

CRITICAL POLITICAL THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICE

THE POLITICS OF TOTAL LIBERATION

Revolution for the 21st Century

Steven Best



CRITICAL POLITICAL THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICE

Mainstream political theory has been experiencing an identity crisis for as long as I can remember. From even a cursory glance at the major journals, it still seems preoccupied either with textual exegesis of a conservatively construed canon, fashionable postmodern forms of deconstruction, or the reduction of ideas to the context in which they were formulated and the prejudices of the author. Usually written in esoteric style and intended only for disciplinary experts, political theory has lost both its critical character and its concern for political practice. Behaviorist and positivist political “scientists” tend to view it as a branch of philosophical metaphysics or as akin to literary criticism. They are not completely wrong. There is currently no venue that highlights the practical implications of theory or its connections with the larger world. I was subsequently delighted when Palgrave Macmillan offered me the opportunity of editing *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice*.

When I was a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, during the 1970s, critical theory was virtually unknown in the United States. The academic mainstream was late in catching up and, when it finally did during the late 1980s, it predictably embraced the more metaphysical and subjectivist trends of critical theory. Traditionalists had little use for an approach in which critique of a position or analysis of an event was predicated on positive ideals and practical political aims. In this vein, like liberalism, socialism was a dirty word and knowledge of its various tendencies and traditions was virtually non-existent. Today, however, the situation is somewhat different. Strident right-wing politicians have openly condemned “critical thinking” particularly as it pertains to cultural pluralism and American history. Such parochial validations of tradition have implications for practical politics. And, if only for this reason, it is necessary to confront them. A new generation of academics is becoming engaged with immanent critique, interdisciplinary work, actual political problems, and more broadly the link between theory and practice. *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice* offers them a new home for their intellectual labors.

The series introduces new authors, unorthodox themes, critical interpretations of the classics and salient works by older and more established thinkers. Each after his or her fashion will explore the ways in which political theory can enrich our understanding of the arts and social sciences. Criminal justice, psychology, sociology, theatre and a host of other disciplines come into play for a critical political theory. The series also opens new avenues by engaging alternative traditions, animal rights, Islamic politics, mass movements, sovereignty, and the institutional problems of power. *Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice* thus fills an important niche. Innovatively blending tradition and experimentation, this intellectual enterprise with a political intent will, I hope, help reinvigorate what is fast becoming a petrified field of study and perhaps provide a bit of inspiration for future scholars and activists.

STEPHEN ERIC BRONNER

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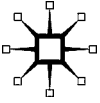
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The Politics of Total Liberation
Revolution for the 21st Century

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THE POLITICS OF TOTAL LIBERATION

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For Willis and Erica, the Loves of my Life.

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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>		ix
Norm Phelps		
<i>Preface: Crisis and the Crossroads of History</i>		xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		xv
Chapter 1	The Animal Standpoint	1
Chapter 2	The New Abolitionism: Capitalism, Slavery, and Animal Liberation	21
Chapter 3	The Paralysis of Pacifism: In Defense of Militant Direct Action	51
Chapter 4	Rethinking Revolution: Veganism, Animal Liberation, Ecology, and the Left	79
Chapter 5	Minding the Animals: Cognitive Ethology and the Obsolescence of Left Humanism	107
Chapter 6	Moral Progress and the Struggle for Human Evolution	137
Conclusion	Reflections on Activism and Hope in a Dying World and Suicidal Culture	159
<i>Notes</i>		167
<i>Index</i>		181

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Foreword

We have all always lived on the same planet. Now we are all in the same boat. Human overpopulation, the ever-increasing power of our technology, and the demand of our omniscient, neoliberal economic system of infinite growth on the basis of finite resources threaten the earth with total destruction. Rescue, Dr. Steven Best tells us, will only come in the form of total liberation. Piecemeal approaches will not work. In the face of our universal victimization, Best issues a clarion call for a total revolution that will liberate humans, animals, and the environment from the lethal impact of human intelligence stupidly employed. *The Politics of Total Liberation* is a seminal work that will shape the social justice, animal rights, and environmental protection dialogues for decades to come.

Profound and acute in its analysis, clear and accessible in its style, *The Politics of Total Liberation* paints a stark picture of the future that awaits us all if we do not turn our society away from its trajectory of total destruction—a future that includes devastating climate change, catastrophic extinctions of irreplaceable flora and fauna, and the self-destruction of human society, perhaps of the human species itself. As Best demonstrates, only a revolution can save us, an unprecedented revolution on behalf of ourselves, the animals, and the earth—a new kind of revolution for the twenty-first century.

This may be the most important book of the twenty-first century. It identifies the common fate that awaits human beings, animals, and the earth if we do not take drastic action soon: extinction, lifelessness, and utter and irredeemable failure. Identifying the causes of the advancing

cataclysm as the explosion of the human population, the frightful power of our technology, and the omniscidal nature of capitalism, it prescribes a cure: a revolution in our way of thinking and living that protects human beings, our nonhuman neighbors, and the Earth that sustains us all.

The Politics of Total Liberation is a clear-headed, abundantly documented, and thoroughly frightening description of the crossroads at which we now stand. It is also a message of hope. By launching a new kind of revolution, a holistic revolution in our way of thinking and living, undertaken on behalf of all of the victims of a rapacious capitalist system that feeds off the lives of the weak and the defenseless, we can save the earth and all who live on it. This vision of a brighter future, built on his incisive analysis of our dark present, places Best securely in the forefront of contemporary social philosophers.

A leading historian and analyst of postmodernism, critical theory, and continental philosophy, Dr. Best is also well known as a staunch advocate of animal liberation and environmental protection. With *The Politics of Total Liberation*, he establishes himself as a preeminent critic of twenty-first-century neoliberal society. Vast in scope, profound in its analysis, and accessible in style, this succeeds far better than any book I have yet seen at diagnosing the critical illness afflicting the earth and all who live upon it and in prescribing the cure.

Read *The Politics of Total Liberation*. If you care about the impoverishment, wage-enclavement, and disenfranchisement of the 99 percent in America, Europe, and throughout the world, read *The Politics of Total Liberation*. If you care about the enslavement and slaughter of billions of sentient, sensitive animals for human appetite and convenience, read *The Politics of Total Liberation*. If you care about climate change and the destruction of the earth, read this book. If you only read one book about the crisis facing humanity, animals, and the earth, read *The Politics of Total Liberation*. Learn from its clear, well-documented analysis, and take heart from its call for a new kind of revolution, a universal revolution for the twenty-first century.

Norm Phelps, author of *Changing the Game: Why Animal Rights Is the Hardest Battle Ever Fought, How We Can Win It*, and *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to PETA*.

Preface: Crisis and the Crossroads of History

In dystopian and apocalyptic times such as ours, one of accelerating global social and ecological crises, this book attempts to articulate a revolutionary politics of total liberation for the twenty-first century.

To date, all political approaches and social movements have been fragmentary, weak, noninclusive, and regressive in their views toward nonhuman animals. In the last three decades, there have been initial and tentative alliances among various social justice and environmental causes, with growing recognition that the collective assault on people and the natural world has common roots in a growth-oriented capitalist system and agricultural society. But, due to neglect on all sides, these alliances did not include the causes of vegan and animal rights/liberation movements. These movements overflow with potential for advancing progressive values (such as rights, liberty, justice, equality, community, and peace), for creating ecological societies, and for overcoming human alienation from other animal species and the earth as a whole.

Alliance politics generally is a challenging issue, as people prefer to focus on their own identities and causes rather than supporting related perspectives and other movements, especially ones that they disdain or disregard out of ignorance.¹ This has to change, and new political ideologies, strategies, and relationships must be formulated, for everything else has failed and the stakes could not be higher. At

risk is nothing less than the future of life on a planet that has been pushed beyond all limits to adapt to human existence but which is prepared to shake us off entirely and allow the evolutionary process to continue without us. This century—indeed, the next decades or even the next few years—is decisive, for what we do or fail to do now will determine the fate of all species, our own fates, and evolutionary history on this planet for millennia to come. The urgency could not be greater; there is no time to waste: it is now do-or-die.

Although diverse in theme, the chapters in this book form a coherent whole and address my core concerns as they relate to the current crisis conditions. The most promising and relevant politics for this century, I believe, will not focus solely on class struggle or fragmented identity politics pursued along single-issue lines concerning race, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth. It will be, rather, a politics of *total liberation* that grasps commonalities among various forms of oppression, that recognizes the interdependence and common goals of various liberation movements, and that forges appropriate political alliances and necessary global responses.

By “total liberation” I do not mean a metaphysical utopia to be realized in perfect form. I refer, instead, to the process of understanding human, animal, and earth liberation movements in relation to one another and building bridges around interrelated issues such as democracy and ecology, sustainability and veganism, and social justice and animal rights. To be sure, total liberation is an ideal, a vision, and a goal to strive for, one that invokes visions of freedom, community, and harmony. But the struggle ahead is permanent and formidable, one to be conducted within the constraints of human nature and the limits imposed by ecology. Human, animal, and earth liberation movements are different components of one inseparable struggle—against hierarchy, domination, and unsustainable social forms—none of which is possible without the others.

Through our predatory behaviors, systems of exploitation, and growth-oriented societies, we have lived in contradiction to one another, other species, and the planet for so long that we have brought about a new geologic epoch. We have hastened the end of the Holocene

Era, which endured over the last ten thousand years, and thereby have precipitated the arrival of the Anthropocene Era—whose very name proclaims our global dominance and the severe environmental impact of *Homo sapiens* (see the Conclusion). In our current Anthropocene period of runaway climate change, the sixth great extinction crisis in earth’s history, resource scarcity, global capitalism, aggressive neoliberalism, economic crashes, increasing centralization of power, rampant militarism, chronic warfare, and suffering and struggle everywhere, we have come to a historical crossroads where momentous choices have to be made and implemented.

The omniscidal regimes of “civilization” and global capitalism have reached their zenith and will end—whether through an ascendant global resistance stronger than this dying world system, or through the cataclysmic adjustments the planet already has initiated, such as those that will ensure its evolution for billions of years to come. But such adaptations will create conditions utterly hostile to supporting humans and countless other species. Anything short of radical, systemic, and comprehensive social changes, of a formidable revolutionary movement against oppressive global capitalism and hierarchical domination of all kinds, will yield false hopes, pseudosolutions, useless reforms, dead ends, and protracted suffering. The time for partial visions, separate struggles, and fragmented resistance is over, and the hour of revolutionary alliance politics and total liberation has arrived.

Yet, alarmingly, we have not yet, as a species or critical mass, awoken to the true gravity of the global crisis in the social and natural worlds, and thus the magnitude of the challenges we face. The big picture proves elusive, antiquated paradigms prevail, and dogmatism and complacency strangle possibilities from all angles. Although few realize it, the human, animal, and earth liberation movements desperately need one another, and the weaknesses and limitations of each can only be overcome through the strengths and contributions of the others.

If fragmented revolts can mature into a coherent global revolutionary process, the starting point for social transformation is to join

hands across the barricades; to engage in respectful dialogue; to communicate, educate, and learn as equals; and to overcome partial histories, critiques, and battles in favor of progressive systemic change. A politics of total liberation could forge alliances more positive and powerful than anything yet created. It could emancipate not just one class, interest group, or even the entire human species from the grip of a nihilistic power elite (that value nothing but power and profit), but also animal communities everywhere, ecosystems worldwide, and the dynamic energies of evolution and speciation currently blocked by human “progress” (see chapter 6).

By listening and learning, working united not dividedly, establishing a unity in difference and a differentiated unity, forging a plurality of critiques and tactics that assail all points and mobilizes resistance from every social quarter, a flank of allied groups and positions can drive a battering ram into the structures of repression and domination. They can unlock every cage and open the doors to a myriad of possible futures.

But humans will awake, if ever, late in the process of advanced crisis and decay. Nothing guarantees that we will succeed rather than fail. But pessimism is suicide, despair is surrender, the stakes are too high, and our responsibilities are too great for us to flounder. Despite our violent history as a predatory and colonizing species, what humanity can and cannot achieve is still unknown. Our capacities and limitations are still being worked out in the laboratory of history and political struggle, yet this evolutionary experiment nonetheless might soon end in extinction. Let us not only hope, but also struggle, for a far different outcome.

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CHAPTER 1

The Animal Standpoint

If we look at history from the animal standpoint, that is, from the crucial role that animals have played in human evolution and the consequences of human domination of nonhuman animals, we can glean new and invaluable insights into psychological, social, historical, and ecological phenomena, problems, and crises. The animal standpoint is used here to shed new light on the origins, dynamics, and development of dominator cultures, as well as to redefine the dysfunctional power systems that structure our relationships to one another, to other species, and to the natural world, in hierarchical rather than complementary terms.

Animal standpoint theory, as I use it, looks at the fundamental role animals play in sustaining the natural world and shaping the human world in co-evolutionary relations. While animals have constituted human existence in beneficial ways, they have seldom been willing partners. The main thesis of animal standpoint theory is that animals have been key determining forces of human psychology, social life, and history overall, and that the domination of human over nonhuman animals underpins the domination of humans over one another and over the natural world.

Thus, this approach stresses the systemic consequences of human exploitation of nonhuman animals, the interrelatedness of our fates, and the profound need for revolutionary changes in the way human

beings both define themselves and relate to other species and to the earth as a whole. This chapter explores the animal standpoint in three different dimensions: (1) for the light it sheds on historical dynamics, the origin and development of dominator cultures, and current social, and ecological crises; (2) for its power to undermine speciesism,¹ and advance egalitarian arguments and liberation ethics, while debunking persistent myths regarding a benign human nature; and (3) for its ability to expose the faulty logic of dogmatic pacifism and to validate militant tactics in defense of animals and the earth.

Toward a New Perspective

Animal standpoint theory draws from a number of key influences and transcends them in bold new directions. First, it absorbs the perspectivalist philosophy of nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.² Perception and cognition are always perspectival, Nietzsche argued, and he scorned those who believed that the scientist has privileged access to reality expressed in “objective” knowledge and truths. For Nietzsche there are no explanations, only interpretations, and science itself is interpretation. Individuals always come to any type of knowing or inquiry already burdened by a host of presuppositions, biases, and limitations. A perspective is thus an optic, a way of seeing, and the more perspectives one has at one’s disposal, the better one can see. In order to avoid limited and partial vision, Nietzsche says, one should employ a *variety* of perspectives in the service of knowledge. We typically endeavor to acquire a *single* viewpoint or attitude toward all the occurrences and events of life, but reality is too complex and many-sided to grasp from one outlook.³ The animal standpoint underscores the fact that history is always written from a particular view, not just from an elitist, patriarchal, or racist bias, but also from a *speciesist* bias—the assumption that humans are superior to animals and utterly unique by virtue of their alleged rationality, such that all nonhuman animals are mere means to their ends.

Second, the animal standpoint is an extension of feminist standpoint theory, which was developed to illuminate patriarchal domination and

its debilitating impact on women and humanity as a whole.⁴ A key idea of standpoint theory—which traces back to the master-slave theory of nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel—is that from a subjugated and “inferior” social standing, an oppressed person or group can glean unique and important insights into the nature of social reality, such as are opaque or unavailable to the oppressor’s biased position. Standpoint theory employs the insights of socially marginalized figures to identify the partial, limited, and flawed modes of understanding held by those “inside” the dominant culture, and to underscore problems with the social order.⁵ As Carolyn Merchant demonstrates in *The Death of Nature*, for example, feminist standpoint theory exposes how the alienated and violent psychology of patriarchy oppresses women yet also informs the “rape of nature,” thereby transforming the earth and animals into inert resources for human use and exploitation.⁶ Similarly, people of color and postcolonial and critical race theorists can illuminate colonial domination, slavery, and racist pathology, all central to the origins of modernity and global capitalism. In a correlative way, the animal standpoint reveals the social and ecological consequences of speciesism and the disastrous consequences of our alienation from nature and of the pathological humanist project to “dominate” and “master” it.

Third, the animal standpoint builds on the modern leftist tradition that examines history from the perspective of the conquered rather than the conquerors. History written “from below” is integral to Marxist and populist theories that focus on the struggles of peasants, serfs, and urban working classes. It motivated the genealogies of Michel Foucault that aimed to recoup marginalized voices buried by conventional (“bourgeois”) history as well as by the totalizing Marxist narrative that reduced all social dynamics to class struggle.⁷ The animal standpoint therefore provides the ultimate turning-of-the-tables narrative shift, for what group has been more oppressed, for the longest period of time, and in the most intensive and invasive ways, than nonhuman animals? If history is a struggle between the masters and slaves, as Marx contended, humans in general are the masters and exploitable animals are their slaves (see chapter 2).

Environmental Determinism and Animal Agency

In the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx initiated a new approach to writing history that shifted emphasis from gods and kings to production, trade, labor, and class conflict. Whereas historiography was mired in the “idealist” view that history is driven by God or ideas, Marx revealed the underlying material forces of history in economics, production, and class struggle.

Marx was entirely conventional, however, in limiting historical dynamics to relations among human actors, rather than also examining the larger field of action that included human and animal interrelations and how animals—as an exploited labor power and productive force—decisively shaped history. Radical humanists like Marx congratulate themselves on demystifying history by “resolving theology into anthropology” (Ludwig Feuerbach) in a “scientific” manner. But the mystification is only relocated, not removed, when historians see social relations as the primary causal forces in history, isolated from the significant roles played by animals and the environment. Just as the story of ruling classes cannot be understood apart from their relations to oppressed classes, so too human history cannot be grasped outside the context of the powerful determining effects of animals and nature on human society.

Since the nineteenth century, geographers and ecologists have developed theories of “environmental determinism” which reject the view that history is constituted solely through human-to-human interactions. In a devastating and humbling blow to humanists, environmental determinists emphasized that geography, physical terrain, climate, and other natural forces play a strong, often decisive, role in shaping a wide array of phenomena, ranging from the emergence of bipedal evolution (hence predating our earliest ancestors) to the organization of human societies to varying psychological temperaments. Once introduced into the disciplines of anthropology, historiography, sociology, and psychology, the focus shifted from humans as the sole or main generative forces in social change to the vital role that the natural environment, geography, and climate play in the emergence and development of societies. While a huge

advance over the anthropocentric conceit that only humans shape human actions, and certainly over the theocentric dogma that social dynamics are the effects of a God or an “Unmoved Mover,” environmental determinists nonetheless discount the importance of animals in constituting both the natural and social worlds. As with humanists, environmental theorists often reify animal agency, culture, and influence by reducing animals to “natural history” or mere moving in the machinery of nature. This falsifies the psychological, intellectual, social, and moral complexity of animals; it also fails to grasp how animals change environments, and to explain that they are not merely changed by them.

From large predators such as wolves in the Americas to the dung beetles in the rainforests of Brazil to pollinators everywhere, animals play critical roles in ecological diversity and stability.⁸ Wolves keep populations in check, help prevent overgrazing near rivers and streams, provide food for scavengers, and increase the fitness of future generations of their prey by feeding on the weakest individuals. Dung beetles spread seeds in the animal manure they transport throughout forests, while pollinators such as bees and butterflies germinate plants (including at least a third of which are staples in the human diet). Each species helps to serve and sustain biodiversity. Environmentalists fail to emphasize that factory farming, agribusiness, and exploiting animals for food is a leading contributor to—if not the main cause of—the most serious environmental problems threatening biodiversity, sustainability, and planetary balance. Water pollution, destruction of the oceans, decimation of rainforests and habitats, desertification, resource scarcity, and climate change are all directly traceable to animal exploitation (see chapter 4).⁹

Whether in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, literary studies, or philosophy, theorists view animals as passive objects determined by biology and genetics, devoid of subjectivity and culture of their own. They frame animals as nothing more than resources, commodities, and the “raw materials” of human thought and action, be they objects of prestige, sacrifice, food, or transport devices. They assume that only humans are conscious, self-directing, and purposeful agents

and reduce animals to being mere means to human ends. Throughout history, animals have been systematically neglected and written out of human experience. In recent years, however, theorists from various disciplines have started to challenge the absence of animals in human history, to rethink our past traditions and culture in terms of the human-animal relation, and to analyze the role animals play in shaping custom, experience, and identity. The new outlook, writes Erica Fudge, breaks from “an earlier form of history which focused on human ideas about and attitudes towards animals in which animals were mere blank pages onto which humans wrote meaning: in which they were passive, unthinking presences in the active and thoughtful lives of humans.”¹⁰ This novel interpretation “is a history in which we are being asked to look at the ways in which animals and humans no longer exist in separate realms; in which nature and culture coincide; and in which we recognize the ways in which animals, not just humans, have shaped the past.”¹¹

Yet, history is not merely a simple drama of humans unilaterally imposing their will on animals, always shaping them and never being modified in return, whereas animals were constituting not only the natural world but also having powerful effects on human societies. Part of the denial of agency is the erasure of nonhuman resistance and rebellion and the constant manifestations of animals’ will, choices, and desire for freedom. Foucault’s dictum that where there is power there is also resistance applies to animals as well as to humans, despite both Aristotle’s dogma that only humans are political animals and Kropotkin’s error that resistance to oppression is a trait unique to humans only (see chapter 2).¹²

Speciesism and the Origins of Hierarchy

The animal standpoint examines the origins and development of societies through the dynamic interrelationship between human and nonhuman animals. It therefore interprets history not from an evolutionary position that reifies human agency as the *sui generis* of all things, nor as the autonomous actions of a Promethean species, but

rather from a co-evolutionary viewpoint that sees nonhuman animals as an inseparable part of human history and as autonomous agents.

Animals have been an integral part of the human adventure from the start. Animals stimulated the awakening minds of our ancient hominid ancestors. They provided the images, models, and metaphors to organize social life. They were gods and guiding spirits. They lit up the night sky in the constellation of stars, and they were commingling spirits in an animistic universe. They provided humans with food, clothing, and resources. They were integrated into communities, domesticated, and thereby co-evolved with us in various ways (mostly to our benefit and their detriment). But it was our violent, predatory, and exploitative relations with animals which prevailed for the last 50,000 years that unfortunately has been far more decisive in shaping our minds and societies, while constituting the crises that threaten all life and the planet today.

It is impossible to imagine human society evolving as it did without large-scale hunting, animal domestication, and the profound role that animals such as cattle and horses played in determining history and social dynamics, notably warfare. Perhaps the most crucial revolution in human history occurred 10,000 years ago, in the shift from hunter-gatherer cultures to agricultural society. In place of a nomadic lifestyle and taking food wherever they could find it, humans began to root themselves in one area in order to cultivate plants (farming) and animals (animal husbandry). They thereby began to domesticate an increasing array of wild species. The “domestication” of animals is a euphemism for a regime of exploitation, herding, confinement, castration, forced breeding, coerced labor, hobbling, branding, ear cropping, and killing. To conquer, enslave, and claim animals as their own property, to exploit them for food, clothing, labor, transportation, and warfare, herders developed broad techniques of confinement and control, such as pens, cages, collars, chains, shackles, whips, prods, and branding irons.

Farming emerged in many different regions such as the Fertile Crescent, but the Middle East distinguished itself from Egypt, India, China, and the Mayan Incan and Aztec cultures in its commitment

to an expansionist and domineering way of life, rooted in the domestication of large animals such as cattle, horses, goats, and sheep.¹³ In the process of domesticating animals and plants, of creating farming societies and herding cultures, a cascade of dramatic changes revolutionized societies and worldviews, changing forever the way people related to one another, to other species, and to the natural world as a whole. Everywhere that agricultural societies emerged, people produced food surpluses, grew populations, expanded territories, waged large-scale organized warfare, and created the first social hierarchies including patriarchy, the state, bureaucracy, and classes—all of which grew out of the bloody soil of animal exploitation and speciesism. As agricultural societies became socially stratified, politically centralized, economically complex, and technologically innovative, people began to see themselves as independent from nature and superior to other animals.

As a direct result of hunting, herding, and animal husbandry, humans developed a dominator worldview, and the subjugation and slaughter of animals paved the way for subduing, exploiting, and killing other humans. The sexual suppression of women, modeled after the domestication of animals, was such that men began to control women's reproductive capacity, enforce repressive sexual norms, reduce them to a status of inferiority, and create patriarchal gods and culture. Slavery emerged in the same region of the Middle East that spawned agriculture and developed as an extension of animal domestication practices. In areas like Sumer, for instance, slaves were managed like livestock, and males were castrated.

Like horses, cattle played a decisive role in the emergence of dominator cultures. Through plowing and agriculture, the exploitation of cattle facilitated the "progress" of human "civilization." To an important degree, Jeremy Rifkin argues, Western civilization was built on the backs of the cow and the bull, whose powerful and massive bodies were exploited for food, clothing, and labor power.¹⁴ According to Rifkin, around 4400 BC, Kurgan people drove huge herds of cattle into Southern and Eastern Europe and subdued the small, peaceful Neolithic village communities through their hoofed armies and

violent ways. This created the first great nomadic cattle empire in world history; it also brought an end to the peaceful farming culture of Europe. Their cultures rooted in cattle, Kurgs were inherently mobile and dynamic. With no allegiance to the land, their identity was synonymous with movement, exploitation, weapons, and conquest. They valued independence, militarism, acquisitiveness, and utilitarian sensibilities. They introduced large-scale herding and military technology into Europe, with new emphases on mobility and change.

Similarly, in his classic text, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond describes the crucial historical role played by horses, whose power and speed allowed the armies that commanded them unprecedented advantages. Horses “may have been the essential military ingredient behind the westward expansion of speakers of Indo-European languages from the Ukraine.”¹⁵ Horses also “enabled Cortes and Pizarro, leading only small bands of adventurers, to overthrow the Aztec and Inca Empires,” and thus helped establish European dominance on a global scale. For Diamond, Eurasia emerged as a powerhouse not because of superior culture or intellect, but rather due to the availability of domestic plants and animals and its fortuitous position on the globe. Whether the peoples of different continents became farmers and herders, and when, largely explains their contrasting fates. “The peoples of areas with a head start on food production,” Diamond argues, “thereby gained a head start on the path leading toward guns, germs, and steel. The result was a long series of collisions between the haves and have-nots of history.”¹⁶ The diseases humans acquired from animal domestication, moreover, became a driving force of history once farmers, herders, and colonialists spread them to other populations. Indeed, more than guns and steel, it was the germs, derived from domesticated animals, that killed most of the people whom Europeans sought to conquer, and that played a crucial factor in history overall.¹⁷

Speciesism provided both the prototype for hierarchical domination and a battery of tactics and technologies of control. Humans defined their “nature,” “essence,” and identity as “rational beings” in direct opposition to nonhuman animals whom they erroneously

defined as “irrational”—that is, as entirely devoid of the qualities that allegedly defined humans as unique, separate, and special. Humans prized rationality as a trait and an endowment important enough to make all other species and the natural world as a whole a mere means to their ends. Once animals became the measure of alterity and the “irrational” foil to the human “rational essence,” it was a short step to begin viewing different, exotic, and dark-skinned peoples as brutes, beasts, and savages, wholly deficient in rationality, and thus sub or nonhuman. The criterion created to exclude animals from the human community was also used to ostracize people of color, women, the mentally ill, the disabled, and numerous other stigmatized groups. The domination of human over human and its exercise through slavery, warfare, and genocide typically begins with the denigration of victims as “savages,” “primitives,” and “mere” animals who lack the essence and sine qua non of human nature—*rationality*.

The discourse, logic, and methods of dehumanization were thereby derived from the human domination over animals, as speciesism, in turn, provided the conceptual paradigm that encouraged, sustained, and justified the domination and slaughter of numerous group and types of humans that did not fit the rationalist, patriarchal model. “Throughout the history of our ascent to dominance as the master species,” Charles Patterson notes, “our victimization of animals has served as the model and foundation for our victimization of each other. The study of human history reveals the pattern: first, humans exploit and slaughter animals; then, they treat other people like animals and do the same to them.”¹⁸ Whether the conquerors are European imperialists, American colonialists, or German Nazis, Western aggressors always engage in wordplay before swordplay, in order to vilify their victims—Africans, Native Americans, Filipinos, Japanese, Vietnamese, Iraqis, and other unfortunates—with opprobrious terms such as “rats,” “pigs,” “swine,” “monkeys,” “beasts,” “vermin,” or “cockroaches.” Once perceived as brute beasts or subhumans occupying a lower evolutionary rung than entrenched social elites, subjugated peoples were treated accordingly; once characterized as animals, they could be hunted down as such. Animals, the first exiles from the

moral community, provided a convenient *moral refuse bin* for oppressors to dispose the oppressed.

European colonialism was but one extension and outgrowth of human supremacism. For just as humans had subdued animals with cunning and advanced technologies, many Europeans believed that the “white race” was superior by virtue of bringing the “inferior races” under Western control and subjugation. The international slave trade borrowed heavily from the technologies of animal domination that emerged with domesticating wild species, including cages, shackles, branding, and auctions (see chapter 2). There are, moreover, direct and profound connections between animal breeding and racist eugenics, between speciesism and racism, between the industrial technologies and division of labor first developed in modern slaughterhouses and the mass killing of human beings in concentration camps and killing fields. In the words attributed to Theodor Adorno, “Auschwitz begins when people look at a slaughterhouse and say, ‘They’re only animals.’”

Ethics, Justice, and Human Nature

In an ethical sense, the animal standpoint has value and consequence on multiple levels, such as determining non-speciesist rules of justice; obtaining a full evaluation of the moral character of a society or an individual; and gaining a critical perspective on *Homo sapiens* as a primate species with violent, aggressive, hierarchical, and dominator proclivities.

Too often, people have an absurdly high estimation of themselves as “good,” while extolling humanity in general as benign and worthy of its lordship over earth. It is one thing to critically assess human nature in view of how people frequently torture, degrade, and murder one another, but a much darker picture of humanity emerges if considered from the animal standpoint. Obviously, animals cannot tell us in human language what they really think about us, or we would wither from their righteous anger and profane diatribes. Think, for instance, of the quote by English author, professor, and Anglican priest William Ralph Inge: “We have enslaved the rest of the animal

creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form.”¹⁹ Recall also novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer’s wry insight that “in their behavior toward creatures, all men are Nazis. The smugness with which man could do to other creatures as he pleased exemplified the most extreme racist theories, the principle that might is right.”²⁰ Consider too, nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer’s correct observation that “compassion for animals is intimately connected with goodness of character and it may be confidently asserted that he who is cruel to animals cannot be a good man.”²¹

Mary Shelley’s classic *Frankenstein*, written in 1818, was a powerful indictment of humanist hubris, the scientific will to power, and technology out-of-control.²² Shelley’s classic also provides a poignant and critical view of human animals from the perspective of a “creature” assembled from human cadavers but not truly “human.” Born innocent and without malice, the creature endures a series of cruelties that ultimately bring him to hate humanity and lash out in rage. But a far deeper and more informed contempt for humanity wells up as he comes upon a book that exposes the systemic presence of violence, warfare, genocide, and destruction throughout human history, and he recoils in horror.

Similarly, in his novel, *Ishmael*, Daniel Quinn dramatizes the deep ideological and structural flaws of humanity through a Socratic dialogue between a circus gorilla and an astonished man.²³ With keen irony, the gorilla notes that after 10,000 years of confining and exploiting other animals, human beings are the true “captive,” as the hierarchical structure of agricultural society has perpetuated disastrous worldviews which humans have proved unable to critically examine and change. Like the creature in Shelley’s tale, the gorilla in Quinn’s story provides a crucial perspective on “civilization” through the animal standpoint, leveling devastating critiques at agricultural society and Western cultures as being fundamentally flawed, dysfunctional, barbaric, and insane, rather than existing as “advanced” and “rational” forms of life.

Through the animal standpoint we acquire profound ethical insight made possible by a gestalt shift in evaluation, such that a crucial touchstone for gauging the moral character of a society, a culture, or an individual is how people view and treat other animals. One cannot adequately assess the moral worth, philosophical depth, and humanity of either cultures or individuals until one examines their views and relations toward animals and the natural world. Just as ethnic and women's studies forced reconsideration of the claims that Western society made for its "civilization" and "progress" (see chapter 6), so we must reexamine human institutions once again from the animal standpoint. According to this quote attributed to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way in which its animals are treated." Just as no person who traffics in slavery can be regarded as having moral integrity, so no one who abuses or neglects animals can be praiseworthy. Thus, the animal standpoint compels us to look at people and society in new ways, enabling us to recognize *Homo sapiens* as the violent, alienated, disturbed, domineering, murderous, and self-destructive species we too often are.

One test of ethical decision-making is by the "Golden Rule," a moral perspective common throughout world religions and cultures such as the Judaic, Christian, Confucian, and Stoic traditions. The Golden Rule, of course, enjoins us to treat others as we ourselves want to be treated by them. This ancient maxim common to numerous religious traditions is perennially relevant, insofar as it is an indispensable decision-making technique for determining right and wrong. It thus brings together both empathy and the principle of reciprocity, which links to a rule of logical consistency. Only prejudice and logical inconsistency prevents us from applying the Golden Rule to our relations with other animal species. As nineteenth-century English novelist Thomas Hardy believed, Darwinism "logically involved a readjustment of altruistic morals, by enlarging... the application of what has been called the 'Golden Rule' from the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom."²⁴

In basically restating the principle of the Golden Rule in more complex language, eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant argued

that actions should be considered from the perspective of the “categorical imperative.”²⁵ According to Kant, we should not act in any way in which we could not universalize our action without logical contradiction. It is a contradiction, for instance, to demand that everyone follow the law except oneself. The idea of *consistency* is crucial here, for if we take the Golden Rule, or categorical imperative, one step further, we must ask ourselves: Would we want animals to treat us in the same manner as we treat them? Would we want to be slaughtered for food; experimented on; bred for coats and clothing; or forced to perform in a circus race, rodeo, or aquarium? Since the answer must be “no,” people considering this maxim from the animal standpoint are compelled to confront their own inconsistency, hypocrisy, double-standard, and unjustifiable discrimination against animals.

Politics and Strategies

The animal standpoint is crucial not only to grasp social organization and change, and adequately assess the character of individuals, cultures, and humanity as a whole, but also to rethink strategies for political resistance and struggle. Wherever discussion is repressed, censored, or stultified due to the hegemony of pacifist dogmas, the animal standpoint allows us to reconsider tactics from the standpoint of victims rather than victimizers. It can thereby help to restore common sense, moral clarity, and tactical pluralism to a discourse dominated by the purveyors of violence and the pacifist choir in various “opposition” movements.

Except for extreme pacifists, most people acknowledge the legitimacy of so-called violence in cases such as self-defense and as necessary to stop implacable forces of evil (see chapter 3).²⁶ Yet when it comes to defending innocent animals under violent and sadistic attack in fur farms, factory farms, slaughterhouses, vivisection laboratories, and other chambers of horror, one typically finds a blatant logical inconsistency. This speciesist double standard says, in effect, that human lives are prized enough to merit physical force as a means of protection and defense if necessary, but nonhuman animals are not.

When considering ethical and tactical problems and issues, we should stop taking corporate, state, media, mainstream “animal advocacy” groups, and uninformed public opinion as barometers of legitimacy and arbiters of action never to offend or transgress. Instead of asking ourselves if a course of action is legal, morally sanctioned, or palatable to public opinion, we can adopt the animal standpoint to ask: What would oppressed and tortured animals want us to do? What courses of action would they approve and which would they condemn as inadequate and a betrayal?

Discussing a problem such as huge dams being built for corporate profit at the expense of species and ecosystems, author and deep ecology advocate, Derrick Jensen, asks: “What is the most moral thing to do? Do we stand by and watch the last of the salmon die, or blow up the dam? Do we write letters, file lawsuits, and do similar time-consuming actions that have been proven to fail, or do we take out the dams ourselves?”²⁷ To those who seek education and legal-based strategies, Jensen retorts: “What if those in power are murderous? What if they’re not willing to listen to reason at all? Should we continue to approach them nonviolently? When is violence an appropriate means to stop injustice? With the world dying—or rather being killed—we no longer have the luxury to ignore these questions.”²⁸

To shake people from their pacifist slumbers and humanist complacency, Jensen asks us to shift the paradigm and adopt the perspective of ecosystems at risk:

What if, instead of asking “How shall I live my life?” people were to ask the land where they live, the land that supports them, “What can and must I do to become your ally, to help protect you from this culture? What can we do together to stop this culture from killing you?” If you ask that question, and you listen, the land will tell you what it needs. And then the only real question is: are you willing to do it?²⁹

There is real value in adopting the perspective of nature. It calls into question individualist pursuits of “the good life,” as defined apart

from what is good for animals and the land, and it can plug our ears long enough to drown out the siren song of humanist pacifism. While nature cannot speak in any sense, the imaginative and empathetic standpoint of the earth and nonhuman life allows us to raise some basic questions: What are their “interests” independent from those of exploiters or humans generally? Would they want to flourish and exist intact and in peace, or to be violently assaulted, blown up, and destroyed by greedy industries and the increasing demands of a surging human population? Would they want us to be patient and to follow the law, even if it led us down the path of total futility? Or would the earth and the animals want us to protect their existence, integrity, and peace by repudiating unjust laws and defend their interests by any (intelligent and effective) means necessary?

To be sure, one cannot presume to know in any finite way what nature “wants” or “needs.” One can be wrong or misinformed, and cannot conjecture much beyond the general axiom that land and life “wants” to live, not die. “Listening” to the “voice” of nature hardly amounts to a rigorous thinking about complex philosophical, political, tactical, and organizational issues. Random and sporadic acts of sabotage, moreover, are ultimately ad hoc, piecemeal, rear-guard, and limited tactics which fall far short of developing a coherent theory and politics of social transformation.

A related question to the ones raised from animal and environmental standpoints would be: What would future generations want us to do? Radical environmentalist Paul Watson gives us yet another perspective—which I will call the “future generations’ standpoint”—from which to challenge knee-jerk condemnations of militant direct action (see chapter 3) and revolutionary struggle. From the perspective of future generations, would sabotage seem “radical” or barely adequate to the task? Watson observes that while environmentalists are currently a minority population, they actually represent a vast majority of people, as one can safely assume that future generations will have no choice but to focus on urgent environmental issues. Moreover, although today’s environmentalists are often derided or vilified as “whackos,” “extremists,” and “ecoterrorists,” those unlucky

enough to be struggling on a degraded planet by mid-century would likely view the radicals of today as the only sane and responsible citizens of the era. Undoubtedly, they will condemn present-day pacifists and moderates as dreamers and cowards who failed to stop the intensifying assault on animals and the earth. Thus, Watson quipped, from the perspective of future generations, environmentalists “make damn good ancestors.”

By deploying anti-speciesist, biocentric, and future generations’ standpoints, we obtain productive ways of approaching complex philosophical and strategic questions. These new optics facilitate support for mass resistance, militant direct action, and revolutionary counterforce in defense of peoples, animals, and a planet under increasingly aggressive assault. The vegan, animal rights/liberation, and environmental movements desperately need new ideas, new perspectives, and new tactics. The animal, ecological, and future generations’ standpoints open up new spaces for thought and new possibilities for action currently stifled by the dogmas of mainstream politics.

Deciphering the “Riddle of History”

The animal standpoint seeks generally to illuminate human biological and social evolution in important new ways, such as revealing the origins, dynamics, and development of dominator cultures, social hierarchies, economic and political inequalities, and asymmetrical systems of power. Through the animal standpoint, one can glean important lessons regarding the origins of hate, hierarchy, violence, war, genocide, slavery, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. Providing perspectives and insights unattainable through other historical approaches, the animal standpoint analyzes how the domination of human over nonhuman animals is intimately linked to the domination of humans over one another, as it also brings to light the environmental impact of large-scale animal slaughter and exploitation.

According to the animal standpoint, speciesism was the first form of hierarchy and domination, and laid the groundwork for other forms of oppression, power, and violence. Given that exploitation and

domestication of animals was crucial for the development and survival of other power systems, one is tempted to say, paraphrasing Marx, that the animal standpoint, not class analysis and communism, is “the solution to the riddle of history.” The animal standpoint casts a brilliant light on problems that one cannot even see or identify through the opaque lens of humanism or its theoretical offshoots.

While not widely recognized as such, the animal standpoint is a crucial perspective for critical theory and radical politics, offering unique insights into human history, the origin and dynamics of hierarchy (including patriarchy, slavery, and racism), the ubiquity of warfare and violence, social and ecological crises, and the conditions necessary for a viable future. As the critical theory of society is immeasurably enriched through the animal standpoint, so too does the animal standpoint need a critical social theory to understand how animal exploitation in the modern world is driven by capitalist profit and growth imperatives and operates within a despotic state apparatus that serves corporate interests and suppresses serious dissent, often violently.

While it is important to have various theoretical perspectives that can map the origins and trajectory of patriarchy, race, class, state, and so on, the animal standpoint has been relatively ignored. The burgeoning field of animal studies is changing this, but its arid, scholastic, and detached framework precludes politicizing the profound insights into the nature and genesis of the key crises plaguing the world today.³⁰ Unlike the largely apolitical field of “human-animal studies,” the animal standpoint is no more “neutral” or “objective” in relation to animals than Marx’s work was toward the working class or the Frankfurt School’s critical theory was to oppressed and suffering peoples. It is an ethically and politically engaged viewpoint that condemns the exploitation and slaughter of animals, and promotes the emancipation of animals from all forms of human enslavement and domination—a goal which demands revolutionizing capitalism and dismantling hierarchical societies and dominator cultures.

As I use it, the animal standpoint is vital to a total liberation politics that promotes human, animal, and earth liberation as interrelated

struggles which need to unite against common enemies such as capitalism, militarism, and the state. It advocates an alliance politics in which different radical movements work together toward the positive goal of shifting the dominant paradigms from hierarchy to equality, from growth to sustainability, from alienation to harmony, and from violence to peace (see chapter 4). Its ultimate goal is to help dismantle every oppressive and dysfunctional hierarchical system that thwarts freedom, creative activity, self-organization, and diversification.

Thus, the animal standpoint examines the crucial importance of animals to our existence and to the planet as a whole, in ways humans rarely comprehend when constrained by the straitjacket of speciesism. The animal standpoint sees the freedom and happiness of humans and animals to be deeply interconnected, and highlights the grave consequences for humans when they violate animal lives on a massive, global scale such as is characteristic of modern societies. The animal standpoint analyzes how human liberation is implausible if disconnected from animal liberation; thus, humanism collapses under the weight of its logical contradictions. If the animal standpoint analyzes how the domination of humans over animals is intimately linked to the domination of humans over one another, then, conversely, it shows that humans will never establish peaceful, just, and sustainable societies until they renounce their arrogant speciesist identities and begin to harmonize their existence with the millions of other life forms on this planet. The abominations humans inflict on animals inevitably rebound to haunt human existence. The exploitation of animals poses a grave threat to countless imperiled species, to the future of humanity, and to the global ecological system, all of which look increasingly problematic, troubled, and bleak.

Without understanding the co-evolution of human and other animals, and the systemic psychological, social, and ecological crises brought about by speciesism, animal domestication, the rise of agricultural society, and the “*Might is Right*” psychosis of “*civilization*,” we cannot formulate a viable theory of history, hierarchy and power, or of social organization and change. Without the animal standpoint, we cannot adequately understand human conflict, the dynamics of

warfare, the pathology of violence and genocide, the alienation of humans from one another and the natural world, and the dynamics driving the current ecological crisis, such as stem principally from corporate agriculture and the global livestock industry. And if we cannot *understand* the key causes of our current crises, then we surely cannot *solve* them, nor forge a better culture, humanity, and future for ourselves and all life forms on this planet.

CHAPTER 2

The New Abolitionism: Capitalism, Slavery, and Animal Liberation

Capitalism originated in—and would have been impossible without—imperialism, colonization, the international slave trade, genocide, and large-scale environmental destruction. Organized around profit and power imperatives, capitalism is a system of slavery, exploitation, class hierarchy, inequality, violence, and forced labor. The Global Capitalist Gulag was fueled, first, by the labor power of millions of slaves from Africa and other nations, and, second, by massive armies of immigrants, former artisans and craftsmen, domestic workers, and urban masses that comprised an utterly new social class, the industrialized proletariat.

As Marx observed, the accumulation of wealth and the production of poverty, the aggrandizement of the ruling class and the immiseration of the ruled, the development of the European world and the underdevelopment of its colonies, are inseparably interrelated. Then as now, these apparent antipodes are inevitable consequences of a grow-or-die, profit-seeking system of exploitation whose ceaseless expansion requires a slave class and inordinate amounts of cheap labor power.

The transatlantic slave trade emerged in 1444 when Henry the Navigator began taking Africans back to Portugal to exploit for labor. Africans already were enslaving each other, but their labor market was

more akin to indentured servitude and nothing like the horrors that millions would later face in British America. Prior to trafficking in African slaves, European nations enjoyed positive relationships with Africa, based on friendship and trade. This ended in the mid-fifteenth century when colonial states succumbed to insatiable appetites for gold, profits, and the spoils of slave labor. As was evident in the brutal exploits of Columbus and Spain, many European states waged genocidal war against dark-skinned peoples in order to appropriate their land, resources, riches, and labor power to fuel expansionist needs.

Over the next few centuries European forces of “civilization,” “progress,” professed Christianity, and capitalism kidnapped twenty million Africans from their homes and villages. They forced inland captives to march up to 500 grueling miles to the coast while barefoot and in leg irons. Half died before they reached the ships and more expired during the torturous six-to-ten-week journey across the Atlantic primarily to North America and other global ports. The slave traders confined their human cargo to the suffocating hell beneath the deck. Africans were packed into tight spaces, chained together, and were delirious from heat, stench, and disease. They were beaten, force-fed, and thrown overboard in droves if sick or troublesome. The lucky ones dived into a watery grave on their own accord.

Marx rightly saw colonialism as the “primitive stage of capital development” that preceded the emergence of advanced market societies in the nineteenth century. “Capital,” Marx said, “comes into the world...dripping with blood.”¹ For five centuries, profits from the slave trade built European economies and powered the American empire. The glorious cities and refined cultures of Western modernity were built on the backs of millions of slaves, and this brilliant “civilization” was the product of barbarism. The atrocities associated with slavery were the burning moral and political issues in states such as England and the United States, and they culminated in strong abolitionist movements. Although various slave markets still flourish and thrive today and the battle against racism, domination, and exploitation is far from over, throughout the world a moral revolution has

emerged, as society shifts from considering human to *animal slaves* and a new abolitionist movement seeking *animal liberation* emerges as a potential catalyst of significant social change.

Strange Fruit of American Democracy

Before, during, and after the Revolutionary War, America was a slave-hungry system. In its European form, as a product of British capital ventures and yearnings for liberty from state tyranny, the fledgling nation emerged from scratch, with no prior feudal history or communal traditions. As British colonists found no vast supplies of gold in America like the Spaniards did in the Southern Hemisphere, they turned to agriculture. From the “Indians” they learned to grow tobacco as a profitable crop, but planting and harvesting required intense physical labor. For their sturdiness, vulnerability, and cheap price, colonists favored Africans over Native Americans and British laborers for the task.

The first Africans arrived on the North American continent in August 1619, a year before Pilgrims landed the Mayflower on the shores of Massachusetts and decades before the slave trade began in New England.² Exchanged for food, 20 blacks stepped off a Dutch slavery ship to become the first generation of African Americans. Joining a society not yet lacerated by slavery and racism, they worked as indentured servants to British elites. As such, their status was equal to that of poor whites, and laborers of either race could gain freedom after their tenure. As with the whites, blacks owned property, married, and voted in an integrated society.

This relatively benign situation changed dramatically in the 1660s, when ever-more Africans were shipped to colonies to meet the growing demand for labor. As slavery became crucial to capitalist expansion and to plantation economies producing work-intensive tobacco, sugar, and cotton crops, British colonists constructed racist ideologies to legitimize the violent subjugation of those equal to them in the eyes of God and the principles of natural law. Having survived the shock of capture and trauma of transport, African men, women,

and children were then auctioned, branded, and sold to white slave owners, who grew rich from trading, breeding, and exploiting their bodies. With no consideration of blood ties or emotional bonds, black families were torn apart. Stripped of their rights, dignity, and human status, these African citizens and their millions of American descendants were brutalized in the most vicious exploitative system on the planet.

Upon the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the number of slaves had grown to nearly 700,000, comprising 20 percent of the population. As colonists became increasingly autonomous from the monarchy abroad, and British military occupation and oppression increased, the conflict between the Empire and its unruly subjects—dramatized in events such as the Boston Tea Party in 1773—inexorably led to war. When the Revolutionary War ended in 1783, social relations and racial views were in a state of great flux. Tens of thousands of slaves fled to England, Canada, Spanish Florida, or Indian camps. Many Northern slaveholders, who authentically embraced the nation's egalitarian values, freed their captives. In 1783, Massachusetts became the first state to abolish slavery, and from 1789 to 1830 all states north of Maryland gradually followed suit. At the same time, however, slavery put down stronger roots in Southern states that were becoming increasingly influential, economically and politically.

The new nation stood at a crucial moral crossroads regarding the slavery question and the true meaning of its professed democratic and Christian values. It could end slavery and adhere to its noble ideals, or it could perpetuate a vicious system of bondage anchored in hypocrisy rather than democracy. Tragically, the profit imperative triumphed over the moral imperative. Although the industrializing north continuously pandered to Southern plantation interests, the two cultures/economies drifted apart irreconcilably, like shifting tectonic plates. Rather than pulling together as one nation honoring the progressive values that led it to war against England, the United States imploded through internal contradictions, and in 1861 the North and South embarked on a long and bloody battle.

The Roar of Abolitionism

With liberty denied and justice betrayed, both free and enslaved blacks intensified their resistance to racist/capitalist oppression, and many allied with progressive whites. Increasingly, opponents of slavery broke with the prevailing tactics of reform, moderation, and incremental change to demand the *total and immediate dismantling of the slavery system*. With conditions worsening and patience frayed, emancipation could not wait. Compromises were scorned, ceaseless agitation was urged, and nothing short of total abolition of slavery was acceptable. Thus, in the early 1830s, the US abolitionist movement was born. Abolitionism is rooted in a searing critique of racism and slavery and their dehumanizing effects on black people. In the US slavery market, a human being—on the basis of skin color alone—was declared naturally inferior to a predominant race, and by that sole criterion thereby stripped of all rights. In such a system, the slave is transmogrified from a human subject into a physical object, from a person into a commodity, and thus reduced to a moveable form of property known as “chattel.”

Abolitionists viewed the institution of slavery as *inherently* evil, corrupt, and dehumanizing, such that no black person in bondage—however well-treated by their “masters”—could attain the full dignity, intelligence, and creativity of their humanity. Abolitionists renounced all reformist approaches that sought better or more “humane treatment” of slaves, in order to insist on *the immediate and total emancipation* of blacks from the chains, masters, laws, courts, and ideologies that corrupted, stunted, and profaned their humanity. Abolitionists did not address the slave owner’s “obligation” to be kind to the slaves, but rather demanded the complete and unqualified eradication of the master-slave relation, thus freeing the slave from all forms of bondage. In Tom Regan’s ringing description of the rights/abolitionist approach:

When an injustice is absolute, one must oppose it absolutely. It was not “reformed” slavery that justice demanded, not “reformed” child labor, not “reformed” subjugation of women. In each of these

cases, abolition was the only answer. Merely to reform absolute injustice is to prolong injustice.³

The abolitionist movement included both whites and blacks, men and women, privileged and non-privileged, citizens and slaves, and nonviolent and violent elements. Its diverse social composition proved a fertile matrix for alliance politics as, for instance, with the suffragettes, who were first politicized via their public support of abolitionism and through recognizing parallels between plantation slavery and domestic slavery. Unlike the typically fragmented and single-issue nature of political developments to follow over the next two centuries, the intense upheavals of the nineteenth century frequently united movements militating for women, workers, African Americans, children, nonhuman animals, and urban environmentalists in broad visions of rights, equality, and justice.

Abolitionism was not only diverse in its social composition and alliance, but also in the wide variety of tactical means it employed toward the end of emancipation. The most militant voices advocated the use of force as a necessary or legitimate tactic of struggle and self-defense. David Walker, for instance, was born a free black, but he traveled and witnessed firsthand the evils of slavery. In September 1829, Walker published his “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World,” a fiery 80-page pamphlet that became a catalyst for militant abolitionists.⁴ With poignant irony, he denounced racist injustice: “America is more our country,” he said, “than it is the whites. . . . The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our *blood and* tears. . . . Americans have got so fat on our blood and groans.”⁵ As whites thought nothing of murdering blacks, reciprocal violence, he contended, was perfectly legitimate as an act of self-defense. In the volatile zone of race wars, it often is a matter of “kill or be killed.”⁶ Similarly, New York Presbyterian minister, Henry Highland Garnet, espoused armed resistance as a needed tactic in the war against slavery. In his keynote speech to the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, New York, in August 1843, Garnet urged a nation of four million blacks to confront their oppressors, demand freedom, and strike them down by the

sword if necessary. For Garnet, “There is not much hope of redemption without the shedding of blood,” and it was far better “to die free men rather than to live as slaves.”⁷

Along with the Haitian Revolution of August 22, 1791, during which slaves overthrew Spanish and British occupiers to establish Haiti as a free black republic, such views panicked US slave owners over the possibility of slave revolts and violence. Their fears were justified, as blacks throughout the country, inspired by the Haitian Revolution, began plotting rebellions, hoping to achieve with bullets, machetes, and fire what they could not attain through politicians, laws, and courts. Whereas rebels such as Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey were betrayed and executed before they could ignite large-scale insurrections, others like slave Nat Turner and John Brown, a white Christian abolitionist, led armed insurrections and raids against slave owners and the state. They spilled the blood of soldiers and exploiters before being captured and executed by the state, but only to live on as inspiring icons of resistance.

Other influential voices urged militancy and direct action without violence. William Lloyd Garrison, a former indentured white servant, started a prominent abolitionist newsletter, the *Liberator*, on January 1, 1831, which he published for 35 years. In the first editorial, Garrison attacked the philosophies of gradualism and compromise and called for the “immediate and complete emancipation of all slaves.” Against the complacency of reform, Garrison stated:

I do not wish to think, to speak, or write, with moderation . . . Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present!⁸

Garrison also brought Frederick Douglass into the abolitionist movement. Douglass was born into slavery, became self-educated, and fled from bondage. With Garrison’s assistance, he became a star

on the lecture circuit, publishing abolitionist newspapers and an autobiography. In his stirring speeches, Douglass preached a potent “gospel of struggle,” most eloquently expressed in an 1857 talk that exposed the Machiavellian essence of politics and the hypocrisy of certain “abolitionists” in the animal advocacy movement:

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will... The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle... If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters.⁹

Black females also played an important role in the abolitionist movement. They organized antislavery societies, staged protests, and gave stirring public speeches. One of the leading stars of the movement was Sojourner Truth. Born into slavery and freed in 1827, for 40 years she traveled across the nation, electrifying audiences with her wit and passion. Harriet Tubman was the celebrated “conductor” of the Underground Railroad, a vital part of the abolitionist movement that operated clandestinely and illegally by a network of volunteers, each of whom risked his or her own freedom to smuggle thousands of slaves into northern “free states” and Canada. Tubman used the safe house network to escape slavery herself in 1849 at the age of 25, and returned to Maryland numerous times—risking jail or death, dodging slave hunters and hefty bounties on her head—to free family members and 70 other slaves. She epitomized the courage, passion for freedom, spirit of resistance, and acute sense of justice driving the abolitionist movement.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the US Congress passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, thereby banning slavery and mandating equal treatment for blacks and whites. Subsequently, four million African Americans throughout the nation

were legally “free” and “equal” to whites, but in reality they remained trapped in racist systems of discrimination, exploitation, poverty, and violence. The United States became an apartheid system organized around Jim Crow segregation laws that institutionalized the principle of “separate but equal.” Violence against blacks increased dramatically through lynch mobs, the Ku Klux Klan, and racist police, while job, education, and housing prospects remained dismal. Not until the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, did the walls of US apartheid begin to crack—such that even marginal social progress might become possible in a nation deeply afflicted to this day with racism, class domination, and poverty.

The “Dreaded Comparison”

To those familiar with the plight of animals in the twenty-first century, it may seem noncontroversial to speak about “animal slavery” in literal terms, or to invoke the phrase “animal holocaust” in a serious way to emphasize the incomprehensible scale and scope of the violence humans inflict on animals. Each year, however, humans kill hundreds of billions of land and sea animals for food consumption alone, while driving hundreds or thousands of species into extinction.

On theoretical grounds, leftists argue that it is a category fallacy to use discourse such as “slavery” and “exploitation” in reference to animals. These concepts are said to make sense only in relation to conscious human beings in social relations, a world beyond the “merely” biological and instinct-governed world that nonhuman animals allegedly inhabit. Ethically regressive and scientifically outdated, left-leaning humanism operates with a crude ontological dualism that rigidly separates humans from animals and denies animals any complex needs or preferences such as the desire for freedom (see below and chapter 5). On political grounds, in the United States above all, people of color respond with hostility toward any attempt to analogize human and animal slavery. Similarly, many Jewish people deeply resent use of the word “holocaust” in any context other than what happened to Jews in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, even

though the term originally means “burnt offering” relating to animal sacrifice.¹⁰

In the apt title of Marjorie Spiegel’s book *The Dreaded Comparison*, the attempt to analogize nonhuman and human slavery is “dreaded” precisely because of the volatile emotions and political altercations it provokes.¹¹ This is directly due to the fact that in modern Western societies, the United States in particular, peoples of color generally have been reduced to the status of animals and subhuman life forms, to “primitive” and “barbaric” types that are inferior to the exalted white cultures of Western “civilization.” Thus, when People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) rolled out their traveling exhibit titled “Are Animals the New Slaves?” (renamed the “Animal Liberation Project”), most blacks were deeply offended and civil rights organizations universally condemned the campaign, which featured images and text comparing human and animal slavery. Similarly, PETA’s “Holocaust on a Plate” exhibit, which contrasted images of Jewish prisoners in concentration camps with pictures of animals suffering in factory farm conditions of intensive confinements, aroused a vehement condemnation from many Jewish people and organizations.

However poorly executed or received, the intent of these exhibits was to challenge speciesism, to elevate consciousness about animal suffering, and to inspire people to cross that bridge of understanding to move from condemning one form of slavery or mass murder involving humans to reviling another form carried out on a far larger scale that victimizes nonhumans. As Dick Gregory, a noted black civil rights activist, commented:

PETA’s display shows how the horrifying excuses that were once used to enslave humans are now used to oppress animals—on factory farms, in laboratories, in circuses, and elsewhere. In making this comparison, PETA is attacking enslavement and oppression at their roots . . . Animals and humans suffer and die alike. Violence causes the same pain, the same spilling of blood, the same stench of death, the same arrogant, cruel, and brutal taking of life.¹²

As a black American, Gregory's sensitivity toward animal rights is exceptional, however, and the overwhelming denunciations of PETA's exhibits were symptoms of the very same discriminatory and hierarchical outlook that oppressed peoples condemn. It is revealing that in the copious commentary on the "Animal Liberation" and "Holocaust on Your Plate" exhibits, *no* human rights or social justice advocates mentioned the unfathomable horrors that animals experience in modern systems of speciesist oppression. Typically, one hears victimized or oppressed peoples bemoan how they were "treated like animals"—as if exploitation, torture, slavery, and mass murder are acceptable so long as the victims are "only" animals. The point of PETA's exhibits and of animal rights advocacy in general is not to reduce humans to animals, but to elevate animals to full moral status. It is to grant animals basic rights (such as to their own bodies and liberty) and to treat them as equal to humans as sentient beings with interests and preferences that favor joy, freedom, and life over suffering, captivity, and death.

Our aim should be not to objectify or exploit one group's tragedy to dramatize another's, but rather to underscore and probe the underlying logic and root causes of all oppression and to contextualize the enslavement of nonhumans and the animal holocaust with other modes of organized violence and administrated murder. In this sense, PETA's exhibits were not only making valid analogies among various forms of oppression, but also addressing causal relations in history between speciesism and other modes of hierarchy and violence.

There are some obvious differences to note, of course. First, for example, whereas slaves can express their oppression and desires in human language, animals cannot. More generally, animals, unlike humans, do not create interest groups, political parties, or complex sociopolitical systems, although there are definitely traditions, rules, obligations, expectations, and ordered patterns of behavior in many animal communities. This is not to say, indeed, that animals do not have complex and evolved forms of communication, emotions, thought, and behavior—they do (see chapter 5).

Another salient difference to note is that speciesism is older and more entrenched in the human mind than racism and other systems

of exploitation, and so it will be far harder to eliminate than racism or other forms of hierarchy involving the domination of human over human. Thus, rallying all humanity behind the cause of animal liberation is a far more ambitious project than human liberation, and one not likely to be realized in mature or universal form. Humans generally have distinct interests and advantages in being oppressors, and the more difficult human existence becomes, such as in conditions of increasing resource scarcity, the more dependent people will likely be on exploiting animals.

The argument is not that human and animal experiences and forms of oppression are identical or that there are no salient differences to be drawn, but rather that *the similarities are more important than the differences*, and they are substantive enough to apply the discourse of rights, slavery, holocaust, oppression, and liberation toward nonhuman animals as well as human animals. The problem lies more with those offended by efforts to make legitimate claims and analogies, and who cannot accept that all beings have rights—above all, the right to be *free from* slavery, torture, and violent murder, and *free to* live an autonomous, pleasurable, peaceful existence. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages when these analogies are applied in historically informed, factually accurate, and culturally sensitive ways, and we must not accept blanket rejections of the validity of “animal slavery” and “animal holocaust” terminology, such as voiced in blatantly speciesist ways.

Abducting Africans from their homeland, wrapping chains around their bodies, shipping them in cramped and disease-ridden quarters across continents for weeks or months, branding their skin to mark them as property, auctioning them as slaves, breaking up their families, breeding life for no other purpose than service and labor, exploiting for profit, beating and killing with impunity—all these horrors and countless others inflicted on human slaves for the New World began with the exploitation of animals.

Like racism or sexism, speciesism creates a false dichotomy between one group and another in order to arrange the differences hierarchically; to justify the domination of the “superior” over the

“inferior”; and to claim that this domination is “the natural order” of the universe, “divinely ordained,” “scripturally sanctified,” or the outcome of dynamics such as natural selection. Whereas racism involves biases, discrimination, and hierarchical domination of one race over another, speciesism, which concerns the biases, discrimination, and domination of one species—*Homo sapiens*—against *all other* animal species that exist on earth, is far greater in its magnitude. Just as racist regimes endow a given race with privileges over others based on skin color or other identifiable characteristics, so too do speciesist societies grant humans absolute power over other animals simply because of their species. Whereas the racist mindset creates a hierarchy of superior/inferior on the basis of inheritable qualities or traits, the speciesist mindset subjugates animals to human purposes on equally fallacious and arbitrary grounds of species, by privileging reason, language, and other alleged “unique” human traits as the sole criteria of moral value. As racism stems from a hateful racial supremacism, so speciesism draws from a virulent human supremacism, namely, the arrogant belief that humans have a natural or God-given right to subjugate animals and use them for any purpose they devise.

Both racism and speciesism are born out of the need to maintain an economy and society rooted in bondage. Only through slavery can the privileged—be they ruling classes, the white minority elite, or the human populace in general—enjoy conveniences and live comfortable lives. Some of the key rationalizations for maintaining both racist and speciesist slave economies include the claim that the slaves are well-treated, that they actually like their slavery and prefer it to freedom, and that they are safer and better off in bondage than in liberty. As white supremacists had no knowledge of the true nature of blacks as full-fledged persons, equal to whites in creative potential and intelligence, so speciesists are ignorant of the emotional, social, and intellectual complexity of animals (see chapter 5). By corollary, just as debased conditions of enslavement prevented blacks from realizing their full human potential, so the real nature of animals is impossible to discern or manifest in conditions of exploitation and intensive

confinement, such as in factory farms, fur farms, zoos, aquariums, or other human-constructed environments.

It was not uncommon for apologists of slavery in the United States to argue that the bondage system was beneficial to slaves because blacks were biologically unfit for freedom. Employing the same illogic, exploiters such as factory farm managers and zookeepers argue that pigs, calves, and chickens are better off in “managed environments” where their “needs for food are met” than in their natural environments defined by “scarcity and predation.” According to racist doctrines, blacks did not desire freedom, and lacked the “higher” wants and needs of European whites. Slave owners who became targets of black rage, however, might have believed otherwise. The history of black slavery is the history of black rebellion. Black resistance began with mutinies on British slave ships before blacks ever set foot in America. Beginning in the 1640s, African slaves organized freedom societies; sought damages for unlawful detention; circulated petitions; made pleas to legislatures; engaged in work slowdowns and strikes; and launched sabotage and arson attacks. They revolted, fled, liberated themselves and others, and overthrew foreign occupiers; they also murdered white oppressors in ultimate acts of vengeance.

In much the same way, speciesist ideologies hold that animals are simple biologically programmed organisms or machines that lack complex forms of consciousness in their relations with one another and the natural world. Ironically, this lack of awareness characterizes the speciesist mindset, which fails to grasp that animals are no different from humans in how they suffer in conditions of captivity, or how their needs for freedom are violated. Moreover, like human slaves, animals too will flee from, disobey, revolt against, attack, and kill their captors and tormentors.¹³ Their rebellion in exploitation settings, such as laboratories, is evident in their resistance to being handled and acts such as zoo monkeys throwing feces at spectators. More dramatically, circus elephants, tigers, and orca whales frequently rebel against their confinement, boredom, exploitation, and beatings by attacking and often killing their trainers. The repetitive motions of fur-farmed animals, the self-mutilation of laboratory animals, and the madness of factory-farmed

animals and those in long-term incarceration, such as bear-bile farms, are signs that oppression violates their every need and instinct. Evident too is the depression and resignation of animals trapped in “shelters,” gestation crates, and battery cages, all of whom are too weary and weak for any display against the total violation of their lives.

Stolen from the wild; bred and raised in captivity; separated from their habitat, families and communities; held in cages and by chains against their will; brutalized and tortured; forced into a life of intensive labor that produces value and profits for exploiters in endless ways, *animals are slaves*. The raw materials of exploitative economies, animals are confined, worked, tortured, and killed for their fur, flesh, bodily fluids, excretions, labor, and spectacle/entertainment value. In factory farm conditions that resemble the mechanized production lines of concentration camps, animals are forced to produce maximal quantities of meat, milk, and eggs—an intense coercion that takes place not only through physical confinement but also now through chemical and genetic manipulation. As typical in Nazi compounds, this forced and intensive labor terminates in death. In circuses, rodeos, and aquariums animals have been taken prisoners and are held in captivity, forced to perform many times daily for the entertainment and economic value of humans. Vivisection labs imprison animals and invade their bodies for purposes of product-tests and experiments, to produce data for research reports necessary to the vivisection and pharmaceutical industries and vital to their profits.

Quite literally, if animals are prisoners and slaves, they can be freed. We can thus speak of animal liberation no differently than human liberation.¹⁴ One cannot “enslave,” “dominate,” or “exploit” physical objects, nor can they be “liberated” or “emancipated.” These terms apply only to organic life forms that are sentient—to beings who can experience pleasure and pain, happiness or suffering. Human and non-human animals share the same evolutionary capacities for joy or suffering, and in this respect they are essentially equal. Like their human counterparts, nonhuman animals are sentient, conscious, feeling, and thinking beings endowed with wills, desires, interests, and much more. They have abilities and potentialities that need satisfaction, and

complex physical, psychological, and social needs that can only be fulfilled in their own cultures and communities, within natural settings undisturbed by humans.

It makes perfect sense, therefore, to speak of animal liberation and to call the non-reformist sectors of the contemporary animal rights struggle a new abolitionist movement. The ontological, psychological, and political dichotomy should not be between humans and animals, but rather between sentient beings and non-sentient things. Humanists who insist that the term “animal liberation” is an oxymoron because animals are not complex, feeling, thinking subjects who seek and need freedom are completely ignorant about both human and animal nature; they have confused living subjects with inert objects, dead matter, and things.

Thus, animals require freedom from human exploitation and freedom to self-determination. Nevertheless, since animals cannot always successfully rebel and liberate themselves, nor organize politically to assert their rights and demands in the prison house of human society, they require the intervention of humans. Animal liberation is a movement of and by human animals for nonhuman animals. Where animals are enslaved, ethically responsible humans arguably have a duty to liberate them. Answering this call of conscience and duty, animal rights/liberation groups have sprouted throughout the world, with the ultimate objective of freeing captive animals from systems of exploitation and overcoming speciesist institutions and mindsets.

The New Abolitionism

Slavery has once again become a focus of social debate and struggle, as attention broadens from the bondage of human over human to include the enslavement of human over nonhumans. Consequently, a new abolitionist movement seeking animal liberation has emerged as a flashpoint for moral evolution and social transformation. As people of color and antiracists everywhere continue to struggle for justice and equality, the moral and political spotlight has expanded to illuminate a far more ancient, pervasive, intensive, and violent

form of slavery in an ongoing global holocaust. Whereas black scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) said that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,”¹⁵ we could state with equal relevance that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the species line. For the fate of animals, society, and the environment are inseparably interconnected, and the war humans have waged on animals is increasingly a war waged on themselves.

Just as nineteenth-century abolitionists sought to awaken people to the greatest moral issue of the day involving the slavery of millions in a society professing universal rights, so too the new abolitionists endeavor to enlighten others about the plight and rights of nonhuman animals. Black slavery raised fundamental questions about the meaning of capitalism, American “democracy,” and modern values. Current discussion regarding animal slavery provokes critical examination of a collective human psyche damaged by violence, arrogance, and alienation, while emphasizing the urgent need for a new sensibility rooted in respect for all life and connectedness to the biocommunity. Whereas racial standpoint theory illuminates core pathologies of modernity in the critique of colonialism and imperialism, so the animal standpoint exposes the destructive dynamics of the violent dominator cultures that have emerged and spread throughout the globe over the last 10,000 years (see chapter 1).

The shift from liberating human slaves to emancipating animal slaves is a continuous and coherent struggle against slavery in modern society. It advances a positive aspect of human nature that manifests in increasingly inclusive ethical systems, the universalization of rights, and thereby the expansion of liberties, democracy, equality, and community (see chapter 6). Animal liberation is an integral part of the modern antislavery movement, and it is the next logical development in moral evolution. Globally, developed human societies are verging potentially toward a similar stage in moral debate over the human treatment of animals, as some Western societies were two centuries ago regarding the moral and legal status of African slaves. Whereas Western societies increasingly have discerned that it is prejudiced,

illogical, and unacceptable to devalue based on ethnic and gender bias, they—and other cultures as well—are beginning to learn how arbitrary and wrong are the justifications for the tyrannical rule of human over nonhuman animals.

Then as now, there is great social turmoil and division surrounding efforts to recognize the rights of enslaved beings and to sever, not lengthen or polish, their chains. In the same way that white abolitionists worked across racial lines to create new forms of solidarity, so the new abolitionists reach across species lines to defend the defenseless and expand the moral community. John Brown and other white abolitionists were condemned as fanatics and race traitors in their time; similarly, animal advocates today are often vilified as extremists, terrorists, misanthropes, lunatics, and species traitors. Whereas the state in the nineteenth-century America frequently compromised with the South by enacting laws that protected slave-owner interests and required escaped slaves to be returned to their rightful “owner,” so too the global corporate-state-security apparatus has come down on the new antislavery struggle with draconian “eco-terrorist” laws to defend animal and nature exploitation industries.¹⁶

Parallel to the nineteenth-century-abolitionist movement that defined itself against both slavery and reformist responses to it, the new abolitionist movement challenges not only the enslavement of animals, but also the welfarist approach that seeks only to ameliorate, not eliminate, the institutions and practices of animal exploitation. Because welfarists only seek to regulate the exploitation and slaughter of billions of animals, they fail to challenge the legitimacy of oppressive institutions, laws, practices, and actions, and the speciesist ideology underlying all of it. Whereas some welfarists accept animal rights philosophy, albeit problematically (in that they believe that reformist tactics will ultimately lead to abolition), others share with oppressors the speciesist outlook that animals are resources for human use and benefit. Such welfarists thus reject the language of “animal rights” and its egalitarian meaning altogether in favor of the hierarchical discourse of “human responsibility” toward other animals they exploit. Welfarism legitimates any human use of animals, the only caveat

being that people should not be “cruel” to animals or cause “unnecessary harm.” This feeble pseudo-“ethical” view fails to grasp that any form of captivity, confinement, and enslavement is inherently cruel and injurious.

Thus, the new abolitionists reject welfarist reforms as wrong in principle and practice; in defiant contrast, they stress the rights of animals and the need for their complete emancipation from all forms of human domination. Nineteenth-century abolitionists renounced the idea of “humane treatment” of slaves as nonsensical, given that the institution of slavery is *inherently* cruel and dehumanizing. Similar talk of “humane killing” of animals is equally absurd, as there is no “humane” way to steal and violate an animal’s life. No accurately aimed bolt shot through the head of a sentient being warrants pretense to any kind of moral dignity or “responsibility,” whatever “improvement” such reforms might be over standard industry practices of dismembering animals while they are still fully conscious and aware. The act of killing itself—unnecessary and unjustifiable—is inhumane and wrong. Just as there is no humane rape or humane pedophilia, there is no humane animal slaughter, and the entire institution of confinement, exploitation, and slaughter is an abomination.

The new abolitionism is evident in the hunt saboteur movement that emerged in England in 1963. It is manifest in the “open rescue” campaigns (where activists free animals from factory farms without causing property destruction or hiding their identity), such as began in Australia in the 1980s and later spread to countries including the United States, Spain, Italy, Brazil, and elsewhere. Also, problematically (see below), it includes vegans who boycott animal products for ethical reasons, and consider themselves abolitionists on the grounds that they do not personally participate in the most significant cause of animal suffering and slaughter, and seek to shutdown the meat, dairy, and egg industries by participating in a mass withdrawal of consumer demand.

A vivid example of the new abolitionism is the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). The ALF was born in England in 1976 as an offshoot of hunt saboteur groups who used numerous nonviolent direct

action tactics to disrupt and stop foxhunts. The ALF took the same direct action philosophy many steps further by destroying hunters' property and applying sabotage including arson tactics against a broad spectrum of exploiters, including commercial breeders, vivisectors, the fur industry, factory farms, foie gras producers, meat suppliers, and fast food chains. The ALF does not wait for some indefinite time in the future when human oppressors would become enlightened or laws would be passed against animal slavery, as they have no faith in a speciesist corporate-controlled state dominated by animal industry interests. They choose their targets and strike at animal exploiters when and where they can.

Often operating under the cover of darkness, wearing balaclavas or ski masks, organized in underground decentralized cells of a few people, ALF activists employ two principle means toward the goal of animal liberation. First, the ALF enters into buildings housing animal prisoners in order to release them (e.g., mink and coyotes) or rescue them (e.g., cats, dogs, mice, and guinea pigs). They are liberating, not "stealing," animals, because animals should not be considered lawful commodities or property for someone to "own." Second, they use sabotage tactics to strike at the economic heart of exploiters and make it less profitable or impossible to exploit animals. The ALF insists that its methods are nonviolent because they only attack the property of exploiters, and never the exploiters themselves, as they rightly insist that the real violence is what exploiters inflict on animals. As of yet, there are no Nat Turners or John Browns in the animal liberation movement, but they may well be forthcoming and would not be without just cause and historical precedent.

Now active in dozens of countries, from England and the United States to Russia and Mexico, ALF activists have cost the animal exploitation industries hundreds of millions of dollars. Along with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), the ALF occupied the top positions of the US government's "domestic terrorism" list in the post-9/11 era. Whereas corporate society, the state, and mass media brand the ALF as criminals and terrorists, the ALF shares important similarities with some of the great freedom fighters of the past two centuries, and is akin to

contemporary peace and justice movements in its quest to end violence, repression, and discrimination against other sentient beings.

In the context of American history alone, the ALF belongs to a long and noble tradition of direct action, law-breaking, and militant uprisings, from the Boston Tea Party and the suffragettes to the civil rights and anti-war movements. The men and women of the ALF pattern themselves after Nazi resistance movements that liberated war prisoners and destroyed equipment—such as weapons, railways, and gas ovens—used to torture and kill millions of Jews and other victims. Similarly, by providing veterinary treatment and homes for many of the animals whom they liberate via vast underground networks, the ALF is a superb contemporary extension of the Underground Railroad that funneled black slaves to freedom through clandestine support channels.

From Pseudo-abolition to Radical Liberation

In the early 1980s, a new animal *rights* movement with abolitionist goals glowed bright with potential. The cause of animal protectionism, which became a bona fide social movement in the early nineteenth century, had made the huge leap from the utilitarian welfarist positions as expressed so influentially in Peter Singer's (deceptively titled) book, *Animal Liberation* (1975) to Regan's abolitionist work, *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983). In just a few years, however, the light faded to black as corruption, opportunism, and bureaucracy snuffed out the promise of genuine change based on an uncompromising rights/abolitionist approach. Soon, it became obvious that large mainstream organizations such as PETA, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) had become entrenched bureaucracies and corporate behemoths.

Increasingly co-opted and compromised, large animal rights organizations frequently worked with, rather than against, animal exploitation industries in order to regulate, not eliminate, the ongoing

animal holocaust.¹⁷ Since the 1990s, for instance, PETA has pressured McDonalds, Burger King, and Kentucky Fried Chicken to adopt “less cruel and more profitable” slaughter methods, while HSUS aggressively campaigned for so-called humane meat, and the RSPCA extolled the virtues of “humanely” slaughtered “freedom food.” PETA presents awards to industry collaborationists who design “humane” slaughterhouse architecture, and both PETA and HSUS sought seats on the board of directors of giant meat production corporations to “influence” their policies toward more welfare-friendly standards. It is often hard to tell the difference between corporate propaganda and welfarist promotion and, in fact, they have become inseparable. Gone is the moral clarity and non-compromising politics of the US abolitionists in the nineteenth century, where talk of happy lynching or certification of kind beatings would have been unimaginable. Meanwhile, a renewed effort to recover abolitionist goals emerged as a response to the co-optation of animal rights, but unfortunately it proved to be a false heir to the militancy and pluralism of the nineteenth century tradition.

In direct response to the reformism and opportunism of bureaucratic “welfarism,” another type of abolitionist movement emerged that built on the rights position of Regan and anchored abolitionism in a vegan lifestyle and pacifist worldview. Beginning in the mid-1990s, Gary Francione, professor of law at Rutgers University, exposed the duplicity of “new welfarist” approaches, such as articulated by PETA, that in theory espouse animal rights positions, but in practice pursue welfarist policies.¹⁸ This orientation, Francione argues, is incoherent and dilutes the meaning of rights. Welfarism in any form, he insists, works to the benefit of industries and thus increases, rather than decreases, the demand for animal-derived products by consumers whose tenuous “moral conscience” is appeased in the knowledge that the animals on their plate were treated and killed “humanely.”

Francione tapped into and mobilized a growing dissatisfaction with corporate reformism and sparked an emerging vegan abolitionist movement, one rooted in an ethical critique of all exploitative uses of animals in society while abstaining from consuming any animal

products (be they food, clothing, or prescription drugs). While Francione advanced a forceful critique of welfarism, he proved to be a reactionary figure largely bereft of political vision and devoid of viable alternatives to reformist policies.

As a symptom of a consumerist, individualist, and depoliticized US culture, Francione's fatuous panacea for a multitude of intractable social and ecological crises is to "go vegan." Francione advanced from marginal movement critic to dogmatic cult leader by peddling simple "solutions" to complex problems, and easily attracting adherents of the same apolitical and delusionary mindset. Francione's followers see themselves as missionaries whose task is to save the world by spreading the Gospel of Veganism throughout the Internet and blogosphere. As the case with all fundamentalists, these cult-like believers insist that they possess the Truth while all others struggle in error. For them, the world is black and white, answers are cut and dry, and complexity is reduced to the Procrustean bed of rigid "either/or oppositions," rather than enlivened through the dialectical logic of "both/and" possibilities.

In Francione's view, the animal advocacy movement is threatened by two equally undesirable extremes. On one side, Francione states, the reformism of corporate welfare groups such as PETA, HSUS, etc. dilutes the integrity of the animal rights message, sells animals out at every turn, and hinders abolitionist efforts to promote species equality and to regulate, not eradicate, exploitation. On the other side, however, Francione believes that radical "extremist" groups such as the ALF use counterproductive "violent" tactics that, he alleges, fail to save animals, alienate the public, and ignore the root problem of eliminating speciesism through educational means (see chapter 3). Trying to steer between the Scylla of reformism and the Charybdis of radicalism, Francione attempts to chart a third way, championing nonviolent vegan education as the *only* possible way to advance abolitionist goals. There is no alternative, he argues, but obedience to law, peaceful vegan outreach, and a focus on individuals and consumption habits over the institutions and production imperatives of global capitalism.

Despite passing references to capitalism, state power, and commonalities of oppression in hierarchical societies, Francione ultimately pushes a simplistic apolitical, quiescent “go vegan” approach pitched to a marginal white, affluent, and privileged Western audience. In their vegan outreach efforts, Francione, and the global vegan movement generally, rarely engage people of color, working-class families, the poor, or peoples in China and India—the world’s most populous and rapidly modernizing nations whose insatiable appetites for meat pose massive problems for vegan abolitionism and, indeed, the planet. Francione thereby reinforces the abysmal elitist, classist, and, racist stigmas attached to animal advocacy since the early nineteenth century, and he further isolates veganism and animal rights from progressive movements and the social mainstream.

Unable to articulate a structural theory of oppression, Francione exculpates capitalism—its destructive logic and disastrous impact on humans, animals, and the environment—to lay the entire burden of blame and responsibility for change on individual consumers. He identifies the problem as one of individual demand for, not institutional supply of, animal products. Certainly, individuals need to take responsibility for their choices and the consequences of their actions, such as by engaging the ecological and ethical imperative to become vegan. However, it is also crucial to recognize the formidable power of corporations, the state, mass media, schools, and other institutions in peoples’ lives, and to appreciate the constraints imposed by poverty, class, and social conditioning. Of course individuals must change, but so, too, must institutions; yet neither will change if our focus is limited solely to dietary education and our pedagogical strategies are flawed and feeble. Francione’s rigid focus on consumer demand fails to grasp the obvious point that supply stimulates demand through such means as mass media, advertising, and government subsidies. Unfortunately, such pivotal political realities fall outside of Francione’s reified asocial outlook.

The corollary of Francione’s focus on individual ethical choices is his antipathy to social and political action of any kind, hostility to militants, and silence regarding the most pressing social and ecological

issues of the day. Francione fails to realize that independent psychological and ethical change does not automatically bring about large-scale social transformations needed for creating viable democratic and ecological cultures. He also is oblivious to the assimilating nature of market structures that easily absorb veganism into capitalist ideologies and market mechanisms, such that vegan abolitionism takes on an ideologically and economically stabilizing role rather than being an oppositional force.

This “abolitionist approach” has no grasp of the totality and systemic logic of capitalism. It offers little else than a tepid political reformism which is no more effective in changing the overall social relations of domination than “welfarism” is in breaking the chains of speciesist oppression. Unable to uncover the root causes of hierarchical domination and ecological crisis, blaming individuals over institutions, Francione is hardly in a position to understand the *problems* let alone to offer potential *solutions*. Thus, the vague, elitist, asocial “vegan education” approach is hopeless in the face of such formidable forces. Yet Francione and flock lack even the most rudimentary elements of a theory and practice of education; this is more than a small problem, given their fetishized focus.

Oblivious to the tipping point this planet is about to cross with global warming (see the Conclusion), they promote slow, incremental change amidst rapid ecological breakdown. They foster fantasies that assume an *infinite* amount of time for change within *finite* conditions, as set by resource scarcity, overpopulation, species extinction, climate change, and systemic ecological collapse. Francione, like most of the global vegan movement, lives in a deep state of denial and delusion about the urgency of ecological crisis and is dangerously naive in his faith in the singular efficacy of conjectural education and moral persuasion apart from direct action, mass confrontation, civil disobedience, alliance politics, and struggle for radical change.

Incredibly, as global social and ecological crises rapidly mount with aggressive neoliberalism, class exploitation, overpopulation, and relentless pillaging of the planet, Francione ignores the most crucial events of the day. Clearly, these complex and catastrophic problems

upset the vapid “go vegan” message and the facile optimism rampant in the vegan movement, which is continuously celebrating its delusional progress and victories amidst global crisis. Yet for every person who becomes vegan, a thousand flesh-eaters arise in China, India, and Indonesia. For every new vegan product on the supermarket shelves, another hundred species die, and for every vegan bistro built, another ecosystem collapses.

Francione champions animal liberation, not total liberation; he denounces the property status of animals without a serious critique of capitalism, the state, property relations, and commodification dynamics in general. He condemns animal exploitation, but never probes into the underlying mechanistic and instrumentalist attitudes, such as inform the vast domination of technics over society and nature. He wants the abolition of animal exploitation, but not capitalism, market domination, and hierarchy in general. Francione does not confront the state, but rather works in and through it, legitimating it as a tool of capitalist and bureaucratic domination.

Pacifist liberal lifestyle veganism is another dead-end and groundless hope, completely inadequate to address the unprecedented challenge of a planet in crisis. Francione’s approach is complacent, detached from troubling realities, and irrelevant to the massive and complex struggle necessary to forestall biological meltdown and ecological catastrophe. Francione presides over a pseudo-abolitionist movement, a bourgeois white elitist, individualist, consumerist lifestyle veganism that is powerless to change anything in society. Ultimately, what Francione offers is not a viable alternative to welfarism, but a theory divorced from any practice in the form of significant education or concrete abolitionist campaigns. Consequently, Francione has more similarities than differences with the corporate welfare movement. All speak exclusively to elite, mostly white audiences; they pursue single-issue reformist policies and non-confrontational politics; they espouse pacifism exclusively and denounce justifiable sabotage as “violent”; they eschew structural critiques of capital and the state; and they seek glacial, piecemeal change in a world that is rapidly disintegrating into unprecedented social and ecological crisis.

African-American educator Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) rejected the program of the abolitionists and the goal of achieving “equality” with whites in favor of incremental welfare reforms. Where abolitionists and thinkers like Du Bois emphasized the need for ceaseless agitation, Washington urged accommodation with the Jim Crow apartheid system. Rather than challenge segregation, he emphasized the importance of black education for advancement within a racist hierarchy. Hence, Francione is the Booker T. Washington of the new “abolitionism,” promoting gradual social reforms, stressing accommodation to the system, and focusing on “educating” individuals rather than transforming institutions. Yet, as Joan Dunayer notes, “The relationship between [new] abolitionists and enslavers must be adversarial, as it was with regard to African-American enslavement.”¹⁹

To the extent Francione has managed to monopolize the meaning of “abolitionism,” the concept has become so diluted and domesticated, so defanged and declawed, so drained of oppositional energy and devoid of political vision, that the word itself is arguably debased and ruined. Just as Francione’s “abolitionist approach” is a major regression from the action-oriented pacifism of the Gandhi and King traditions, so it is a pale shadow and caricature of the abolitionist tradition to which it claims allegiance. It is a quiescent, housebroken, apolitical form of consumption by and for docile citizens. Veganism is the new opiate of the people.

We need a far richer and more radical concept of abolitionism that draws from and revitalizes the power of the nineteenth-century anti-human slavery movement that erupted in the United States, one that returns to and renews its radical roots, pluralist tactics, and alliance politics orientation. In contrast to Francione’s pseudo-abolitionism that offers nothing but apolitical veganism and new consumer practices, I urge a total liberationist alternative. Against the false option that Francione imposes between welfarism and vegan abolitionism, I advocate a holistic approach that integrates veganism and animal liberation into a broader political project that seeks the abolition of capitalism and hierarchical domination generally.

Since this alternative model is richer, multidimensional, and far more political in its scope, it escapes the dismal marginalization of animal advocacy and veganism, in order to pursue novel and dynamic organizing possibilities. Unless tied to alliance politics and radical social and environmental movements, the animal rights movement is a single-issue reformism and veganism is reduced to just another form of bourgeois individualism and capitalist consumerism. Profound in moral, social, and ecological implications, animal rights and veganism are crucial necessary steps for liberation politics, but hardly in and of themselves sufficient conditions for revolutionary change. The profound importance of veganism and animal rights can be recognized by a social majority only in a broad political context, and only in alliance with other struggles can their revolutionary potential be realized (see chapter 4).

It is not just the content of Francione's positions that I challenge, but also the very form and method of his approach. We cannot progress in the struggle for liberation or hope to be politically relevant, unless we abandon Francione's dualistic, either/or logic for a dialectical both/and logic, one that abandons bogus dichotomies and false oppositions. Thus, we need education and agitation, mainstream and militant tactics, peaceful resistance and confrontation and sabotage, and aboveground/legal and underground/illegal means of weakening speciesist capitalism.

The pluralist and contextualist method central to my position (see chapter 3) absorbs the partial value and validity of vegan abolitionism, but without its debilitating dogmatism, denialism, apoliticism, and pacifism. This approach is far truer to the diverse and militant nineteenth-century movement that emphasized the importance of relentless struggle, bold confrontation, and militant resistance. It renounces the naïve belief that one can win significant change through a corporate-dominated society and legal system. It abandons single-issue fetishism and the complacency of class and racial privilege in favor of diversity, solidarity, and common interests. It initiates bridge building with the economically disadvantaged, the politically marginalized, and the globally oppressed. It confronts the growing social

and ecological crises that threaten all life on this planet. It directly engages the problems posed by rapidly modernizing giants such as China, India, and Indonesia (in terms of their soaring rates of meat consumption, energy use, population growth, and so on). It recaptures the militant spirit of nineteenth-century abolitionism while also drawing from contemporary theories and political movements. It also can reinvigorate a movement sold-out by corporate opportunists and paralyzed by pacifists suffering from what can appropriately be described as the Stockholm syndrome.

Thus, I advance a multidimensional total liberation position that incorporates the following: (1) it defends the legitimacy of militant direct action tactics such as liberation and, where necessary, sabotage; (2) it views capitalism as an inherently irrational, exploitative, and destructive system, and regards the state as a corrupt tool whose function is to advance the economic and military interests of the global elite and to repress opposition to their agenda; (3) it has a broad, critical understanding of how different forms of oppression are interrelated, seeing human, animal, and earth liberation as inseparable; (4) it promotes an anticapitalist alliance politics with other rights, justice, and liberation movements that share the common goal of dismantling all systems of hierarchical domination and remaking societies according to new democratization and ecological imperatives; and (5) it overcomes the limitations of humanist “progressive” and “radical” movements in hopes of awakening political masses to the urgent necessity of veganism and animal liberation for human liberation and, indeed, for human survival and planetary integrity.

CHAPTER 3

The Paralysis of Pacifism: In Defense of Militant Direct Action

Globally, the vegan and animal advocacy movements are in crisis, one so profound that it has evaded critical attention. As global social and ecological problems deepen, and the animal holocaust claims billions more victims each year, the vegan and animal advocacy movements grow correspondingly weaker, not stronger in response.

Despite the precariousness of these movements on many fronts, vegans and animal advocates are in serious denial. Rather than a sober recognition of their weaknesses, losses, and marginalization, many are convinced that their movements are ascendant forces and that the renaissance in diet and ethics they seek to advance will bring social enlightenment, global peace, and ecological healing and balance. Vegans and animal advocates exaggerate the growth in their numbers and the significance of minor reforms, as they simultaneously ignore the global picture and its ominous trends. They underestimate corporate and state domination, and large organizations such as the HSUS and PETA are integrated into the system and often collaborate with exploitation industries to promote “humane meat” and “humane slaughter” (see chapter 2).

To overturn arbitrary power systems, therefore, one must identify the ideologies, myths, norms, and values that validate social

domination, block critical thinking, stifle political resistance, and bind the oppressed to their oppressors. Thus, the *rationalist ideology* champions the Socratic-Enlightenment/liberal notion of humanity as rational beings who do wrong only when they do not know what is right. Similarly, the *pluralist democracy ideology* depicts the capitalist state as a neutral arbiter among conflicting wills, one that gives all interests equal consideration and voice. Finally, the *pacifist ideology* views the state as open to reforms and understands human beings to be fundamentally good and amenable to moral persuasion and ethical conduct. Thus, pacifists conclude, while civil disobedience may be a necessary catalyst for change, there is never a rationale for using “violence”—a complex concept that few adequately define or contextualize.

This chapter focuses on pacifism as a problematic moral and political philosophy that perpetuates power relations and violence, in contradiction to its stated aims. While critical of nearly all interpretations of pacifism as dogmatic, limiting, and weakening, I trace the degeneration of the action-oriented and confrontational *pacifist* tradition of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to the timid, apolitical, and domesticated *passivist* approach taken by many contemporary vegan, animal rights and other social change advocates. In contrast to dogmatic or “fundamentalist” pacifism, reality is complex, ambiguous, paradoxical, dilemma-ridden, and often undecideable, and I thereby reject absolutist truths, universal values, and reductionist models. Against fundamentalist pacifism, I advance a pragmatic, contextualist, and pluralist method that abandons attachment to principles for achieving results. I reject totalizing viewpoints to emphasize differences and specific contexts, and I abandon dogmas that limit resistance tactics in favor of a pluralistic stand that maximizes the possibilities for struggle and progressive change.

This approach further exposes the flaws of pacifism while absorbing its partial truths and limited insights in a broader context; it neither opposes nonviolence nor fetishizes violence but rather opts for whichever approach works best in specific situations. The entire range of militant tactics, including physical force, is defended as legitimate

and necessary responses to the total war against all life and the earth as a whole.¹ Also, I invoke a principle I call “extensional self-defense” to justify cases where animal activists—the self-appointed “voices of the voiceless”—have a moral duty to use any (intelligent and effective) means necessary to effectively defend animals from violent assault, as animals under attack themselves would if they could.

The Fallacies of Pacifism

Vague and therefore often misleading, the term “pacifism” has provoked considerable confusion over its meaning, as it connotes the opposite of its intended use. More accurately termed “nonviolent resistance” or “nonviolent civil disobedience,” pacifism is, in fact, a dynamic, active, and assertive opposition to violence, oppression, and injustice. Pacifism has acquired a negative connotation of inaction; this is not only due to a literal interpretation of its meaning, but also because of the precipitous decline in the public sphere, democracy, and political activity of a citizenry transformed into a mass consumer base. This is a regressive development, conspicuous in the lifestyle of veganism and the single-issue animal advocacy movement (see chapter 2). Dissatisfied with the connotations of “pacifism,” Gandhi coined the term “*satyagraha*,” or “soul force,” to stress the active power of ethically principled resistance—one that seeks to counter violence with nonviolence, to overcome hatred with love, and to transcend injustice with justice.

For Gandhi and King, pacifism entailed dramatic confrontations and bold actions against oppression and injustice, such as involved protests, demonstrations, and civil disobedience. Hardly tailored for the weak, timid, or cowardly, Gandhi and King emphasized that nonviolent resistance demanded extraordinary courage, risk, and strength to stand up against violent assault and repression without using weapons or physical aggression of any kind, even in self-defense. Both directly provoked and challenged systems of oppression in order to spotlight injustice, sharpen conflicts surrounding it, awaken the dormant masses, and to wear oppressors down with the capacity of

resisting peoples to endure suffering. Since power cannot be maintained except through the consent and cooperation of the oppressed, they taught the need for noncompliance and noncooperation with unjust laws. When the law is wrong, and contradicts ethical principles, one has a duty to defy that law, to pressure the state to rectify injustice and end oppression.

A hegemonic ideology among contemporary social movements, nonviolence has been fully embraced by vegans and animal advocates. Many envision themselves creating a community of peace and respect deeper than anything yet conceived, far surpassing the limits of humanism. The assumption is that one cannot reach the goal of a peaceful world without peaceful means, an argument invariably “sealed” with non-contextual clichés such as “Violence only begets violence,” “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind,” and “The ends do not justify the means.” Every platitude is framed as a timeless and universal truth, and counterexamples are never considered for the clear reason that there are devastating refutations of such glib universal claims.

Here pacifism truly becomes, literally, passivism—a degenerate, enfeebled form of pacifism, one that replaces courage with fear and public presence with private retreat. Passivism avoids mass protests and civil disobedience to prevent alienating public opinion. It abandons agitation for “education,” fragments groups into isolated individuals, flees from the streets to the sanctuary of the home, and abandons the public space of real land for the cyberspace of the Internet. Just as they corrupted the concept and movement for “abolitionism,” so too have predominant vegan pacifists co-opted the notion and history of direct action. Whereas “direct action” refers to potentially dangerous street confrontations, civil disobedience, and protesting against oppressors, vegan pacifists have opportunistically redefined it to designate individual ethical choices and consumer behavior, for instance, that based on boycotting “animal products.”

The “resistance” of vegan passivists manifests itself in “political” actions such as posting and “liking” comments on Facebook, trading recipes, baking cookies for potlucks, blogging to the converted,

and launching sectarian attacks on other vegans. Shifting focus from corporations and the state to consumers, from unjust institutions to false consciousness, passivism bypasses critiques of institutionalized power structures and logic to focus on individual consumers whose “demands”—falsely abstracted from supply-side manipulation—are singled out as the root of the problem (see chapter 2). This approach not only exonerates the state and capitalist institutions—with their repressive legislations and destruction of peoples, biodiversity, and ecosystems of all kinds—but also absolves animal exploitation industries from moral crimes of the highest order, including the slaughter of billions of innocents annually. It occludes the structural logic of capital, ignores how supply stimulates demand, and nullifies the importance of targeting industries and states to focus instead on the amorphous and sole task of changing consumer behavior through “education.”

Hence, on this liberal model, the “solution” is not institutional change and revolution, but consumer education with respect to veganism. One cannot miss the bold contrast between these movements that piously quote Gandhi and King in words, but never follow their teachings in practice. Civil disobedience is not part of the lexicon or tactics of contemporary vegan and animal advocacy movements, let alone animal liberation and property destruction. Rather, these are condemned as “violent” and terrorist” in language taken straight out of the playbook of the corporate-state-security complex.

The most egregious example of internalizing the state superego, and becoming compliant rather than defiant, is the vegan “abolitionist approach” associated with professor Gary Francione (see chapter 2). The consummate elitist, liberal, apolitical, single-issue vegan, Francione not only vehemently denounces the “closed rescue” tactics of the ALF, but also the Gandhi-friendly “open rescue” approach (which overtly breaks into factory farms, causing minimal property damage, to rescue a small number of animals and to document conditions of abuse). Francione disavows all civil disobedience and law-breaking tactics, renounces protests or demonstrations, rejects all legislative campaigns (even at the local level), mocks “single-issue

campaigns” (such as anti-vivisection), and literally renounces everything but “vegan education,” which is but a hollow mantra that substitutes for real thinking and action.

Fundamentalist pacifists do not engage in genuine argumentation, but rather assert claims without rational support. Their rhetorical strategy is not to think and reason for themselves in a dialogic process, but rather to quote Gandhi, King, the Dalai Lama, and other sanctified authorities—usually out of context. As a dogmatic and authoritarian discourse, fundamentalist pacifism dresses its language in the garb of truth, not interpretation or perspective. It is theology secularized, and spoken with the reassurance of the “True Believer.”² Even a superficial acquaintance with this sector of the contemporary vegan movement generally reveals a preachy, judgmental, and arrogant tone informing a religious faith in veganism as a panacea to the world’s problems. As religion is often hostile to science, so fundamentalist vegans—many of whom boast secular and atheistic views—typically ignore the facts of science, ecology, and social theory that upset their facile schemes, naïve optimism, and one-dimensional vision. Fundamentalists rigidly adhere to inflexible principles because *to admit exceptions is to allow complexity, precisely what fundamentalists seek to avoid*. So it is an either/or and all-or-nothing equation for their mindset, as so-called violence is always wrong and their concept of nonviolence is always right, both in principle and in consequence.

This is seductively logical and deceptively simple, as indeed is virtually every pacifist argument against force, or “violence.” For if rational arguments and moral persuasion have little effect on animal exploiters and the animal holocaust industry generally, and speciesist propaganda techniques that exploit emotions rather than target the mind are far more powerful than vegan education methods, then evidently people are not as educable as pacifists claim. Hence is it not logical to conclude that methods that are more forceful are needed to stop the massive assault on animals? If the state and security complex are tools of industries that are heavily lobbied and paid to pass draconian laws against activists, then there are further grounds to believe that direct action is necessary to protect animals from violent

assault and mass slaughter. Finally, if it turns out that militant direct action tactics and so-called violence often stop violence, in cases where boycotts, education, and legislation are dismally slow and hopelessly ineffective, then the moral coherence model (one can only achieve nonviolent ends through nonviolent means) fails and pacifism collapses.

Education and moral persuasion can often be potent forces of change, but the efficacy of rational and ethical appeals is greatly exaggerated. Despite Socratic and Rousseauian visions of humans as essentially rational, good, and compassionate, the record is quite clear: humans—all too often—are evil, xenophobic, tribalist, sadistic, selfish, and irrational, and the history of *Homo sapiens* is largely a sordid tale of violence, greed, genocide, and environmental destruction. People are not moved by fact or reason as much as they are animated by aggressive urges and manipulated at the unconscious and emotional level by propaganda techniques.

The standard education model relies on a false, idealist, and rationalist view of human nature. It denies the primacy of irrational forces and drives, and the sadistic pleasure and thrill that people such as hunters derive from killing animals. It ignores the identity investment humans have as members of the “superior” species for whom all other animals are mere means to their ends. It dismisses the psychological mechanisms used to resist change, rationalize behaviors, and avoid unpleasant realities. It negates the operations of detachment and compartmentalization that facilitate indifference to shocking cruelties and unfathomable levels of mass slaughter of animals. Lastly, it seems oblivious to the power of propaganda and manipulation, to the resultant resistance to change, and to the overall denial of rational dialogue and compassionate appeals, especially where economic interests are involved. When humans have a financial stake in a tradition, institution, or industry that is exploitative and violent—such as Canadian sealers, Japanese whalers, or African rhino and elephant poachers—their attachment to irrational drives, cruelty, greed, and selfishness is more implacable and tenacious than ever. Despite the epistemological revolution sparked by Nietzsche and Freud over a

century ago (see chapter 5), pacifists cling to a false theory of human nature that ignores seven million years of primate evolution that predated our emergence as “modern humans,” as *Homo sapiens sapiens*, 45,000 years ago.

Thus, where exploiters will not voluntarily surrender their power over others, ending oppression and advancing liberatory goals requires a more forceful approach that moral persuasion and education can offer. Throughout the history of modern democratic struggles, moral progress has occurred not through civilizing the elites, who then voluntarily relinquish or share their power, but mostly through one kind of coercion or another—be it Gandhi’s soul force (*satyagraha*), sabotage, physical force, or armed struggle and revolution.

If not ignorant of historical complexity, pacifist fundamentalists represent events in simplistic, one-sided, and tendentious ways. On their distorted view, nonviolence always advances social progress and violence, however justified, perennially impedes it. Their modus operandi is to argue that social progress in the modern world was the result of nonviolent tactics *and these alone*. While nonviolent strategies have often been used creatively against oppressive governments and dictatorships, and dramatic social change has sometimes come about nonviolently (e.g., the “velvet revolution” in Czechoslovakia in 1989 and the “singing revolution” in Estonia during 1987–91), pacifism has also failed miserably in numerous conflicts. Throughout Central America, in the twentieth century, nonviolent protests were drowned in blood by fascist juntas serving US interests, and Gandhi’s call for nonviolent resistance to German Nazism demonstrated that nonviolent resistance alone is futile, and cannot work in conditions where oppressors are ruthless in their use of violence to suppress dissent.

Invariably, “victories” attributed to nonviolent struggles have been taken entirely out of context to ignore the important role of resistance and a variety of forces militating for change. Gandhi did not gain the independence of India alone, as a violent insurgency was also attacking British forces. Martin Luther King Jr. did not win civil rights achievements unaided, as Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and thousands of rioters setting cities aflame brought strong pressure for

change, while King was positioned as a moderate and the lesser of many evils. Nor was the American peace movement decisive in ending the war in Vietnam. President Nixon mocked them, and escalated the war even as opposition to it increased. The United States fled Vietnam in 1973 not because of peaceful hippy protests, but rather because the nation was defeated militarily on the battlefield by the armed insurrection of the Vietnamese people. In such cases, “violence” (more precisely, self-defense) ended violence, and only “violence” could win peace.

The tactics that apply in advanced Western democracies may not work at all in Eastern nations, Asian dictatorships, or South American juntas. In their privileged lives in which they encounter violence on the television but not in the streets, white middle/upper class Western liberals are accustomed to resolving conflicts solely through negotiation, and thus champion the ideology of the “pluralist democratic” state. They never ask whether the open, aboveground, nonviolent, legislative tactics they believe prevail in advanced capitalist nations might not be suicidal in fascist or authoritarian states. What is more presumptuous than privileged elites dictating to the entire globe, to diverse peoples struggling under varying conditions, that nonviolence is the only legitimate and viable way? Moreover, by implication, pacifists are legislating tactics to future generations, the unfortunates who will live in advanced stages of sociopolitical, economic, and ecological crisis and may well have far fewer options of resistance against total war.

What Is Violence?

While few animal liberationists misrepresent pacifism as a static state of nonactivity, there is far less appreciation and charity in pacifist representations of militant direct action. Pacifists distort, caricaturize, and slander militant approaches, vilifying radicals in the corporate-state language as being “violent” and “terrorist” people who allegedly damage the security and respectability of peaceful, law-abiding citizens. Part of a larger reactionary culture, fundamentalist pacifists censor all

discussion or debate about militant direct action and they expel violators from their groups and Internet forums. Yet just as pro-life supporters wrongly revile “pro-choice” advocates as “pro-abortion,” given that their normative goal is to defend women’s reproductive rights and not endorse killing fetuses for its own sake, so pacifists slander proponents of militant direct action as “pro-violent,” whereas in fact militants seek the best means to stop the violence against animals and hardly celebrate “violence” as inherently good.

Pacifists rarely trouble themselves with providing a cogent and nuanced definition of violence. Instead, they dogmatically cite Gandhi and King or even use corporate-state definitions designed to recode sabotage as a terrorist crime. I must emphasize that the controversy over “violence” in the animal liberation movement is not about attacking, kidnapping, torturing, and assassinating animal exploiters, because almost no one is even talking about violence in the narrow sense, let alone carrying it out. Rather, the censure of “violence” in reality applies to tactics such as liberation, sabotage, home protests, confrontations, and other militant direct action tactics that cannot be defined as “violent” in any precise or substantive way.

Definitions of violence that are broad, vague, and promiscuous in scope must be opposed because they lack precision, blur crucial distinctions, and are advanced *by and for* the corporate-state complex. Broad definitions that focus on property, not animals, occlude the massive violence that corporations and governments inflict on sentient beings, while condemning courageous activists who rescue animals from murderous aggression as “violent extremists” and “terrorists.” They also obscure the fact that the corporations, states, police, and security forces direct real violence, apart from the atrocities inflicted on animals, against animal and environmental activists.³

Thus the narrow definition of violence is entirely defensible, as it is more precise, plausible, and maintains perspective on the real violence and the true criminal forces, which are obscured by corporations, states, security agencies, mass media, sundry exploiters, and pacifists alike. Within the narrow definition, an act is “violent” when one individual or group intentionally and aggressively causes physical

harm, injury, or death to another individual or group without justification and adequate cause. Moreover, it is noteworthy that all such acts of “violence,” as defined above, are expressly contrary to the stated guidelines and principles of the ALF.

If the definition of violence is to be broadened at all, the expansion should include attacks on animals, on sentient life, rather than damage to property. The Orwellian corruption of semantics, which vilifies breaking windows but not butchering hundreds of billions of animals, occurs in the context of capitalist societies in which property is sacred and life is profane. It is painfully ironic that in capitalist legal terms, corporations are “persons” and animals are things, resources, and commodities. But how can one “hurt,” “abuse,” or “injure” a non-sentient thing—for example, an animal-breeding research building, or computers and equipment in a vivisection laboratory—that does not feel pain, have awareness, and is not alive? How can one be “violent” toward brick and mortar, glass and steel? How can hammers, bolt cutters, and spray paint be likened to guns and knives?

If they give reasoned arguments at all in support of their sweeping claims, pacifists see violence in both (1) the act of damaging property and things, and (2) the psychological consequences it has on humans who own or use the property. The first rationale identifies violence with destructive acts per se, whether against a human being or private property. Saboteurs deface, break, burn, and demolish objects and thus, on this line of reasoning, they exert anger, aggression, and hostility rather than calm, peace, and love. They rely on coercion and intimidation rather than logical reasoning and moral persuasion. For pacifists adept at tuning out the horrors of the animal holocaust, sabotage qualifies as bona fide violence. The second point considers the harm or trauma caused to people whose homes, cars, or offices are damaged. Their businesses, investments, livelihood, research, or careers may be adversely affected or ruined as well, and they may be injured psychologically, emotionally, economically, and professionally. These potential results as well, it is assumed, suffice to brand sabotage as a form of violence.

There are serious consequences to using the broad, vague, and indiscriminate definition of violence. First, inflating the meaning of violence to include buildings, laboratory equipment, technologies of domination, and assorted objects trivializes the violence the corporate-state complex inflicts on humans and other animals, as it blurs the critical distinction between living beings and nonliving things. There is a huge moral difference between slitting the throat of a pig and slashing the tires of a meat truck. The values of society are revealed all too clearly when only the latter action is condemned as a crime worthy of intense opprobrium and legal sanctions. Second, those who accept the corporate-state's definition of property destruction as violent unwittingly contribute to the demonization of freedom fighters as "terrorists," and thereby legitimate state repression of the animal liberation movement and its supporters.

Assessing "Violence" from "Principled" and "Pragmatic" Grounds

Arguments for or against animal liberation stem from two different logics that are crucial to differentiate, which I call the "principled" and "pragmatic" perspectives. The *principled* standpoint examines whether militant direct action tactics are ethically legitimate for *intrinsic* reasons, and asks if actions are right or wrong independent of good or bad consequences. In contrast, the *pragmatic* standpoint brackets ethical issues to focus on *extrinsic* concerns relating to the *consequences* of tactics, and asks if militant tactics help or hinder the movement. The distinction between principled and pragmatic assessments of radical approaches is critical, for one could argue that militant direct action is (1) ethically legitimate but has damaging consequences; (2) morally wrong but yields effective results, (3) ethically sound and fruitful in results, or (4) morally wrong and negative in consequences.

Pacifists reject all "violent" actions as wrong *and* counterproductive and thus renounce militant direct action on both principled and pragmatic grounds. They never grant the legitimacy of direct action,

nor do they acknowledge the proven effectiveness of underground sabotage and liberation tactics. A shrewd theorist or activist analyzes actions or campaigns on both principled and pragmatic levels, and may be as much Machiavellian as moral, believing that the vicious war that humans have waged against other animals does not afford them the luxury of bourgeois etiquette. When the game is rigged, only fools follow rules. In a two-sided war, militants would be equally strategic, utilitarian, and as indifferent to the life of exploiters as exploiters are to animals. The sole focus would be on tactics, so that the “good” action is an effective action, one that inflicts maximal harm on abusers and liberates as many animals as possible.

As Malcolm X quipped, “Tactics based solely on morality can only succeed when you are dealing with people who are moral or a system that is moral. . . . We are nonviolent with people who are nonviolent to us. But we are not nonviolent with anyone who is violent with us.”²⁴ The only categorical imperative that resistance movements have under conditions of total war is to inflict as much damage as possible on exploiters; to liberate the enslaved from captivity, torture, and death; and generally to thwart the assault on all life and the earth by any means necessary. The global holocaust industry is such an inexorable and prodigious killing machine, one could argue, that any chance at effective resistance requires a “teleological suspension of the ethical” (Kierkegaard) and a going “beyond good and evil” (Nietzsche) through unequivocal counterforce and extensional self-defense (see below).

The Principled Objection

Pacifist opponents of militant direct action uncritically define property destruction as violence and reject it as inherently wrong. In classic syllogistic logic, they argue:

- (1) Property destruction is violence;
- (2) Violence is always wrong;
- (3) Therefore, property destruction is always wrong

As we have seen, this reasoning is unsound, principally due to its promiscuous definition of “violence” and the dogmatic dismissal of any possibility that “violence” is justifiable, necessary, and effective. Once again, fundamentalists advance unqualified universal judgments that “violence” is *always* wrong and *never* works to the advantage of animal, human, or earth liberation.

Let us, for the sake of argument, follow Tom Regan’s strategy, which is to grant the contested premise that sabotage is violence, and thereby shift the question from “Is it violence?” to “Is it justifiable?”⁵ Conceding that sabotage is violent (and Regan insists it is) does not lose the argument to pacifists, Regan argues, for it does not follow that if an action is violent, it is therefore wrong. Drawing on the tradition of “just war theory,” Regan proposes criteria that “violent” actions would have to satisfy to be ethically legitimate, such as (1) one uses violence defensively against an offensive assault, (2) one uses counterviolence as a last, not first, resort to self-defense, and (3) one uses the minimum amount of force necessary to stop a violent attack.

Despite the provocative title of his essay, “How to Argue for Violence,” Regan—a mainstream philosopher, a respected and decorated professor emeritus, and an avowed pacifist—can hardly conclude with a defense of violence unless he were prepared to risk losing his revered standing in the academic and activist communities. Thus, the tease of his essay’s title aside, the pacifist outcome is predetermined against militancy, whether in narrow or broad terms. Regan easily escapes his ploy by insisting that we have *not* run out of options and still have many educative and legislative possibilities yet to pursue. Regan thereby opens the door a crack toward more militant and pluralist forms of struggle, but only to promptly slam it shut again.

Many pacifists are content to stroll slowly down the long and interminable hallways of the system, patiently pushing education and legislation strategies, while the screams of the tortured intensify, the blood flows wider and deeper, and the body count of butchered animals climbs by the billions. In the bigger picture, moreover, the global eco-crisis is so severe, so near or already past the tipping point of

runaway climate change and systemic collapse, that we do not have time for glacial improvements and incremental reforms. In the midst of accelerating climate change, species extinction, human population growth, rainforest devastation, resource scarcity, dying oceans, and so on, we must seek more potent means of resistance and immediate catalysts of social transformation.

Apparently unmoved by a sense of urgency, advocates of the principled critique believe that “violence” and civil disobedience are unnecessary for a cause allegedly strong enough to prevail on logical arguments alone. Peter Singer, for example, affirms animal protectionism as good and just, so long as it remains “nonviolent.” After one paltry concession to decades of stunning victories by the ALF, Singer argues that for real success:

We must change the minds of reasonable people in our society... The strength of the case for Animal Liberation is its ethical commitment; we occupy the high moral ground and to abandon it is to play into the hands of those who oppose us... The wrongs we inflict on other species are... [undeniable] once they are seen plainly; and it is in the rightness of our cause, and not the fear of our bombs, that our prospects of victory lie.⁶

Besides grotesquely minimizing the achievements of militant direct action, and uncritically advancing rationalist models of human nature and education that are false and outdated, Singer further undermines his argument by tying it to a naïve and thoroughly discredited faith in the State and mythical “democratic process.” He ignores the fact that these systemic processes serve as alibis for corporate hegemony over every facet of society and everyday life. This crude and caricatured propaganda model views the state as a servant to the people, whereas in truth people are slaves to the state, to a greater or lesser degree. It sees representative or parliamentary democracy as embodying the general will of the citizenry, rather than the private will of powerful corporations and their various armies, including lobbyists with money-stuffed suitcases.

This model of indirect democracy (a contradiction in terms) views politics as the province of professional bureaucrats and the product of pacified voters. With a gullibility matched only by their ignorance of realpolitik, a preponderance of animal advocates feel that the two-track strategy of education and legislation is the sure ticket to overcoming entrenched speciesist mindsets and laws, whereas in fact it is a double delusion and total dead-end. Pacifists massively underestimate the task of changing the dominant ideologies and undoing the systems of speciesist indoctrination in schools and mass media. They rarely understand the need for, let alone the means to, dismantling the hegemony of corporations, states, banking industries, and the military-industrial complex, all of which work together to ensure the perpetuation of repression, violence, domination, and, ultimately, planetary collapse.

From the realization that the state is hardly a neutral arbiter of competing interests, but rather is a tool of capitalist interests, a second political tradition of *direct democracy* has emerged. Direct action advocates argue that the indirect system of representative or parliamentary democracy is irredeemably corrupted by money, power, cronyism, and privilege. Appealing to the lessons of history, direct activists insist that one cannot win liberation struggles through education, moral persuasion, political campaigns, and demonstrations—or any form of aboveground, mainstream action—alone. In direct action campaigns, activists abandon time-consuming, futile efforts to persuade the state to turn against its corporate masters. Unhindered by the constraints and mechanisms of capitalist ideology, they themselves assume all responsibility to attack, blockade, sabotage, or act in any way to stop the violent, destructive, or genocidal practices of relevant targets.

When exploiters will not voluntarily shut down the lucrative machinery of exploitation and killing, when the state lends its full legal weight and military might to protect oppressors, and when the populace is passive or ineffective, activists have no option but to right these wrongs outside of sanctioned channels. One's obligation to protect innocent life from harm, and to defend the earth from pillage and irreparable devastation, far outweighs the duty to obey unjust laws or

to respect moral and legal prohibitions against “violence” that serve the cause of violence so well. There comes a time when one is forced to choose between pacifist principles or pragmatic results, between tolerance or intolerance of state-sanctioned violence, and no principles are more important than the sanctity of life, the defense of the innocent, and the preservation of biodiversity and the earth as a whole.

Extensional Self-Defense and Just War

Dogmatic pacifists do not even accept self-defense as the most obvious and compelling counterexample to their rigid rule against “violence.” They thus do not address the question of whether one can use force against exploiters if necessary to protect defenseless animals targeted for their horns, skin, flesh, fur, milk, or other body parts and excretions. As they accept no possible justification for violence, they therefore reject the concept of just war, first elaborated upon in the medieval writings of St. Augustine (354–430) and St. Aquinas (1225–74) in order to defend the legitimacy using explicit force and warfare in specific conditions.

Self-defense and just war theory are two widely accepted rationales for retaliation against aggressors. But a clear speciesist double standard informs the argument made by those who defend using physical force when human lives are at stake, but suddenly begin equivocating and moralizing when the victims confined, exploited, tortured, and murdered are other animals. Why are Nazi resistance fighters extolled as heroes while the ALF, ELF, and others are denigrated as “terrorist” groups? Why is it laudable to break down doors, smash windows, and launch military strikes to save hostages, but “wrong” and “counter-productive” to raid laboratories and rescue animals infected with disease, sickened with toxic products, and mutilated in heinous burn experiments? Clearly, to explain this hypocrisy, it is not the *methods* of direct action that people disagree with as much as the *subjects* for whom the actions are undertaken.

When Malcolm X said African Americans should fight for freedom “by any means necessary,” he was not advocating aggressive violence

and offensive attack; rather, he was emphasizing the right to self-defense in conditions where police, the state, and the military are not protectors but enemies with intent to kill. Like humans, animals have the right to self-defense, and with few exceptions (e.g., orcas imprisoned in aquariums, lions trapped in zoos, and elephants exploited in circuses often turn on and kill their trainers) cannot defend themselves.⁷ Therefore, given that (1) animals mostly cannot defend themselves against human violence and mechanized murder; and (2) human activists—often self-styled “voices of the voiceless”—represent their interests; and (3) if animals would use extreme force to defend themselves against deadly attacks; then (4) humans who act on behalf of animals have a *prima facie* duty to do protect them from injury by any means necessary.

This theory makes no assumptions about animals’ thoughts, needs, or desires except the reasonable belief that they do not want to be confined, sickened, tortured, and murdered, and would rather live a life of pleasure and freedom in natural conditions, with their own kind, making their own choices. If physical force is needed to save an animal from attack, then that force is a legitimate form of what I call “extensional self defense.” This principle mirrors US penal code statutes known as the “necessity defense,” which can be invoked when a defendant believed that an illegal act was necessary to avoid great and imminent harm. One only needs to expand this concept slightly to cover actions that are increasingly desperate and necessary to protect animals from total war against them.

Extensional self-defense is not just a theory, it is a crucial national policy put into practice in countries like South Africa, where governments hire armed soldiers to protect rhinos and elephants from ruthless poachers who kill for horns and tusks more valuable than gold on the international market.⁸ The struggle to defend endangered species against mafia, poachers, and mercenaries has escalated into full-scale war, in which many poachers are killed, but far more rhinos and elephants lay dead, with the horns and tusks ripped from their heads and faces. In a perverse irony, the more endangered the species, the more valuable their body parts. The rhino and elephant wars raging

in Africa are a clear sign of increasingly intense struggles developing around the “politics of nature” that involves animals, activists, conservationists, endangered species, biodiversity, the environment, and the struggle over natural resources in conditions of scarcity. Pacifists cannot stop poachers, but bullets can, and while many measures must be taken to protect endangered species, right now armed soldiers are the best protection rhinos and elephants have against murderous, weapon-wielding poachers. At the same time, some conservationists “are now coming to a surprising conclusion: In exceptional circumstances, they say, the only effective way to protect the environment may be at the barrel of a gun.”⁹

Understood *in context*, these actions are not violence, they are counterviolence, dynamics of just war, and extensional self-defense. To confuse these emergency measures that demand armed protection of imperiled animals with machismo and “pro-violent” measures, rather than necessary defensive actions, indicates the absurdity, misplaced priorities, and tragic consequences of pacifist principles that actually increase violence. Contrariwise, militant actions and extensional self-defense *reduce* violence. The pacifist cliché that “violence only creates more violence” is thus glib, hollow, and false.

The Pragmatic Critique

The pragmatic argument brackets the ethical status of militant direct action to focus on its possible or actual consequences for the animal advocacy movement. Here, the question is not so much whether violence is ethically defensible, but is it pragmatically effective and helpful or harmful to stated goals. While there are various lines of objection, the most common pragmatic critiques are that militant direct action is negatively framed by the media; that it diminishes public perceptions of the animal advocacy movement; and that is “counterproductive” in achieving no positive results for animals, actually setting the movement back rather than moving it forward.

The pragmatic argument that *all* militant direct action is alienating, damaging, and counterproductive is riddled with fallacies, false

assumptions, and factual errors. It assumes, first, that all or most actions are widely reported in the media, when in fact the vast majority are minor actions, or successful strikes that corporations do not wish publicized. How the public can form opinions on all but a few dramatic actions is not explained, unless in the unlikely event that they are regular readers of magazines and websites that regularly report on the animal liberation movement.¹⁰

As for militant actions that make the news, it is hardly true that all reporting is negative and therefore that radical resistance “always” alienates public support. Often, one finds a complex and indeterminate mix of negative and positive framing, which however “encoded” or portrayed by the media is “decoded” or interpreted by audiences in different ways. Provocative militant direct action strikes—such as the August 2003 ALF actions against San Francisco Bay Area foie gras chefs and restaurants—often bring unprecedented publicity to horrific conditions of animal exploitation, thereby creating debate and change on issues that otherwise would not have been exposed or discussed. While militant tactics turn some people off (such as middle or upper-class consumers), they turn other people on (such as alienated or rebellious youth and disillusioned citizens), and many activists credit ALF media reports as their main influence for joining the animal rights movement in one form or another. Yet dogmatic pacifists claim to *know* what “the public” thinks without a shred of sociological research or empirical evidence; clearly, their conclusions are speculative, unsubstantiated, and altogether groundless.

Most militant activists do not write off public opinion and education as irrelevant. A key purpose for establishing a press office for the animal and earth liberation movements, after all, is to counter corporate-state propaganda and frame direct actions as necessary and legitimate tactics of freedom fighters, not “terrorists.” Mollifying public opinion, however, is not a militant’s first priority, which is instead to rescue and liberate animals and inflict maximal economic damage on exploiters. In the words of an ALF activist, “Our aim is to destroy property and force laboratories to close—publicity is neither here nor there.”¹¹ More importantly, public opinion does not shape progressive

change; rather liberation movements shape history and values, and mass consciousness catches up with progressive struggles decades or centuries later.

The claim that militant direct action is counterproductive and injurious to the animal rights movement is nonsensical. The most stunning successes have come from underground actions that target exploiters' property, inflict heavy or devastating economic damage, take "property" confined in cages, and recover damning videotapes of the hideous realities that animal exploiters present to the public as "humane" and in keeping within legal "welfare" standards. Moreover, these tactics are often highly effective in generating media publicity, and they move the debate toward the radical pole in a way that lends more credibility toward mainstream approaches that otherwise might be mocked and dismissed as too "extreme."

Finally, it is crucial to dispense with the most damaging myth of all regarding militant direct action, which is that every animal liberated is replaced and that every building razed to the ground is rebuilt. A favorite pacifist myth is that militant direct action tactics *never* work and are nothing but injurious and counterproductive to the movement. This assertion is advanced without any regard for, or recognition of, the historical record that clearly shows thousands of cases in which raids, sabotage, and other militant actions liberated countless animals, hundreds or thousands at a time, and shut down oppressors altogether. Since the ALF first emerged in 1976, it staged dramatic raids on vivisection laboratories, especially in the United States during the 1980s. From 1996 to 2005, after the ALF nearly eliminated the fur industry in England, direct action tactics closed down a half dozen breeders who supplied animals to laboratories, and liberationists stopped construction of a major animal research center at Cambridge University and almost at Oxford as well. If not for the massive intervention by British and American governments, activists might have bankrupted and destroyed a major pharmaceutical and product testing company, Huntingdon Life Sciences.

As four decades of history actions show, underground activists *accomplished* their goals by rescuing countless thousands of animals

and weakening or dismantling the apparatus of commercial breeders, far farmers, vivisectionists, and sundry exploiters. Exploiters recovered on some, but hardly all, occasions, and the annals of history are filled with cases of raids and attacks that ended operations forever, permanently, never to start again. Not only were the animals suffering and dying in these gruesome compounds, freed by the only means possible, but also countless thousands more animals were spared the same fate. Innumerable animals would have endured the same nightmarish pits of hell were their lives dependent upon mainstream activists unable to transcend their own fear and self-concern. It is instructive to contrast the relative inertia of chanting, petitioning, leafleting, lobbying, and working for years to win largely meaningless or limited reforms of grisly practices with forms of exploitation that liberationists have ended in a matter of minutes or hours.¹²

Are historically informed, thinking people supposed to believe the absurd claim—advanced by corporations, states, security forces, mass media, and mainstream animal “advocates” alike—that those who freed suffering souls while hurting no one are “violent”? Are rational individuals expected to agree that an unbroken dramatic series of victories over four decades and dozens of countries truly should be dismissed as “counter-productive”? If the argument is that some groups and tactics are indeed counterproductive, then let us shift attention from militants and liberationists to reformists and mainstream collaborationists. Let us talk not of militant direct action, but rather the RSPCA promoting “freedom food” or the HSUS working with industries to certify “humane meat” and “cage free” eggs, and even sponsoring events promoting meat consumption. Let us talk about PETA’s campaign to persuade Kentucky Fried Chicken to kill chickens with gas rather than to slice their throats; their objectification of women (alienating to social movements) to protest the objectification of animals; and wearing Ku Klux Klan costumes for media attention. Further, let us talk about PETA’s awards to Temple Grandin for using her alleged “empathetic” abilities to design technologies that facilitate the march of animals to their slaughter; their astronomic

kill-rate of healthy and adoptable animals; their embarrassing use of celebrities that pose for anti-fur ads one day and model fur coats the next. Let us also discuss evangelical, apolitical, single-issue, pacifist vegans who confuse boycotts with action and potlucks with politics. How is it possible for direct action to “damage” a movement already moribund and riddled with more than its share of sell-outs, frauds, opportunists, and collaborators? Or might direct action instead revive, reinvigorate, and embolden the animal rights movement—to become something more than a pawn of industries and lackey to the state, such that it might find it is the will and the courage to boldly resist speciesism and other forms of oppression?

If my argument so far is unconvincing, another way to assess the effectiveness of militant direct action is to ask: What tactics do animal exploitation industries fear the most: vegan outreach and potlucks, or liberations and sabotage? If mainstream organizations and pacifists tendentiously minimize and distort the efficacy of militant tactics, we can gain a different and arguably more accurate perspective from animal exploiters themselves, many of whom openly admit that groups such as the ALF have greatly impeded their plans and projects. “Because of terrorist [*sic*] acts by animal activists,” says Susan Paris, president of the pro-vivisection group Americans for Medical Progress, “crucial research projects have been delayed or scrapped. More and more of the scarce dollars available to research are spent on heightened security and higher insurance rates. Promising young scientists are rejecting careers in research. Top-notch researchers are getting out of the field.” Similarly, a report to the United States Congress on “Animal Enterprise Terrorism” states: “Where the direct, collateral, and indirect effects of incidents are factored together, the ALF’s professed tactic of ‘economic sabotage’ can be considered successful, and its objectives, at least toward the victimized facility, fulfilled.”¹³ It is not for trivial reasons that after 9/11 the United States corporate-state complex designated the ALF and the ELF the top two “domestic terrorist” groups, given the threat they pose to the property and profits of animal and earth exploiters.

The Methodology of Militant Direct Action

Thus, my position contradicts fundamentalist pacifism at every ideological and methodological point. It is, first, nondogmatic in striving for the virtue of “intellectual honesty” championed by Nietzsche. Unlike fundamentalist pacifists, these arguments are not made *ex cathedra*, nor do they have pretensions to omniscience, infallibility, and unassailable Truth. As Gandhi said, “Truth is an experiment,” and one should not pose as a scientist armed with indubitable facts of human nature, nor as a prophet with a crystal ball that can determine the right tactics and predict public response. Intellectual honesty requires abandoning pretense to indubitable knowledge that one cannot have.

This approach, second, is thereby pragmatic in not being tied to philosophical or moral doctrine, but rather to the categorical imperative to advance animal/total liberation. The pragmatic outlook allows the situation and context to dictate the action, rather than imposing a master theory onto all possible situations historically and globally. It is committed to results over doctrines, dogmas, rules, traditions, authorities, and teachings of any kind. It abandons fidelity to all moral principles, ideologies, and party lines. Maintaining the moral high ground at the expense of achieving results is a luxury that liberationists cannot afford, especially as the global elite are greedy, power-hungry, nihilistic, implacably violent, and committed to total war. Fundamental pacifists ought to question whether their priorities are to axioms or to animals, to a lexicon or to liberation.

Abandoning doctrine, dogma, and dicta, one is left with specific situations and different contexts in all their complexity and contingency. This leads, third, to a contextualist approach, which asks: What tactic or combination of tactics is most appropriate to a specific situation? In a campaign to ban animal-exploiting circuses in one’s community, for example, one might best combine public education and legislative measures, accompanied by protests and demonstrations. But since reason is a weak opponent to self-interest and the profit motive, one should not expect victory based on the force of logic as much as the logic of force, and be prepared to make it

as uncomfortable and unprofitable as possible for a circus to return again. If the goal is to end animal experiments at a university, argumentation and moral persuasion are almost certain to fail, given the entrenched ideology of speciesism and the billions of dollars at stake. A pragmatic approach would also use militant means such as targeting animal breeders, demonstrating at vivisectionists' homes, inflicting maximal property damage on laboratories, and liberating captives from their sadistic abusers.

While nonviolent tactics may be adequate or even more effective than militant direct action in some cases, this will not be true in all instances. Only from a dogmatic position could one declare that all protest, resistance, and liberation struggles must be lawful and/or without force. Each situation needs to be assessed according to its own specifics, not for its fidelity to predetermined and inflexible principles. Thus, we move from *a priori rules to a posteriori diagnostics*. A contextualist approach is necessary, moreover, to determine the validity and nature of tactics in defense of animals. Whether an action is justifiable and potentially effective depends on context.

In a global setting, contextualism asks this question: How can we best defend all life and the entire planet from the massive and unrelenting assault of global capitalism, centralized political rule, militarism, and the metastasizing growth of the human empire colonizing the earth and monopolizing its resources? Questions concerning the legitimacy and efficacy of physical force cannot be answered in the abstract, but only in specific contexts. Whereas partisans on both sides want to read the history of moral progress as driven exclusively by nonviolence or violence, the fact is that social change unfolds through the entire arsenal of pressure tactics, which include strikes, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, sabotage, liberation, education, legislation, or even armed struggle.

Contextualism implies the fourth key methodological tenet of this view of militant direct action, namely, pluralism, for a pluralist approach uses any and all tactics relevant to specific situations. Unlike totalizing pacifism, a contextualist and pluralist approach does not apply a general rule to each and every circumstance in a grandiose act

of deduction; it looks, rather, at each circumstance and determines which action, strategy, or campaign among a host of options seems most promising. The only rule is that there is no rule. The fundamental idea is to have the flexibility to use a variety of tactics as appropriate to different situations. Whereas dogmatic pacifists allow one and only one strategy—nonviolence—militants concede the need for education, leafleting, vegan outreach, effective legislation, media campaigns, exposés, protests, demonstrations, and civil disobedience—all mainstream or traditional, nonviolent tactics. Indeed, these are standard tactics for many militants’ activism too, but they also insist on augmenting stock practices with underground and high-pressure approaches and ultimately whatever intelligent and effect action it takes to stop the animal holocaust and the devastation of the earth.

A pluralist approach does not categorically reject militancy and counterviolence, nor does it fetishize or unqualifiedly support radical rhetoric and tactics. Context matters. In April 2012, the Green Hill Occupy movement in northern Italy liberated hundreds of beagle dogs through daring daylight open rescues, *with* support of police and media. This Gandhi-like nonviolent open rescue tactic should be used to its fullest potential in Italy so long as it remains fruitful and widely accepted. It would be a mistake, therefore, in this particular context, to prematurely move to more radical actions such as economic sabotage, actions which could bring on police repression and alienate public support.

Thus, one cannot claim that all radical tactics are always warranted, tactically sound, or done intelligently—such blanket pronouncements violate a contextualist approach. Nor should one ever romanticize violence or recklessly urge a “tear down the house” mindset. Rather, there should be careful scrutiny of each situation and the judicious weighing of variables such as short-term benefits and long-term costs, including possibly damaging media coverage, negative public reaction, and state blowback. In some situations, moral persuasion may work; other scenarios will require protests, legal work, civil disobedience, or more. Still other forms of domination, exploitation, and destruction are best carried out with sabotage or may even necessitate counterviolence or

warfare, as is clearly the case in Africa where a war of extermination is being waged against elephants and rhinos. A contextualist position disarms pacifist dogmas and opens new vistas of tactical thinking rooted in the animal standpoint—what works to promote animal liberation—rather than the liberal-bourgeois, fear-conditioned, delusional, conformist, dogmatic, pacifist humanist standpoint.

Whereas proactive and open-minded activists use *inclusive* approaches that acknowledge the validity of different approaches and mainstream tactics in various situations, their pacifist and mainstream critics adopt *exclusive* mindsets that deny the need for tactical richness and pragmatic realism. Nonviolence works as a complement to militant direct action and counter-violence, and vice versa. The key distinction to be drawn is not between nonviolence and violence, but rather between pacifism and pluralism: the former is totalizing, dogmatic, exclusive, and one-sided, whereas the latter is contextualist, fluid, and inclusive. Pacifism reads history rigidly and tendentiously, pluralism views social struggle and change dialectically.

Post-pacifist Politics

As a dogma, a tool of censorship, and a totalizing ideology, pacifism in any form—especially the corrupt and degenerate form of postmodern passivism—is a major obstacle to radical social change. This pathology internalizes the repressive state superego to induce conformity; it is apolitical, bourgeois, and individualist; it reveres authority and reviles radicalism, even renouncing civil disobedience as “too radical.” It handcuffs opposition movements and disarms them of highly effective means of struggle. Pacifism in all forms limits our tactical options at a time when we desperately need to think in new ways, to diversify tactics, and to expand the means and scope of resistance. Pacifism is rooted in false assumptions and models regarding human nature, education, power dynamics, and the determining logic of capital and state domination.

The complex philosophical, political, and tactical questions about how to vanquish speciesism and the 10,000-year reign of dominator

cultures cannot be settled with dogma, clichés, censorship, naiveté, historical revisionism, collaborationism, and the proverbial turning the other cheek. We can only progress in the struggle for animal liberation once we dispense with fallacious logics such as fundamentalism, rationalism, liberal democracy, and essentializing views of an allegedly benign human nature. People must also overcome their latent Stockholm syndrome-complex that binds them to their oppressors. This pervasive mentality commands obedience to the rules, norms, and laws that are designed to perpetuate elite rule and compels activists to seek the “inner good” of animal exploiters, while vilifying liberationists as criminals, terrorists, and threats to “civilized” society.

To apply contextualism to our current era of systemic social and ecological crisis, one can observe in recent decades that animal advocacy and environmental movements have become increasingly radicalized, with militant resistance as the next logical and perhaps inevitable stage in this development. The evolution, for instance, of mainstream environmentalism to the direct action and “monkeywrench” tactics of Earth First! to the Earth Liberation Front is a clear response to a mounting global ecological crisis. The sense of urgency generally is rising in proportion to the severity of planetary crisis. With the earth in the throes of climate change, dying ecosystems, the sixth great extinction crisis, and an ever-growing holocaust, “reasonableness” and “moderation” are as entirely unreasonable and immoderate, as “unconventional” and “radical” actions are necessary and appropriate.

Unless the intensity of our defense of life matches the ferocity of the assault against it, we allow a greater violence to grow exponentially until an earth once teeming with life becomes a mass graveyard, a battered wasteland, and a toxic cesspool. Then, when it is finally too late, the unfortunates who remain will grasp what the radicals tried to convey: what the logic of growth and capitalism finally wrought, the colossal failure of human vision and will, and the complicity of pacifism with the greatest violence of all.

CHAPTER 4

Rethinking Revolution: Veganism, Animal Liberation, Ecology, and the Left

Unlike the corporate-state-security apparatus, the entire spectrum of the Left is oblivious to the fact that in the last few decades a new movement has emerged that is of immense ethical, political, and ecological significance.¹ That movement is the *animal liberation* movement. Because animal liberation—and the inseparably related concept and practice of veganism—challenges the anthropocentric, speciesist, and humanist dogmas entrenched in radical and progressive traditions, leftists as a whole have ignored or mocked rather than engaged these important new movements, and most environmentalists are equally antagonistic and clueless. The vital importance of veganism and animal liberation has yet to be recognized, and both deserve a prominent role in the decisive politics of the twenty-first century. This is all the more important given the incursions into the animal advocacy movement by those on the Far Right, particularly in England, France, and Italy.

Since the 1970s, animal liberation has been one of the most dynamic resistance forces on the planet. As the “new social movements,” comprised of people of color, women, students, peace and antinuclear activists, gays and lesbians—all defining their cause

and identities in opposition to a moribund labor movement and reductionist class politics—had themselves waned by the late-1970s, a novel “politics of nature” emerged with ascending environmentalism and animal advocacy. Although each had humble beginnings in England and the United States in the early-nineteenth century, by the 1970s and 1980s they had become mass social movements. While different from one another in key ways, both environmentalist and animal advocacy movements were a break not only with narrow class politics of the “old Left,” but also with the anthropocentrism and humanism of the “new Left” and “new social movements” as well. The animal liberation movement has kept radical resistance alive and is growing in numbers and influence globally—despite mass conformity, state repression, and corporate blowback, and the corporatization and co-optation of mainstream animal advocacy groups.

It is becoming increasingly clear that human, animal, and earth liberation movements are inseparably linked, such that none (humans, animals, and dynamic ecosystems) can be free until all are free—from human exploitation and interference. In the last three decades, there has been growing awareness that environmentalism cannot succeed without social justice and social justice cannot be realized without environmentalism. This insight led to new forms of alliance politics, such as launched the American environmental justice movement, Earth First! alliances with timber workers, Zapatista coalition building, and the 1999 Battle of Seattle that united workers and environmentalists.² The coalitions that have emerged to date have tended to link human rights and social justice issues with environmentalism only. Despite the many historical, ideological, and institutional modes of oppression linking human, animal, and environmental concerns, there have been no significant attempts in practice to forge an alliance of unprecedented depth, diversity, inclusivity, and power that would unite human and earth liberation struggles with vegan and animal liberation movements.

Fault lies equally on all sides; except for rare historical figures who grasped the systemic nature of oppression and occasional

writings on the topic of overlapping systems of oppression, both the Left and animal advocacy movements have ignored each other at best, or expressed intense mutual disdain and hostility.³ Similarly, despite the crucial relevance of veganism for resolving a wide range of environmental and social problems relating to diet-based diseases, resource scarcity, agribusiness domination, and expropriation of small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples from their land, no significant alliances have been organized around common concerns apart from rare efforts such as from vegan-oriented social/food justice groups. Even amidst the startling political energies that erupted during the Occupy Movement that spread throughout the United States during 2010–11, anarchists, social justice groups, environmentalists, vegans and animal rights activists failed to capitalize on the unprecedented opportunities for dialogue, interaction, and bridge building over common concerns, such as the catastrophic effects of global agribusiness. What is truly disturbing, however, is that elements within the far Right, that is, neo-Nazis and other racist organizations, have been attempting to infiltrate and hijack the animal movement—with some degree of success—to co-opt their popularity and political energy, and to serve as a platform for their own repugnant views and their political agenda based on intolerance and hate.

Human, animal, and earth liberation are interrelated projects that must be fought for as one, as we recognize that veganism is central to peaceful, healthy, ecological, and just societies. Given their symbiotic, holistic, and interlocking relationship, it is imperative that we no longer speak of human liberation, animal liberation, or earth liberation as if they were independent struggles, but rather that we talk instead of *total liberation*.

This chapter asserts the need for more expansive visions and politics as it calls for initiating new forms of dialogue, learning, and strategic alliances on all sides. Each movement has much to learn from the other, yet all weaken and marginalize themselves through narrow, dogmatic, and isolated positions. None, however, can achieve their goals apart from solidarity with the others, and it is only through

strategic alliances and total liberation politics that humanity has a chance to defeat the corporate-state-military complex that has been waging total war on all life and the planet. The similarities vastly outweigh the differences among key social movements and common objectives could become clear through a productive dialogue that has yet to commence.

Forming complex and enduring alliances with human animals from different groups with varying agendas, and shaping a resistance movement powerful enough to effect radical social transformation in the midst of advanced crisis and be able to withstand fierce repression and opposition, is clearly no easy project. Thus, one can be forgiven for being far from optimistic that humanity can find the collective will, intelligence, and courage to wage war against the war-makers, before impending social and ecological collapse brings about a different world of mass suffering, global chaos, desperate survival conditions, and authoritarian control. We are at a historical crossroads, time is running out, and our options are few.

The Left Critique of Vegan and Animal Advocacy Movements

As discussed in chapter 2, the *animal welfare* approach seeks to regulate animal suffering in systems of exploitation, the *animal rights* outlook aims to eliminate these institutions altogether, and the *animal liberation* orientation uses direct action—sometimes, but not always, in defiance of the law—to free animals from captivity and to attack exploiters through various means, including economic sabotage. Whereas welfarists never formally challenge the assumption that animals are resources and property for human use, rights advocates attack speciesism and insist on the intrinsic value and equality of *all* sentient life. Liberationists share the welfarist concern for immediate action and relief of animal suffering, and often rely on rights-based assumptions while upholding abolitionist goals; yet they adopt militant tactics and radical outlooks that are antithetical to both welfare and rights positions.

For most people, the clear divide in the animal advocacy movement is between the welfare and rights camps, and intense debates typically erupt over these opposing views. Welfarists deride the rights position as extremist, purist, and utopian—a vacuous dream of a distant future when animal exploitation might be abolished, without addressing urgent issues of suffering and failing to propose viable alternatives to reformism. Rights proponents, in turn, disdain the “meaningless” measures that lead to “bigger cages” and “humane killing” and argue that welfare campaigns benefit the exploitation industries far more than animals, while seducing the public into thinking holocaust victims are confined and killed “humanely.” Welfarists, they argue, promote more, not less suffering and killing; reinforce speciesist views that animals are resources for human use; and block the path toward abolition, especially when mainstream organizations actively collaborate with exploitation industries.

Against conventional thinking, one can see the welfare and rights approaches as variations within the same mainstream paradigm rather than as antithetical or incommensurable frameworks. Their similarities are more important than their differences, and their conflicts are more akin to a family squabble than a civil war. It can be argued that the more significant fault line in the animal advocacy movement is between the mainstream, law-abiding, pacifist, and single-issue standpoint of welfare and rights approaches on one side, and the militant, law defying and, to a lesser degree, alliance politics orientation of liberationists on the other. This is evident through a number of lines of comparison.

First, whereas both welfare and rights proponents advance their goals in strictly legal and aboveground ways, focusing on education and legislation, liberationists employ underground and high-pressure methods that include harassment campaigns, freeing captive animals, and economic sabotage. Both welfare and rights proponents uncritically rely on education approaches that can exaggerate the efficacy of rational argument and moral persuasion on human beings who are deeply irrational, self-interested, or hateful and violent to animals. In addition to education campaigns, both mainstream tendencies pursue

legislative campaigns at local, state, and federal levels, and tend to be naïve to the fact that the state (especially at the national or federal level) is a corrupt tool of capitalist interests.

Although rejecting paltry compromises and reforms without offering viable and concrete alternatives, the rights camp generally shares with welfarists a complete contempt for the “extremists” in the liberationist movement. Both thereby adopt the discourse of the corporate-state complex to demonize some of the boldest actions and most effective tactics in movement history. Because they believe the only way to effect positive change is to work within the system, rights and, especially, welfare advocates follow the law and often show an obsequious respect to exploiters and a hostile public alike. Both welfarists and rights proponents denounce the liberation and sabotage tactics of groups such as the ALF as “terrorist,” “counter-productive,” and a threat to the movement’s “credibility” (see chapter 3). Fearful that the state, media, and public will smear the entire movement with the same “extremist” brush (which could tarnish their halo of respectability and cause precipitous drops in donations), mainstream groups erect a firewall between their own “law-abiding” and “peaceful” activism and the alleged “violent and criminal” tactics of militants, which they insist have no legitimate place in a principled movement. Thus, in their editorial pages, mainstream magazines like *Animal People* regularly denounce “violent extremists” in the movement, as the Humane Society of the United States applauds FBI persecution of legal direct action campaigns and even contributes reward money for the capture of alleged saboteurs. Disturbingly evident in these examples is the deep internationalization of the Stockholm syndrome in the movement’s mainstream and pacifist sectors. Also apparent is how the rule of capitalist logic determines an organization’s main priority—to make profits, not to help animals.

Both welfarists and rights proponents accept the legitimacy of capitalist economic, political, and legal institutions, at least in practice, and unlike Left theorists, are far less inclined to possess the historical and theoretical framework required to understand the inherently exploitative and growth-oriented logic of capital and the structural

relationship between market and state. They typically lack even a rudimentary understanding of class domination and struggle, state power and repression, colonialism and imperialism, neoliberalism, and the wide spectrum of mechanisms (such as corporate media, advertising, and entertainment industries) that control populations through consent as well as force. In their single-issue focus, segments of the animal activist community are often ignorant of, and indifferent to, social justice struggles and the plight of poor, exploited, disenfranchised, and colonized peoples, and cannot draw useful comparisons and contrasts between various liberation movements. This also makes them vulnerable to the Far Right groups that allegedly promote animal welfare or rights at the expense of human rights, and that often champion misanthropic views.

Generally, animal advocates promote single-issue reforms within market societies, rather than challenge the core logic and systematic devastation of capitalist institutions. Indeed, mainstream organizations are themselves capitalist bureaucracies that accumulate coveted money and influence from the corporate-state system, and thus, are hardly subversive institutions breeding the next generation of radicals. The politics of the movement range from the Far Right and fascist to free market libertarianism to liberalism, with radical voices almost always marginalized. Predominantly middle class, overwhelmingly white and privileged, insensitive to class oppression and the lack of diversity within their movements, vegans and animal advocates typically are entombed in their elitist enclaves. As such, they hardly inspire radicals, progressives, working classes, the poor, people of color, and other oppressed groups to regard them as anything but privileged misanthropes whose moral pieties are irrelevant to immediate survival imperatives.

Those in the welfare and rights camps who seek change through the pre-approved channels of capitalism usually do so from an unshakable conviction that parliamentary or representative democracy is a just and functional system. They embrace the myth that the state is, more often than not, a fair and neutral arbiter of competing interests rather than a subservient tool to corporations, the military, and the power

elite. They thereby legitimate the myths of bourgeois democracy and obscure the determinate role of corporations, lobbyists, vested-interest groups, and money. The mainstream sectors thus proceed without a systemic analysis, holistic vision, and structural critique of global capitalism and supporting systems such as the state, mass media, schools, and military. In the contemporary animal slavery economy, where agriculture and pharmaceutical industries are major economic and political powers, vegans and animal advocates fantasize that one can end speciesism without revolutionizing capitalism itself—as if the corporate-state complex will willingly cease all operations once persuaded their mega-exploitative systems are unethical. Given that capitalism is an irrational *system* that is inherently growth-oriented and exploitative, talk of “green capitalism” or “sustainable development” within this socioeconomic context is sheer folly and the fundamental fallacy of all reformist projects and single-issue politics.

The asocial theoretical vision bears political deficits and yields seductive pseudo-solutions to deep problems. Some of the most incisive writers who grasp the profound importance of the animal standpoint (e.g., Jim Mason and Charles Patterson) still advocate ineffectual moral changes alone, rather than emphasizing the profound institutional and structural transformations necessary to stop global capitalism, the animal holocaust, and planetary breakdown. Of course, spiritual and moral changes are necessary, but to focus on inner enlightenment apart from social oppression is hopelessly naïve, utopian, and diversionary. New-Age veganism and animal spirituality perfectly serve the needs of capitalism by locating the burden of change on individuals rather than on destructive institutions, irrational social imperatives, and ultimately on the power elite waging total war on the planet. The spiritual revolution presumes to obviate or supersede the social revolution and directs people to inner contemplation rather than public confrontation and political transformation.

Lacking a sophisticated social, political, economic, and historical analysis of capitalist societies, and seeking reforms in one sector of society with the crucial purpose of alleviating or abolishing the suffering of animals, much of the animal advocacy movement well-deserves

the Left critique that it is a reformist, single issue movement. Further, its demands—which are potentially radical to the extent that animal liberation threatens an economy and society deeply rooted in animal slavery—are easily contained within a totalizing global system of exploitation, commodification, and domination. The ease with which capitalism can transform the subversive potential of veganism into more fodder for profit-making, consumerism, and political pacification is blatantly obvious with the mass marketing of veganism and the glossy magazines and apolitical discourse of prominent spokespersons for the healthy lifestyle.

As Left libertarian Takis Fotopoulos notes of the reformist tendencies dominating the animal advocacy movement, it “might be viewed as a kind of ‘popular front’ organization that seeks unity around basic values on which people from all political orientations—from apolitical, conservative, and liberal persuasions to radical anarchists—could agree. But . . . this is exactly its fundamental weakness which might make the development of an anti-systemic [i.e., a holistic critique of capitalism and related power structures] consciousness out of a philosophy of ‘rights,’ etc. almost impossible.” Fotopoulos further observes that, “Unless [such a] current develops out of the present broad movement soon, the entire movement could easily end up as a kind of ‘painless’ (for the elites) lobby that could even condemn direct action in the future, so that it could gain some ‘respectability’ among the middle classes.”⁴

Here Fotopoulos correctly emphasizes the ease with which large animal advocacy groups can be co-opted and take on regressive roles in society. But he fails to discriminate among the different aspects of “the entire movement,” to note the presences of a Far Right or fascist element, and to appreciate what the fringe “left radical” elements have in common with his revolutionary politics. On occasions at least, liberationists attack capitalist systems and challenge the myths of bourgeois democracy. They bypass the corrupt gatekeepers of the state to accept responsibility for animals under attack, to take power into their own hands, and set out to abolish exploitative conditions through direct action.

Some animal liberationists have close affinities to the anarchist tradition in ideology, temperament, and organization. Not only anarchist in political outlook, many work in small, decentralized groups and underground cultures, in much the same manner as the ALF. These decentered, anonymous resistance units are akin to anarchist affinity groups in their mutual aid, solidarity, security culture, and consciousness building. Unlike the single-issue focus that dominates the animal advocacy movement, the militant wing of the movement is more likely to advance a total liberation viewpoint—one that emphasizes human, animal, and earth liberation struggles must be interrelated in theory and practice because they stem from similar root causes and have overlapping dynamics. Liberationist subcultures oppose imperialism, fascism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on, all of which they link to and mediate with anti-speciesism, and they militate against the infiltration of Far Right and fascist elements into the animal movement. With varying degrees of sophistication, they are politically aware of global realities and planetary crisis and support all genuine struggles for liberation. Indeed, in many cases, animal liberationists may have the broadest systemic vision of activists across the political spectrum.

Thus, the “animal advocacy movement” is not a monolithic entity, but rather a conflicted force field of opposing tendencies, such as involve statist and non-statist, aboveground and underground, and conservative and radical dimensions. One main problem of Left/progressive critiques is that they reduce a plurality of conflicted approaches and fractious divisions to a homogenized “movement.” They therefore (1) conflate Left-radical and mainstream tendencies, (2) carelessly overlook the radical aspects of the liberationist camp and its many similarities with progressive social movements, and (3) fail to grasp the profound importance of the moral message of animal advocacy *as a whole*.

Clearly, among the plurality of approaches in the animal advocacy movement, those who engage in direct action are closest to the concerns of the Left and progressive politics. To the extent that animal activists grasp the big picture that links human, animal, and

earth liberation struggles as one, they can be viewed as a profound new political force that has *a crucial place in the planetary struggles of the twenty-first century*. In conditions where social movements and NGOs are reformist, institutionalized, collaborationist, or co-opted, animal liberationists are key forces of resistance. They defy corporate power, state domination, and capitalist ideologies; they literally *attack* institutions of domination and exploitation—not just through critiques and denunciations, but rather with bricks, sledge hammers, and Molotov cocktails. Whereas too many left radicals are blustering in cafes, pontificating in seminars, or spewing inscrutable jargon in obscure journals, animal liberationists are *taking action* against the commodification and exploitation of life. Since the 1970s, animal and earth liberationists have been among the most dramatic forces of resistance on a global scale, boldly operating in a post-9/11 epoch where the corporate-state complex and its proto-fascist police-security apparatus have pacified populations already neutralized by media/entertainment spectacles and pacifist ideologies. Animal liberationists and eco-activists thereby merit widespread support and recognition that they play an important role in empowering resistance, even if sabotage tactics are ad hoc measures and hardly substitutes for building mass resistance movements.

Beyond their obliviousness to important affinities that radical cultures share with animal (and earth) liberationists, and their abhorrence of the Far Right “animal rights” imposters, leftists and progressives fail to grasp the more subtle point that *all* aspects of the animal movement have contributed to the deep sea change in human thought and culture. This awareness needs to spread far wider and deeper on a global scale if humanity is to survive the ultimate challenge it currently faces. For over 2,500 years, beginning with ancient Eastern cultures that profoundly shaped the best elements of Western societies from the Greeks to the present, enlightened prophets, visionaries, philosophers, poets, writers, artists, and statesmen have advocated kindness, decency, and even equal treatment to animals, and these teachings have had crucial civilizing influences in a universally barbaric human civilization. The animal protectionist

movement that began in England and the United States nearly two centuries ago, and all compassionate animal advocacy figures and groups since, have furthered this moral progress in various ways (see chapter 6). Similarly, the ancient teachings of vegetarianism and more recent advocacy of veganism are immensely important for the general enlightenment and education of humanity, to improving both moral and physical health, and to building sustainable societies and overcoming a myriad of environmental problems including climate change. Given the profound relation between the human domination of animals and the crisis—social, ethical, and environmental—in the human world and its relation to the natural world, animal and earth activists are in a unique position to articulate the importance of new relations between human and human, human and animal, and human and nature.

Speciesism and the Paleoleft

Moral advance today involves sending human supremacy to the same refuse bin into which society earlier began to discard male supremacy and white supremacy. The gross inconsistency of progressives who champion democracy and equality while supporting a system that enslaves billions of other sentient and intelligent life forms far surpasses the hypocrisy of Americans protesting British tyranny while enslaving millions of Africans. Animal (and earth) liberation requires that people transcend the complacent boundaries of humanism to make a qualitative leap in ethical consideration, thereby moving the moral bar from reason and language to sentience and subjectivity. As the recent confrontation with ecology infinitely deepened and enriched leftist theory and politics, so too can an encounter with veganism and animal liberation.

Animal liberation demands radical transformations in the mindset and practices of human beings as it also entails a fundamental restructuring of all social institutions that define animals as human property, commodities, resources, and objects, with the aim to end animals' slave status and exploitation in all forms. The philosophy of

animal liberation deconstructs the identities and worldviews that portray humans as conquering Lords and Masters of nature, and necessitates radically new ways of relating to animals and the earth. Animal liberation is a frontal assault on the supremacy that human beings have claimed over animals since they began hunting them to extinction tens of thousands of years ago.

Animal rights is not an alien idea to modern societies, but rather builds on the most progressive ethical and political values Westerners have devised in the last two hundred years—those of rights, equality, democracy, autonomy, and nonviolence—as it carries them to their logical conclusions. Whereas humanists argue that rights are “cheapened” when extended to animals, in fact, they are redeemed from an artificial and prejudicial limitation of their meaning and application to those having human linguistic and rational capacities. The next great step in Western moral evolution is to abolish the last acceptable form of discrimination and slavery that subjugates the vast majority of species on this planet to the violent whims of one.

The discriminatory, hierarchical, and domineering ideology of speciesism infects social and environmental movements as much as it poisons mass consciousness. This atavistic ignorance necessarily calls into question the “radical,” “enlightened,” or “progressive” nature of left politics. While championing democracy, equality, justice, rights, respect, and peace for all, the Left/progressive traditions have ignored—often defended—the most severe forms of exploitation and violence on the planet today, as they remain oblivious to the catastrophic consequences of speciesism. Although priding themselves on being critical, rational, moral, just, egalitarian, and defenders of the weak, leftists impale themselves on the hypocrisy of speciesism and dramatize the shallowness of humanist values. Champions of “dialectics,” holistic theorizing, and systemic analysis, they completely miss the most portentous connections of our time—the hideous chains linking animal exploitation to human exploitation and environmental catastrophe. They excoriate exploitation, denounce domination, preach peace, and vie for the vulnerable, while consuming the diseased and dismembered bodies of the most oppressed beings on the

planet. They rail against profit fetishism, growth imperatives, total commodification, exploitation, slavery, and corporate domination, yet the animal products they consume daily are mass-produced for the enrichment and expansion of transnational market systems that further cannibalize the earth's resources. Those with an ecological sensibility prattle on about the "unsustainable" nature of capitalism and decry its ruinous effects on environments and peoples, while remaining oblivious to the fact that agribusiness is the leading cause of environmental destruction today.

The arrogance and incoherence of humanism is obvious when victims of violence and oppression wail that they were "treated like animals," as if exploitation, torture, and murder are perfectly acceptable so long as inflicted on nonhuman animals. The problem with humanism—however extensive, inclusive, and universal the scope of democracy, autonomy, and rights—is that its bigotry toward the millions of other animal species with whom we share this planet, nullifies its liberatory potential and brands it as just another dominant culture that cannot possibly bring peace, justice, and sustainable societies. Just as anarchists saw the Marxist workers' state and Leninist vanguard party as bureaucratic domination under a new name, so animal liberationists might view humanist and populist struggles of any kind as pseudo-revolutions that preach democracy and peace, but practice domination and perpetuate a holocaust for animals.

From the animal standpoint, leftists have been regressive and reactionary forces. In the *Communist Manifesto*, for instance, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels dismissed animal protectionists as mere petit-bourgeois reformers.⁵ They failed to see that the animal welfare movement in countries like the United States was vital to women whose opposition to animal cruelty was inseparable from their struggle against male violence and the exploitation of children. Similarly, in his work, *On the History of Early Christianity*, Engels belittled vegetarians and anti-vivisectionists, with no understanding of the importance of these issues for reducing human cruelty to both human and nonhuman animals, and for moral progress generally.⁶

Establishing the model for generations of leftists down to the present, Marx and Engels developed a naturalistic theory of human evolution inspired by Darwin, but jettisoned Darwin's emphasis that humans are different from animals only in degree and not kind. In works such as *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx posited a sharp dualism between human and nonhuman animals, arguing that only human beings have consciousness, free will, and a complex psychological life and social world. Marx claimed that whereas animals have an immediate and merely instinctual relation to productive activity, human labor is mediated by imagination and intelligence. In Marx's narrative that links social progress to the domination of nature, animals exist merely as natural resources to exploit in the goal to "humanize" and master the physical world.

Of course, Marx and other radicals of his time were products of Western society—from Greco-Roman and stoic cultures, to Christianity and medievalism, to modern science, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. Despite the sharp differences among these eras, the continuities are far more profound. Whether ancient or modern, secular or religious, aristocratic or democratic, the entire trajectory of Western society, with roots in agricultural societies that emerged 10,000 years ago, has been premised on domestication of the wild, speciesism, anthropocentrism, and the subjugation of "barbaric," "savage," and "primitive" cultures—all deemed deficient and "animal-like" in their alleged lack of rationality and sophistication. Advancing these pernicious ideologies to their highest expression, modern European societies viewed white male capitalists as paragons of "civilization" and embarked on the reckless and hubristic project of "dominating" nature.

While there is lively debate over whether or not Marx had an environmental consciousness, there is no question that he internalized a dualistic speciesist paradigm that vitiates the Left and progressive traditions to this day. Leftists have tended to either ignore vegan and animal issues, or deride them in embarrassing displays of ignorance and smug hostility. Left-liberal magazines such as the *Nation*, for example, write scathing critiques of the exploitation of workers toiling

in factory farms and slaughterhouses, without even mentioning the far worse plight of animals intensively confined, mercilessly tortured, and dismembered alive. In bold contrast, Gale Eisnitz's powerful work *Slaughterhouse* documents the exploitation of animals *and* humans alike on the killing floors of slaughterhouses, showing how the sadistic violence workers inflict on animals at the workplace explodes in domestic violence as well.⁷

As symptomatic of the provincialism rampant in left traditions, consider the case of Michael Albert, a noted anarchist theorist and co-founder of *Z Magazine* and *Z Net*. In his interview with an animal rights magazine, Albert confessed:

When I talk about social movements to make the world better, animal rights does not come into my mind. I honestly don't see animal rights in anything like the way I see women's movements, Latino movements, youth movements, and so on... a large-scale discussion of animal rights and ensuing action is probably more than needed... but it just honestly doesn't strike me as being remotely as urgent as preventing war in Iraq or winning a 30-hour work week.⁸

One would not expect a human supremacist like Albert to see animal and human suffering as roughly comparable. But it is hard to fathom privileging the exploitation of workers by ten hours a week over freeing animals from nonstop, intensive confinement that ends only with a horrifying death—a hell worth suffered, of course, so that it can grace the workers' dinner plate. Albert betrays a shocking but typical anarchist insensitivity to the animal holocaust and lacks the holistic vision to grasp the profound connections between animal rights, viable nonhierarchical societies, and flourishing ecosystems.

Anarchists criticize authority, centralization, and hierarchical structures as antithetical to human freedom, and traditionally they have excoriated Marxists and hardline communists for reproducing repressive power dynamics in statist bureaucracies. Despite astute critiques of left authoritarianism, in relation to the animal question, anarchists

were as bigoted, backwards, and hierarchical in their views of animals as other radicals, and they remain so today with the exception of vegan anarchist subcultures advancing a total liberation orientation.

A paragon of anarchist speciesism is the “eco-anarchist” or “social ecologist” writer Murray Bookchin. In the early 1950s, Bookchin published pioneering critiques of industrialized farming, described emerging environmental disasters, and exposed the dangers of an increasingly chemicalized food supply. More generally, Bookchin dissected the delusional nature and disastrous consequences of Western anthropocentrism, such as culminated in the modern project to “dominate” nature. Bookchin recognized, however, that replacing antagonistic paradigms with complimentary relations to nature was impossible to realize in market-dominated societies rooted in profit and growth imperatives antithetical to human freedom and ecological balance alike. Thus, he argued, the ecological crisis is a social crisis, provoked by irrational and destructive social systems, and therefore demands a social solution—namely, abolishing capitalism and hierarchical domination generally, in favor of a federation of decentralized democracies which “remake society” in ways that allow autonomous citizens to shape rational, free, ecological societies.

As clearly as Bookchin saw the social ecology connection, he missed the profound relevance of veganism and animal liberation to a liberatory future. Bookchin condemned the mechanization of agriculture because of its effects on small-scale farming, the land, and human food supply, not because of its horrific impact of animals suffering in systems of intense confinement and ruthless production methods. Describing his concept of an ecological society, Bookchin blithely spoke of killing animals for food, hunting, and other human purposes. He thereby typifies the entire left spectrum, which is unable to escape speciesist social conditioning to grasp that human and nonhuman animals have equal interests in freedom, happiness, and life over captivity, suffering, and death. Like Marx, Bookchin embraced the Cartesian-mechanistic view of animals as dumb creatures devoid of any complex consciousness or social life (see chapter 5). In Bookchin’s terms, animals belong to the non-reflexive world of “first nature,”

along with rocks, trees, and other insensate objects, and he reserved the self-conscious and creative world of “second nature” for humans. For as social evolution phased out of biological evolution, humans alone, he claimed, made the ascent from instinct and mere sensation to self-consciousness, language, and reasoning.⁹

Consequently, Bookchin vehemently rejects the concept of animal “rights,” as he adopts conventional rationalist and social contract views that only beings who can speak, reason, and barter moral obligations can have rights. With the concept of rights arbitrarily precluded, welfarism fills the vacuum. The “enlightenment” of the entire left spectrum never surpasses the moral bankruptcy of welfarism—the obfuscating alibi used by factory farms, slaughterhouses, fur farms, and vivisectors to legitimate torture and mass slaughter under the guise of “humane” treatment. Thus, the Left is at one with mass ideology and industry propaganda, in justifying an accelerating animal holocaust and ecological entropy through a fraudulent moral discourse. The most advanced position the Left can achieve is treating the slaves “kindly,” without condemning the evil of slavery itself.

Like nearly all leftists, Bookchin failed to mediate analysis of the ecological crisis with the exploitation of animals in factory farms. This is a major problem as agribusiness is the primary cause of global warming, the main source of water pollution, and a key contributor to other crises such as rainforest destruction and species extinction.¹⁰ The global meat culture also aggravates inequality and poverty among the world’s peoples, as ranching interests and agribusiness displace peasants and farmers from their land and raze rainforests for cattle grazing. Power, profit, and resources flow from impoverished southern nations to the United States and Europe, industrialized societies plagued by an array of diseases and health care crises due to a heavy consumption of animal protein and fat.

Despite his understanding that scarcity is socially created and not a natural occurrence, Bookchin also occluded the connection between meat consumption and world hunger, specifically, that animal agriculture is a hugely inefficient use of resources. Bookchin’s view of an inexhaustibly “fecund” earth that could feed over ten billion people,

if rationally and democratically managed, proved to be another modernist fantasy discredited in the twenty-first-century world of climate change, depleted resources, and degraded ecosystems—strained further by burgeoning human population growth and Western consumer cultures. Moreover, as the most rapidly modernizing giants, China and India, have begun to switch from a traditional plant-based to Western animal-centered diet, while demanding Western levels of income, consumption, and comfort, the problems of resource scarcity, pollution, and climate change have worsened dramatically. Thus, in this era of real, not artificial, scarcity, intense “resource wars” are erupting throughout the globe.¹¹ Bookchin’s dangerous cornucopian fantasies aside, today’s population of over seven billion people consuming more than two hundred billion land and sea animals every year is completely unsustainable, and no anarchist world federation could resolve this crisis without urging a global shift toward a vegan diet. Hence, in June 2010, the United Nations published a report emphasizing that in the current world, marked by growing populations and escalating meat consumption, the only globally sustainable diet is veganism.¹²

Although since the 1970s, the Left began to seriously address the “nature question,” radicals and progressives have universally failed to engage the “animal question” that lies at the core of key social and ecological crises. Calls for a “re-harmonization” (Bookchin) of society with ecology, and emphases on a “new sensibility” that focus on the environment apart from the millions of animal species which play critical roles in ecological diversity and maintenance are speciesist and tragically inadequate. As with most environmentalists, the overriding concern of the Left is with fisheries, not fish; with forests, not its nonhuman inhabitants; with “resources” for human use, not animals with inherent value. Ecological concerns stem not from a “biocentric” respect for the intrinsic value of all life and the earth, but rather from the Left’s oxymoronic concept of “enlightened anthropocentrism” that reduces animals and the natural world to mere means to human ends and is incapable of advancing a new planetary ethic to inform a truly sustainable mode of life.

In the last two decades, Green parties have emphasized progressive social concerns in conjunction with environmental values. However, Greens have not endorsed animal rights or veganism, and they are as speciesist as leftists and progressives, even if they do not share the same virulent form of humanism. Green parties, mainstream environmental groups like the Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Fund, controversial (but still co-opted and corporatized) organizations such as Greenpeace, and noted environmentalists such as Dave Foreman and Bill McKibben all adopt speciesist positions that support hunting and meat-eating, oblivious to how factory farming and copious global meat consumption contradicts their ecological values. In 2007, Greenpeace called a press conference on the connection between meat production and global warming, emphasizing how methane gas from cattle is a major ozone destroying gas. But instead of advocating veganism, they called for consuming non-ruminant animals such as kangaroos, as they do not produce greenhouse gases and in addition are “pests” that should be eliminated!¹³ It is far easier to “respect nature” through innocuous but relatively meaningless reforms—for example by recycling, eating local and organic meat, or driving hybrid cars—than it is to make the profound conceptual shift and conversion to becoming vegan and committing to being an animal/earth liberation advocate. These philosophies and lifeway are changes that are far more decisive for a sustainable future; they are the most important actions one can take in one’s personal life.

Amidst the violence, racism, war, and social turbulence of the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned a future “worldhouse.” In this cosmopolitan utopia, all peoples around the globe would live in peace and harmony, such that religion fulfills their spiritual needs and capitalism satisfies their material needs. Yet even if this sentiment were realizable within an economic system that breeds violence, war, destitution, extinction, and ecocide, until humanity stops exploiting and killing animals, King’s worldhouse is still a bloody *slaughterhouse*. King’s “dream” for the human species is a *nightmare* for the billions of animals butchered each year for food, clothing, “science,” and other exploitative purposes. Just as “capitalist democracy” is a contradiction

in terms, so a worldhouse built on values of peace, respect, equality, and nonviolence for humans only is a farce. The humanist hallucination will always haunt the social world itself, as it remains plagued by social and environmental problems that stem from animal exploitation and dominator paradigms. Humanist “revolutions” are superficial by definition. Humanist “democracy” is speciesist hypocrisy. Humanism is tribalism writ large—the “Us” of *Homo sapiens* vs. the “Them” of all other animals, a conceptual dualism that underpins the vicious and violent system of *species apartheid*.

In short, the broad spectrum of modern radical and progressive traditions stands in continuity with the entire Western heritage of anthropocentrism, speciesism, hierarchy, violence, domination, power, and instrumentalism. Thus, from the animal standpoint, leftism is far from a liberating philosophy or revolutionary politics; it is, rather, part of the ancient and reactionary thinking that spawned millennia of dominator cultures. *It is Stalinism and Nazism toward animals.*

Talkin' About a (Total) Revolution

Since the fates of all species on this planet are intricately interrelated, the exploitation of animals cannot but have a major impact on the human world—psychologically, socially, physically, and ecologically. When humans hunt animals, they disrupt natural selection and degrade ecosystems necessary for their own lives. When they butcher animals by the tens of billions every year in factory farm systems, they poison the air and water, degrade aquatic ecosystems, squander scarce resources, ravage rainforests, turn grasslands into deserts, and spew greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Intensive confinement of pigs and birds spread deadly viruses that jump to human populations, causing outbreaks of diseases such as Bird Flu (H5N1) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that raise the specter of catastrophic contagion that could kill billions of people. Heavy use of antibiotics (80 percent in the United States are given to animals not people) to promote rapid growth and control disease in agribusiness has weakened the ability of these former “miracle drugs” and

ushered in a post-antibiotic era rife with deadly strains of drug-resistant bacteria. There are crucial links between meat consumption, the displacement of farmers and peoples, and world hunger due to global agribusiness and its insatiable need for land and resources. Animal experimentation not only kills over one hundred million animals annually, it kills thousands of people as well, being driven by huge pharmaceutical companies whose goal is to make profits, not to cure disease. Animal research is inherently unscientific and misleading data is routinely manipulated to secure government approval for marketing drugs ultimately tested on humans. People who are violent to animals tend to turn violence against humans, as dramatically evident in the biographies of serial killers. The connections go far deeper, as speciesism was arguably the first hierarchical system and contributed to the emergence of patriarchy, state power, slavery, racism, militarism, colonialism, genocide, fascism, ableism and domination of all kinds (see chapter 1).

In countless ways, the exploitation of animals rebounds to create crises within the human world itself. The vicious circle of violence and destruction can end only when humans learn to form harmonious and complementary, rather than hierarchical and antagonistic, relations with other animal species and the natural world. Understanding the relationship between human and animal oppression blocks the tired objection used to berate every animal advocate: “But what about human suffering?” This question assumes a zero-sum game whereby helping animals undermines humans (see chapter 6), and completely fails to grasp what Martin Luther King Jr. identified as the “garment of mutual entanglement.” Whether they realize it or not, activists who promote veganism and animal rights are *ipso facto* engaging a vast complex of problems in the social and natural worlds.

Thus, animal liberation is best pursued not through reformist single-issue approaches, misanthropic myopia, or compromises and collaboration with corporations and politicians. It cannot be achieved without connecting speciesism with class domination, global capitalism, state power, and hierarchical rule in all forms. One cannot change violent, exploitative, and destructive dynamics without transforming the

economic, political, and legal institutions that produce and reproduce them. The abolition of speciesism cannot advance without eradicating market systems and their imperatives of growth, commodification, exploitation, and consumption. Corporate destruction of nature and nonhuman animals is financed and controlled by hierarchical social relations, whereby capitalists and power elites commandeer the political, legal, security, and military system in the service of exploiting every available “resource,” be it a worker in a factory, an animal in a cage, or a grassland rich in oil.

Any viable solution to the animal holocaust and to global ecological destruction must promote the democratization of society. Allocations of power and resources must not be dominated by an elite minority who act solely for their own benefit, in complete disregard of the needs of the biocommunity, but rather would be managed collectively by autonomous communities. So long as corporations, banks, politicians, and bureaucrats monopolize economic and political power and decision-making over weak and passive citizens of authoritarian societies, animals and the environment will suffer too, as rational, sane, and peaceful modes of existing are precluded to advance the interests of predatory narcissists and sociopaths.

As has been argued, the human/animal/earth liberation movements have much to learn from one another, and none can achieve their goals apart from the others. Veganism and animal liberation could gain new critical perspectives by engaging radical social discourse and histories of oppression and struggle. Left progressives can help temper the apolitical, ahistorical, elitist, misanthropic, and other problematic ideologies rife throughout the vegan and animal advocacy movements, such as creeping proto-fascism, by advancing awareness about capital logic, systemic power, social oppression, the plight of peoples, and the need for inclusiveness and diversity within social movements. Conversely, in dialogue with vegans and animal activists, those in social and environmental movements could overcome the blatant hypocrisies of only condemning oppressive and anti-ecological ideologies and practices when these are not associated with, or result from, animal exploitation. From the vegan and animal

standpoints, they could gain new insights into the dynamics of hierarchy, domination, and environmental destruction and develop more effective politics and tactics. All parties would benefit through acquiring new perspectives and potentially more effective politics; certainly, all would grow wiser and become stronger in numbers, diversity, and power in alliance with one another and other progressive social movements. Imagine, for instance, the powerful opposition that could be mobilized against agribusiness if vegans, animal activists, social radicals, and environmentalists joined ranks, along with small farmers associations, indigenous peoples, and health care advocates.

It is not understood by the Left or the animal rights/liberation movement, for example, that despite the amorphous political pluralism of animal advocacy, and absurd claims from some extremists on the Far Right to the contrary, the animal rights/liberation movement is fundamentally leftist in origins and values. The concerns for equality, rights, democracy, peace, justice, community, inclusiveness, nonviolence, and autonomy define both human and animal rights movements equally. The animal rights movement drank deep from the well of progressive modernism that also spawned radical social movements, but hardly in a derivative and uncreative way that did not expand these values to their full meaning and potential.

Any analysis of left politics with respect to its relationship to the animal rights and liberation movements would be incomplete without a discussion of ongoing incursions into the animal movement by elements of the political Far Right. Recently, there has been much debate on social media over the attempted infiltration into the animal movement by far-right extremists and their racist and fascist ideologies. Essentially, there currently exist two opposing camps: one which maintains that animal rights is a social justice cause of the Left, and as such, encompasses and embraces humanist concerns, such as issues of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and so forth. The other argues that the cause of animal rights should be strictly single-issue and exist entirely independent of all other movements. Therefore, if, for instance, individuals who are proponents of animal rights also held and espoused bigoted or proto-fascist—or even neo-Nazi—positions,

a minority hold the “big tent” view that they should still be part of the animal movement, as “all that matters is the animals.”

As much as militant direct action must constitute part of animal liberation politics, so, too, must militant anti-fascism. Espousing a cause such as animal rights, which requires a humane and compassionate sensibility, while simultaneously disregarding or dismissing other social justice issues that demand equally of our empathy and ethics, is at best a fundamental contradiction and, at worst, a perversity. Whereas the animal cause does not exist in a social vacuum, neither do other repressed societal entities or victims. Thus, it behooves both the Left and the animal advocacy movement to acknowledge and respect the social needs of all oppressed and marginalized groups, if each hopes to effectively represent its respective constituency in the sociopolitical arena, and if a progressive alliance politics is to be possible. Fortunately, those in the animal movement who uphold the tenets of total liberation were outraged at the attempts by the Far Right to penetrate the animal movement as a whole, and have again mounted a fierce resistance. As a result, they vigorously countered those forces of fascism, despite the latter’s recent surge in overall popularity, and electoral wins in France, that campaigned, in part, on a ticket that decried the horrors of “halal” butchering, a front for its real agenda: anti-immigration and racism.

Attacking the new slave economy as it does, the animal liberation movement is a significant threat to global capital. Animal liberation challenges large sectors of the capitalist economy by assailing corporate agriculture and pharmaceutical giants and their suppliers. Far from being irrelevant to social movements, animal rights can form the basis for a broad coalition of progressive social groups and drive changes that strike at the heart of capitalist exploitation of animals, people, and the earth. It is not a revolutionary force on its own, but it is hardly reducible to a petit-bourgeois parlor game. The animal advocacy movement as a whole, today, is the fruition of twenty-five hundred years of a vast cultural and learning process, spanning Eastern and Western cultures, evolving from venerable ancient times to the postmodern era. The vegan and animal standpoints bear the seeds of

a profound paradigm shift, turning away from dominator cultures, predatory violence, and pathological humanism, toward a new ethic and culture of complementarity, interconnectedness, and reverence for all life. They thereby advance possibilities for harmonizing human society with other animal species, with the biocommunity, and with itself. Despite their often feeble nature, the vegan and animal rights/liberation movements have the potential to advance rights, democratic consciousness, psychological growth, and awareness of biological interconnectedness to higher levels than previously achieved in history.

Animal liberation is by no means a *sufficient* condition for democracy and ecology, but it is for many reasons a *necessary* condition of economic, social, cultural, and psychological change. For it is not enough to democratize power, as the Left demands, if one does nothing but redistribute the authority and capacities to exploit and kill. From the animal and earth standpoints, the slogan “Power to the People!” is frightening, not enlightening; it is oppressive, not liberating. One must change the instrumentalist mindset itself, transform sensibilities that view animals as nothing but resources for human use, provoke profound changes in human identity, and promote respect for, and connectedness to, all life and the earth as a whole. Vast social, political, and economic changes by themselves are inadequate, unless accompanied by equally profound psychological transformations. This involves a *Copernican revolution* in human ethics, identities, values, and worldviews, whereby people realize that *they belong to the earth, and that the earth does not belong to them.*

In a world under relentless attack in every way from nihilistic forces and predatory powers that thrive on domination, exploitation, and violence, and which will kill and destroy until nothing is left, all who are not murderous operatives of this system share a common interest in shutting it down and building a new world altogether. It is, truly, one struggle, one fight. There is a desperate need for more expansive visions and politics on all sides of the human/animal/earth liberation equation. No movement can achieve its own immediate objectives apart from solidarity with other progressive struggles, and

alliance-building processes can begin with open and constructive dialogues and debates. Unfortunately, to date, no significant efforts have been undertaken along these lines; indifference, misunderstanding, and acrimony persist on all sides. We must replace identity politics and single-issue orientations in favor of a far broader, deeper, holistic, and more inclusive concept of total revolution. Rather than a polemic against any one structure of domination, we need a critique of hierarchy as a *systemic phenomenon*. We thereby must reject partial struggles for a broader, deeper, more complex, and more inclusive concept and politics. We must not only see the “entanglement of human/animal oppression,” but also those of human/animal liberation.¹⁴

A truly revolutionary social theory and movement will not just emancipate members of one species, but rather all species and the earth itself. A future revolutionary movement worthy of its name will grasp the ancient conceptual roots of hierarchy and domination, such as emerged in the animal husbandry practices of early agricultural societies. It will incorporate a new ethics (ecology and animal liberation) and politics of nature that overcomes instrumentalism and hierarchical thinking and institutions in every pernicious form possible. It will grasp the incompatibility of capitalism with the most profound values and goals of humanity. It will build on the achievements of democratic, socialist, and anarchist traditions. It will incorporate radical green, feminist, LGBT, and indigenous struggles. It will repudiate proto-fascist ideologies and unequivocally reject alliances or association with the Far Right. It will merge human, animal, and earth liberation in a total liberation struggle against global capitalism and domination in of all kinds.

A radical politics of the twenty-first century must dismantle all asymmetrical power relations and structures of hierarchy and begin the vital process of healing the breach among human beings and between human and nonhuman animals. It must eliminate every vicious form of prejudice and discrimination—not only racism, sexism, fascism, homophobia, and ableism, but also the scientifically false and morally repugnant lies of speciesism and humanism. It must reverse the growing power of the state, mass media, and global corporations in

order to promote decentralization and democratization at all levels of society, and only then can society possibly be reconstituted in harmony with the natural world and other species. Radical politics is impossible without the revitalization of citizenship and the repoliticization of lives, which begins with forms of education, communication, and culture that anger, awaken, inspire, and empower people toward action and change.

Articulating connections among human, animal, and earth liberation movements no doubt will be challenging, but it is a major task that needs to be undertaken from all sides. We may not succeed in this endeavor, or even come close, but the results of such failure promise to be catastrophic.

CHAPTER 5

Minding the Animals: Cognitive Ethology and the Obsolescence of Left Humanism

What does it mean to be “human”? The question, though it has occupied some of the greatest Western minds of philosophy, science, history, and political theory, could not have been answered with any plausibility until recently. For only in the last century or so have we begun to acquire enough knowledge through evolutionary theory, geology, ecology, anthropology, paleontology (the scientific study of prehistoric life), archaeology, and genetics to provide an informed response. At the same time, recent scientific and technological developments have produced radical and vertiginous change. The possibilities of artificial intelligence, robotics, cloning, pharmacology, stem-cell research, and genetic modification pose entirely new challenges for attempts to define “human” in fixed and essentialist, rather than fluid and plastic, terms. Ironically, just as we are beginning to acquire important knowledge of human nature, we have developed the means to begin altering ourselves in dramatic ways, yet as technological animals with malleable natures this itself is an important part of what it means to be human.¹

Despite our deep-rooted animality and long lineage of biological evolution, “humanity” is also a social construct involving the identity

and conception that humans have of themselves as members of *Homo sapiens*. In its arrogant, alienated, and domineering Western form, human identity reflects a host of problematic assumptions, biases, prejudices, and myths derived from religion, philosophy, science, and culture as a whole. The massive, tangled knot of ideologies involved in the construction of our species identity (as opposed to our racial, religious, ethnic, gender, or national identities) needs to be critically unraveled, so that we can develop new values and worldviews and forge sane, ethical, ecological, and sustainable lifeways. To an important degree, the new consciousness requires an ethic of respect for all sentient life—human and nonhuman—and a reconnection to the earth as a whole. The new identities—post-anthropocentric, post-speciesist, and post-humanist—would be not only ethically progressive in their egalitarian, inclusive, and nonviolent outlook, they would also be scientifically valid, by accurately representing the true place of *Homo sapiens* in the intricate biocommunity of this planet.

Profound change has been stirring in areas such as philosophy and religion, but in many key aspects science is paving the way, with constant new discoveries that demand radical rethinking of human identity and carry profound moral, social, political, and ecological implications. In urging systematic conceptual shifts in our views of the natural world and of nonhuman animals, this chapter underscores an irony and problem that has received little if any attention. This concerns the gross failures of the Left to engage one of the most significant intellectual convulsions of the modern era, namely, cognitive ethology: the scientific study of animal intelligence, emotions, behaviors, and social life.

Science has always been important to the Left, as radicals and progressives proudly claimed the mantle of critical inquiry and the Enlightenment, and championed the liberatory possibilities of scientific and technological innovation. From the nineteenth century to the present, leftists embraced empiricism, naturalism, skepticism, and agnosticism or atheism. Inseparably related to their support of critical reason, radical traditions also, of course, embraced the moral and political avant-garde in ethics and politics, namely the bourgeois

ideals of equality, justice, autonomy, and rights, whose true liberatory potential could only be realized, they argued, in a postcapitalist and genuinely democratic society.

This chapter raises various questions concerning human identity politics—the social, political, and environmental implications of how humans view and conduct themselves as species beings in relation to other species and the earth as a whole. While advancing the progressive norms and institutions of modernity in many ways, the leftist tradition is viewed more as a part of the problem than the solution. Leftists, radicals, progressives, liberals, humanists, populists, and so on, uncritically reproduced the pathologies of Western anthropocentrism, speciesism, humanism, and rationalism. En masse, therefore, they have failed to break with the repressive mindsets and institutions underpinning hierarchy, oppression, violence, and the domination of human over human, other animals, and the natural world. Because of their atavistic, unenlightened, pre-scientific, and discriminatory views toward nonhuman animals (such as led them to ignore some of the most profound scientific and moral revolutions of the modern era), leftists cannot regain their former place of pride or pretense to avant-garde thinking. Their claim of progressive vision cannot be realized until they engage the profound issues of veganism, animal rights, and cognitive ethology, and break from dominator cultures at their very roots.

Modernity and Its Discontinuities

As humans continue to explore their evolutionary past and gain a more accurate knowledge of the intelligence of great apes and other animals; as they probe the depths of the cosmos in search of life more advanced than themselves; as they develop increasingly sophisticated computers and forms of artificial intelligence and artificial life (self-reproducing “digital DNA”); as they create transgenic beings and cross species boundaries to exchange their genes with other animals; as they clone life forms and create others virtually from scratch; and as they merge ever more intimately with technology and computers to

construct bionic bodies and become cyborgs, the question inexorably arises: Who and what is *Homo sapiens*?

From the first cosmologies, ancient Greek philosophy, Christian theology, modern science, and the Enlightenment to Marxist humanism and beyond, Western culture has struggled, and failed, to attain an adequate understanding of the human species. From religious attempts to define humans as immortal souls made in the image of God to philosophical efforts to classify us as disembodied minds, thinkers have often approached the question of human nature apart from our bodies, our animal past, and our evolutionary history. Whereas religious and philosophical fictions such as “soul” and “consciousness” vaporize biological realities, deny our animality, and exaggerate human uniqueness in relation to other animal species, disciplines such as sociobiology or behaviorism reduce humans to biologically determined organisms, “selfish genes,” and the like. Both extremes fail to grasp the tensions and mediations that shape the human animal, a being that exists within the tautness of culture/nature, of the long biological and social constitution of *Homo sapiens*. A deep understanding of human nature has been obscured by vanity, arrogance, error, and pomposity, as well as fear and insecurity of being “merely” animal.

Human identity in Western culture has been formed through the potent combination of the agricultural domestication of animals and plants, Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism and speciesism, Greco-Roman rationalism, medieval theology, Renaissance humanism, modern mechanistic science, and Social Darwinism. Whether ancient or modern, religious or secular, philosophical or scientific, these multiple determining influences concur in the belief that humans are wholly unique beings, existing in culture rather than nature, alone in having language and reason, and ontologically divorced from animals and the physical world. Throughout the entire trajectory of “civilization,” in Western cultures above all, humans imagined themselves to be unique, privileged, and advanced forms of life, agents of a cosmic *telos*, the end to which all other beings and things were mere means.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, however, the dominionist, anthropocentric, speciesist, theocratic, and geocentric worldview of Western society suffered a series of powerful intellectual blows that decentered humans from their cosmological throne and self-assigned position of power and privilege. Each conceptual bomb destabilized the medieval cosmological picture—which can be visually depicted as a series of concentric circles—in which God is the center of all things, the earth is the heart of the universe, “Man” is the core of the earth, and the soul or reason is the essence of the human. Over the last five hundred years, this cosmology has been overturned through a series of “discontinuities.” These involve scientific, technological, and ethical revolutions that shatter the illusory privilege, harmony, and coherence that human beings vaingloriously attempted to establish between themselves and the universe. Whenever a rift opens in their narcissistic map of reality, humans are forced to reevaluate the nature of the universe, to rethink their place in it, and to restore philosophical order. Invariably, this process occurs by reestablishing their alleged privilege and uniqueness in a new way. While some push for change amidst ongoing paradigm shifts, others fear the new and cling to dogma and the status quo. Thus, in times of transformation and uncertainty, opposing forces clash and struggle for the power of truth and the truth of power.

As a strong reaction to theism, the hegemony of theology, and the oppressive and hostile stance that the Church took toward scientific and technological advance, humanists championed unleashing the powers of science, technology, and industry. Breaking with fatalism, absolute subservience to God, or passive stoicism, modernists such as Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, and Rene Descartes urged humans to seize command over nature and bend it to our will to advance human life. This Promethean outlook tended to separate culture and nature even further, and deepened the chasm between the human and animal worlds by establishing a false dualism between irrational beasts and “rational man.”

In his book, *The Fourth Discontinuity*, Bruce Mazlish identifies four ruptures in the medieval worldview, brought about by dynamic

changes in the modern world.² The first discontinuity opened with the Copernican revolution in the sixteenth century. In place of the dominant geocentric paradigm that situated the earth at the epicenter of the universe and claimed that the sun revolved around it, Copernicus, and subsequently Galileo in the seventeenth century, argued that the sun occupies the center of the universe and the earth revolves around the sun. Under the spell of the Ptolemy and medieval astronomy, human beings had to confront the fact that their planet is not the physical center of the cosmos. Not only did this reality contradict official church dogma, the spatial decentering entailed a psychological decentering, moving the earth from the center of the picture to the margins. Of course, science has since demonstrated that there is no center to the universe and that its limits are endless. There have been rich speculations, moreover, that alien species exist that are far more intelligent and advanced than humans are; that there may be multiple or “parallel” universes; and that humankind inhabits a “small planet attached to an insignificant star in a backwater galaxy.”³

But rather than a blow to human supremacism, some modern thinkers saw this first decentering or discontinuity as an opportunity for humankind to assert itself even more boldly in the universe. As J. B. Bury writes,

Finding himself in an insignificant island floating in the immensity of space, [“man”] decides that he is at last master of his own destinies; he can fling away the old equipment of final causes, original sin, and the rest; he can reconstruct his own chart and, bound by no cosmic scheme, he need take the universe into account only in so far as he judges it to be his own profit. Or, if he is a philosopher, he may say that, after all, the universe for him is built out of his own sensations, and that by virtue of this relativity “anthropo-centrism” is restored in a new and more effective form.⁴

Thus, one should never underestimate the narcissistic capacity of humans to deny reality and to reassert the delusional belief in their privileged position and special meaning and purpose. Heliocentrism

was part and parcel of a new empirical science that was a crucial catalyst for modern humanism, a veritable *secular religion* in which humanity elevated itself to God-like rule over the earth. The mechanistic theories of Thomas Hobbes and Julien Offray de Le Mettrie, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, were potential counters to religious mythologies, philosophical idealism, and human supremacy. Their heretical ideas rejected Cartesian dualism, stripped away the soul and reduced the human to nothing but a body as machine. Yet religion, science, and philosophy deflected these dangerous ideas and together reasserted dualism and our unique essence as soul or mind, and thus defended a significant challenge to human supremacism while resurrecting the walls between animality and humanity.

Despite the heliocentric theories of Copernicus and Galileo and the emergence of a secular scientific culture, Western humanity nevertheless could still feel privileged and superior in its alleged radical uniqueness and growing delusions of mastering nature. A more powerful blow to their cosmic narcissism arrived with the second discontinuity humans had to confront, when Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859. This earth-shaking work dealt a fatal blow to the Platonic metaphysics informing Western thought, which denied the reality of change and sought Truth in a transcendental and timeless realm of Ideas or Forms. During the nineteenth century, numerous thinkers explored the notion that nature changes and evolves toward greater diversity and complexity. It was not until Darwin's insight into natural selection as a key mechanism of biological change that Platonism finally retreated and humans were forced to confront their own animality.

With the help of emerging geological science, which demonstrated that the earth was billions not thousands of years old, Darwin demolished a litany of propositions taught by mainstream interpretations of the Old and New Testaments. These included traditional religious beliefs, such as: God made humans in his image; God put animals on the earth for human benefit; God created the animals after he created humans; and each act of creation was unique. Yet Darwin showed,

and science subsequently has confirmed, a set of counterpropositions: one can explain the universe without positing God, there is no inherent purpose in the universe, animals lived for billions of years before humans, and all life evolves in a continuum according to the same mechanisms of change.

Over a century a half after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, however, much of humanity still cannot accept the facts of evolution and the animalic origins of human life. Moreover, as many scientists had strong psychological attachments to speciesism, along with powerful economic and career investments in the burgeoning vivisection and pharmaceutical industries, they either ignored Darwin's emphasis on the emotional, psychological, and social continuities between human and nonhuman animals, or they grotesquely misused and distorted Darwin's concepts to promote elitist agendas. Conservative thinkers in the social and natural sciences along with sundry elitists, reactionaries, and capitalist ideologues transformed "Darwinism," a scientific theory of biological evolution, into "Social Darwinism," a political ideology justifying class domination and hierarchical rule.

This bastardization of Darwin's work applied biological concepts such as struggle, competition, and "survival of the fittest" (a phrase coined by Herbert Spencer not Darwin), to social relationships in ways that conflated key differences between the biological and social worlds; that erased the role of cooperation in nature; and that naturalized capitalism, class domination, ruthless egoism, and insatiable greed. Projecting capitalist values into nature, Social Darwinists portrayed social life as a brutal struggle for survival in which only the "fit" (capitalists and social elites) survive while the "weak" (workers and other oppressed groups) languish and die, unable to "compete." Social Darwinism and the "might is right" ideology bolstered not only class domination of human over human, but also speciesist domination of humans over other animals.

Thus, rather than interpreting Darwin's theory in a way that undermines speciesism and anthropocentrism by underscoring the unity and interconnectedness of all life and natural processes, various

ideologues appropriated Darwin for reactionary purposes. They thereby reinforced conditions of alienation, division, exploitation, and violent domination in human relations to one another, to other animals, and to the natural world. Darwinism, therefore, was not unambiguously progressive; rather, it was put to reactionary uses and cut both ways. Hence, a subversive discontinuity that should have revolutionized human thought and existence was effectively countered, co-opted, and used to buttress antiquated ideologies and a destructive status quo.

While still grappling with the dangerous provocation of Darwin's research on evolution and cognitive ethology (see below), Western culture had to confront the subversive implications of a third discontinuity launched by Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century and advanced by Sigmund Freud into the twentieth century. Against the Christian/Cartesian view of the body as an ephemeral shell for the immortal soul and the self as governed by a rational essence, Nietzsche and Freud demonstrated that reason and conscious thought are products of the body. They are epiphenomena of the subterranean, unconscious realm of existence governed by primordial instincts, desires, drives, and the sexual and violent urges of the Id. Inverting the Western view of the self, these iconoclasts viewed *Homo sapiens* as a desiring, not a rational, creature; as unable to master its internal world, let alone external realities; and as animalic through and through and therefore, not the radically unique being humans have fantasized themselves to be since the dawn of symbolic culture and the invention of writing.

But despite the power of these provocations, there was, as with Darwin, little problem for reactionary ideologues to suppress, falsify, and adulterate these subversive philosophies in order to make them serve, not undermine, dominator societies. Thus, Nietzsche's complex concepts of the will to power and "higher types" were appropriated by Nazis to justify anti-Semitism, Aryan domination, and genocide. Freud's theory of the unconscious was ironically fashioned into a new science, as psychotherapy generally became a tool of a conformist "therapeutic culture" that made individuals, not repressive social

institutions, responsible for their alienation and unhappiness. The job of psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists was less to rehabilitate humans into happy and fulfilled human beings than to readjust and reintegrate malcontents into the capitalist machine, working hand-in-hand with pharmaceutical industries in order to dull awareness and produce “happy robots.” Dismissing both Nietzsche and Freud as reactionary thinkers (and to be sure, each was politically problematic in various ways), leftists did not trouble themselves with the radical elements of their critiques, such as that which called into question the speciesist and rationalist fallacies informing the archaic model of left humanism and theory of human nature.

Finally, Mazlish notes, a fourth discontinuity surfaced during the mid-twentieth century, following the rapid development of computer technologies and artificial intelligence. After being forced to confront their separation from the cosmos, their long biological history and animal origins, and the primacy of the unconscious over the conscious mind, humans had to reconsider their relation to machines and the ancient dualism of determinism vs. free will. Just as pious believers in God, the soul, and immortality were, and are, repelled by the thought of their animal nature and origins, so humans generally loathe being likened to machines that in contrast to them are devoid of mind, intelligence, and free will.

Yet, as the artificial intelligence of computers grows ever-more sophisticated and continues to surpass the capacities of human minds in numerous ways, people are forced to question yet another alleged ontological divide, the one separating humans from machines. Even machines are no longer mechanisms as traditionally described, as they increasingly approximate the biological operations of the brain through neural nets, parallel processing, evolutionary hardware, and the like. Moreover, when the self-ascribed “essence” of the human is stripped away, and human beings begin to merge intimately with technology, fusing flesh with steel and silicon chips, human identity comes into question in disturbing ways.

In contrast to technophobics, who responded with anxiety to the breathtaking pace at which computers were becoming faster,

smaller, more ubiquitous, and increasingly sophisticated—able to self-organize, mimic human thinking processes, and beat Russian chess masters—a bold cadre of technophiles, visionaries, futurists, and “transhumanists” embraced this revolution. They declared the weakness and inferiority of the human carbon-based life form and championed the merging of biology with technology as the next stage in evolution. Some argued, for instance, that merging with machines would dramatically increase human intelligence, happiness, and longevity, thus in effect creating a new post-human cyborg species far superior to the feeble evolutionary product known as *Homo sapiens*. Others, articulating visions of Christian reincarnation and neo-Cartesian views of consciousness as the human essence, desire to abandon their bodies and to upload their consciousness into a computer. According to radical technophiles, the day is fast approaching when humans will create “spiritual machines” or “mind children” that advance evolution by quantum leaps.⁵

The Human Chimpanzee

Thus, since the opening of modernity five centuries ago, humans were compelled to engage, if only to deflect, at least four major discontinuities that problematized their alleged radical uniqueness and special status in the universe. In each case, “rational man” had to rethink human identity—his *species* identity common to all other humans, or rather, to all who counted as “human,” such as white Western males—which was defined in opposition to nonhuman animals. In quick succession, reflexive members of *Homo sapiens* had to overcome scientific and philosophical errors, false dichotomies, cosmic narcissism, an exaggerated sense of uniqueness, and illusions of separation from the natural and animal worlds. Those possessing the virtue (extolled by Nietzsche) of “intellectual honesty” digested the nauseating knowledge of the cosmic insignificance of humanity masked by a vast carapace of lies, while coming to grips with human contingency and our humble evolutionary origins; this led to philosophies such as existentialism, anti-speciesism, and biocentrism.

Yet, as we have seen, with each discontinuity and tear in the carefully woven fabric of cosmic delusion, there is great struggle and turmoil, leading to *a dialectic of decentering and recentering* the human position in the universe. When faced with their contingency, insignificance, and limitations that challenge human supremacy and the power of social elites, reactionaries battled to reinterpret, distort, and domesticate any subversive ideologies; the full weight of intellectual revolutions, scientific discoveries, technological changes, and moral advance, however, pressured the infantile narcissism of humankind. Increasingly, more accurate knowledge and plausible truths began to nullify the “utility of the lie[s]” (Nietzsche) that humans elaborately construct for purposes of cosmic comfort, psychological peace, arrogant complacency, and for justifying and protecting the privileges and powers of the few over the many—whether these violent hierarchical systems were aristocratic, monarchical, capitalist, or democratic-humanist in nature.

While Mazlish ably describes four major challenges to human identity from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century, there are many additional developments in the decentering process and human identity formation that are important to highlight and thematize, only a few of which are touched on here. Some of the most important conceptual revolutions from the mid-nineteenth century to the present relate to a deepening understanding of other animals and our own animality. The huge gains in knowledge relating to our nature and evolutionary past came from evolutionary theory, ecology, anthropology, paleoanthropology, archaeology, genetics, and cognitive ethology. After the blows to anthropocentric and speciesist identities inflicted by Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, computer technologies, transhumanists, and others figures and sources, Richard Ryder—the English philosopher who coined the term “speciesism”—believes that the moral revolution of animal rights (a philosophy that in many ways is supported by, and is compatible with, recent scientific discoveries) is yet another crucial discontinuity with implications that we as a species must embrace. “We must now continue this [decentering] process,” Ryder argues, “by discarding speciesism along with

our other delusions of grandeur, and accept our natural place in the universe.”⁶

The fact is that only since 1859 has humanity begun to understand the forces of life and their origins and nature at all. Mythology, religion, philosophy, and science all contributed to constructing myths, distortions, and falsehoods that obscured the animal roots and real nature of *Homo sapiens* and the long process during which social evolution phased out of biological evolution. Until the late 1800s, humans had virtually no conception of our closest biological relatives, the great apes (chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans). Accounts from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries describe gorillas as dangerous degenerates, beast-men, primitive races incapable of speech, or monsters. Growing acquaintance with the physiology and behaviors of primates, however, quickly undermined the speciesist belief in human uniqueness as it became increasingly obvious that we shared common evolutionary roots.

“Ecology” did not emerge as an official science until 1866, when German Darwinist Ernst Haeckel coined the term. As the study of organisms in their relation to one another and to their natural environment, ecology is an inherently holistic outlook that contextualizes the origins and development of plant and animal species within vast, intricate, and dynamically changing natural conditions. Yet, whereas many humans assume they live in rarified technological castles that hover above the coarse earth, ecology showed that humans are part of a planetary web of intricate interrelationships and interdependencies (which they happen to be radically disrupting). A humbling blow to our arrogant outlook, ecology reveals that humans—who conceive of themselves as the most autonomous and exalted forms of life—are entirely dependent upon the natural world, biodiversity, and in particular, the crucial role nonhuman animals play in maintaining and enriching nature. Indeed, earthworms, dung beetles, butterflies, and bees are far more important to the integrity and diversity of nature than humans are—the latter being the only species one could remove from earth ecosystems with positive effect. From an ecological perspective, humans are an overpopulated, parasitic swarm, living in total

ignorance of natural “laws” they foolishly think they can master, but in truth must conform to and harmonize with if they intend to survive.

Archaeology dates back only to the late 1800s, and did not become a systematic science until after World War II. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was believed that a large brain was the initial step and driving force of human evolution. This falsehood was encouraged with the hoax of the Piltdown man, a fabricated fossil skull of an alleged early human that for forty years helped to perpetuate gross scientific errors. These falsehoods persisted until 1924, when Raymond Dart discovered the “Taung child” fossil in South Africa and identified it as a new species, *Australopithecus africanus*, which existed 2.5 million years ago. In addition to assuming that humans evolved in Europe or Asia rather than Africa, anthropologists and others believed that they emerged relatively recently and that large brains (the human essence, after all) developed before bipedalism. In 1974, these assumptions were decisively refuted, when Donald Johanson discovered the remains of “Lucy,” an *Australopithecus afarensis* species who existed 3.2 million years ago.⁷ The ancestral human timeline was thereby pushed back further and Lucy and other fossil discoveries confirmed beyond doubt that our australopithecine ancestors walked upright before developing large brains, a process that would take millions of years of evolution. Lucy and other australopithecines were ape-like in their relatively small brain mass, and human-like in their morphology and upright mobility, making bipedalism not cognition or language the earliest and most defining characteristic of *Homo sapiens*.

Not until 1960, when Jane Goodall made her historic journey to Gombe National Park in Tanzania, Africa, did human beings possess even a rudimentary understanding of the great apes, specifically the chimpanzee. Using her pioneering method of “habituation,” of patient observation that invited eventual acceptance or ignoring her presence, Goodall discovered that infanticide, warfare, and murder were not behaviors unique solely to humans, but existed among chimpanzees as well. Bonobos, in contrast, live in matriarchal and peaceful societies dominated by sex, not war. Whereas thinkers such as James Burnett and Darwin recognized that humans have significant

physical and behavioral similarities with primates, the facts of our biological relationships were not established definitively until 1975, when molecular genetics determined that chimpanzees and humans are 95–99 percent alike in their DNA. This means that chimpanzees are our closest biological cousins and are nearer to humans than they are to orangutans and gorillas. This also helps to explain Goodall's findings, for along with chimpanzees, humans are the most violent and aggressive species on the planet.⁸

In 2002, The Human Genome Project corroborated these genetic findings, and they were confirmed again in 2003, when scientists at Wayne State University argued that, based on additional evidence, chimpanzees should be reclassified as *Homo troglodytes*.⁹ This change would make them full-fledged members of our genus, *Homo*, which would be revised to currently include *Homo (Homo) sapiens*, or humans; *Homo (Pan) troglodytes*, or common chimpanzees; and *Homo (Pan) paniscus*, or bonobos. On this approach, Jared Diamond is perfectly correct in removing humans from their exclusive place in the *Homo* genus to identify them instead as the “third chimpanzee.”¹⁰ According to current genetic research, humans and chimpanzees shared a common ancestor 5–8 million years ago, before branching off into two separate lineages. But whereas some taxonomists situate chimpanzees as members of the *Homo* genus, it seems more logical to move humans into the chimpanzee Genus, *Pan*.

The Revolution of Cognitive Ethology

Beginning in the seventeenth century, modern science constructed a mechanistic paradigm that depicted animals as automata or machines. From Descartes to sociobiology and behaviorism in the present, the modern tradition cast animals in the role of brutes or machines devoid of emotional, cognitive, and social complexity. Unless they sought ridicule and academic failure, students trained in the mechanistic paradigm learned to avoid reference to the subjective life of animals. Under the spell of behaviorism, scientists redescribe the love a chimpanzee feels for his or her mother as “attachment formation”;

elephants are not roused to anger, but rather display an “aggression exhibition”; and problem solving by birds manifests not intelligence, but only a “conditioned reflex.”

Scientific journals refused to publish papers that alluded to animal thoughts or emotions, as if they were human-like (or, rather, we were animal-like). To apply “human” concepts such as love or sadness to animals is to commit one of the most egregious mistakes in science, namely the fallacy of “anthropomorphism.” By using incommensurable categories appropriate to the ontological divide between animals and humans, scientists prohibit describing animal existence in anything but mechanistic terms and so by default reduce them to machines and beg the question of their true nature.

Clearly, we do not want to project onto animals attributes that they do not have (as a grinning chimpanzee is not happy but nervous); however, there is a difference between denying all complexity to animals and misinterpreting their emotions or behaviors, and working to improve our understanding. Moreover, the evolutionary continuum from nonhuman to human animal entails that humans have inherited much from their primate ancestors and thus we do share many similar thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with other animals; in fact, much of our own experience is *derived* from animals (see below). So we can distinguish between crude anthropomorphism and what Donald Griffin calls “critical anthropomorphism,” which is an interpretive process that does not erect a wall of understanding but rather seeks an empathetic and reflexive opening into similar and shared worlds and seeks to verify its findings scientifically. Behaviorism and the scientific fetish of “objective detachment,” in contrast, has been a principle obstacle to understanding other animals and guarantees that we will languish in error so long as such barriers and false assumptions stand.

Yet, having misled us for so long about animals, science has initiated a revolution in our understanding of animal emotions, minds, behaviors, and social lives. As evident in a spate of recent books and the new discipline of “cognitive ethology” that studies nonhuman animals, science finally is beginning to understand the true nature and complexity of other animal species, elevating our respect for their

complexity while rightly devastating our deluded and vain species identity.¹¹ Without question, the early pioneer of cognitive ethology was Charles Darwin, and here his most important contribution was not *The Origin of Species*, but rather his later works, *The Descent of Man* (1871), and *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). As stated, Darwin established the animal roots of humanity, he described significant physiological and behavioral similarities between nonhuman and human animals, and he argued that humans differed from other animals such as apes “in degree, not kind.” Darwin thereby underscored the continuity of animal evolution, rather than positing an ontological chasm incompatible with the basic principles of biological change and development.

In the late 1970s, inspired by Darwin’s innovative lead but drawing on a growing body of knowledge unavailable in Darwin’s day, Donald Griffin established cognitive ethology as a new and respected science.¹² Griffin’s work inspired a new generation of writers and helped spawn a proliferation of articles, books, websites, and documentaries that revolutionized the way many scientists and laypersons alike viewed animals. Of course reactionaries defended mechanism, dualism, behaviorism, and speciesism; however, these were ad hoc and weak responses to an emerging new paradigm and scientific revolution that refuted a host of fallacious theories and established its new approach and findings on solid ground.

On the basis of biological science and genetics, field research and experimental testing, and careful observation and logical reasoning, we know that the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social worlds of animals are more remarkable and complex than we could have imagined. Virtually every emotion that humans have—including fear, stress, loneliness, sorrow, jealousy, embarrassment, pride, empathy, love, and joy—animals have as well. We know, for instance, that Michael the gorilla loved the music of Luciano Pavarotti, just as Flint the chimp died of grief upon the death of his mother, Flo. It is a well-known fact that elephants mourn their dead, enact burial rituals, and seemingly are aware of the significance of death. Animals know joy as well as sorrow, and can be playful as well as serious. They also possess

an aesthetic sense, and sense of humor, as evident in the behavior of birds who delight in dancing and chimpanzees who love to bang drums, throw balls, and paint.¹³

Complex skills and forms of intelligence run broad and deep throughout the world of animals. Birds have acute memories and impeccable spatial mapping skills, and crows and other bird species use tools and exhibit problem-solving skills as well. Many animals have abilities to count and to recognize patterns and visual relationships and analogies—often better than children and even college undergraduates. There is strong evidence that “higher” mammals such as whales, dolphins, gorillas, and chimpanzees have significant rational and linguistic abilities. Koko the gorilla commanded a sign vocabulary of 1000 words, such as she displayed on her many Internet chats. Alex the African Grey parrot could name over a hundred different objects, seven colors, and five shapes, while able to count objects up to six and speak in meaningful sentences.¹⁴ Chimpanzees have a repertoire of at least thirty sounds that have express distinct meaning. Given the tools of American Sign Language, great apes convey thoughts and feelings to human beings and one another. Using computer keyboards with lexigram symbols, they correctly answer questions that demand reasoning skills. The fact that chimpanzees who stare at themselves in mirrors and remove dots placed on their foreheads suggests they have a sense of self-identity. Dolphins communicate their individuality to each other through signature whistles and whales have a repertoire of over six hundred different social sounds. Thousands of experiments in the field and laboratory have demonstrated that animals such as prairie dogs, squirrels, and chickens use distinct sounds to convey information to one another, such as to warn of a predator in the vicinity.

Acknowledging only one model of intelligence and communication, that of *Homo sapiens*, scientists have argued that since animals do not speak or reason like we do, they do not have minds at all—a monumental non sequitur. In expecting animals to satisfy human criteria of rationality and language, scientists have succumbed to the very anthropomorphic fallacy they condemn. It is not that many animal

species cannot think, reason, symbolize, and communicate in sophisticated ways, but that we “wise” beings could not overcome dogmatic assumptions and exert enough intelligence to recognize and interpret other kinds of minds and communication. Intelligence and thought processes can assume many forms, not all of which follow textbook-defined rules of inductive and deductive reasoning; similarly, communication can transpire through sounds, expressions, gestures, and behaviors, and meaning is not transmitted only by following the conventions of human syntax, although monkeys seem to understand basic rules of grammar.¹⁵

Beyond the abilities that many animals have in counting, memory, spatial mapping, analogical reasoning, problem solving, and communication, they also evince a clear sense of morality, justice, and fair play.¹⁶ Great apes, elephants, wolves, whales, dolphins, hyenas, rats, and mice display a wide range of moral behavior. Despite the stereotype of nature “red in tooth and claw,” animals are not brutal, violent, killing machines built only to survive and reproduce, while locked into life-or-death struggle with competitors. Rather, they, like humans, have peaceful, empathetic, compassionate, nurturing, and altruistic aspects to their nature, as evident in the ways animals care for family or their own kind, express feelings of love and grief, and nurture or sacrifice for individuals of other species.

The moving nature of this compassion and altruism in animals invites comparison with the way humans behaved in the infamous experiment of Stanley Milgram in which many individuals, obeying the order of an authority figure, gave (simulated) lethal levels of electric shock to actors feigning intense pain. Empathetic and altruistic actions suggest that animals should be viewed as moral agents who often act with awareness, deliberation, care, and concern toward one another. The “gladiator view of life” was never one propounded by Darwin, who rather emphasized the evolutionary importance of cooperation as much as competition, as did Kropotkin’s important book *Ethics: Origin and Development*.¹⁷

Far from being automatons governed by rigid biological imperatives and crude instincts, ethologists have shown that animals such as

chimpanzees, monkeys, and dolphins form genuine *cultures*, whereby knowledge and behaviors are transmitted by teaching and learning rather than acquired through genetic inheritance.¹⁸ As demonstrated by Jane Goodall, Frans de Waal, and others, chimpanzee societies are not instinct-driven, but rather *rule-governed*.¹⁹ Chimpanzees live in hierarchical societies dominated by an alpha male and there are known rules of behavior and punishments for violating expected norms (such as demand cunning and secrecy when a subordinate male sneaks sex with the female of the alpha male). They think and act in terms of conventions, hierarchy, rules, consequences, and mutualism. The intelligence of primates is not innate and fixed, but rather, like ours, an important part is socially constructed in the context of culture and technological innovation.²⁰

Aristotle was flat wrong in his attempt to define human uniqueness in terms of being political animals, which we can take to mean not only that humans are social creatures but also organize themselves in societies governed literally by power relations and political struggle. For chimpanzees are social and political animals in a similar sense, living in rule-governed, power-oriented communities that are Machiavellian in their emphasis on dominance and subordination, imposing and violating rules, and chronic struggles for alpha male power.²¹ Similarly, Kropotkin could not have been more misguided in his attempt to define human uniqueness in terms of having the agency and will to resist repression and to desire freedom. Resistance to human oppressors is rampant in a world that holds animals in captivity and exploits, tortures, and kills them. The most dramatic examples of animal rebellion involve elephants and orca whales killing their trainers, but animal resistance to human oppressors occurs constantly and they rebel against abusers and fight for freedom just as humans do.²²

Crumbling Walls and Conceptual Claustrophobia

The old paradigms have been eclipsed, proven to be utterly false and bankrupt, and many quarters of science and philosophy have

abandoned Cartesian mechanism, behaviorism, and speciesist dualism. The belief that animals are primitive only betrays the archaic limitations of the human mind and its inability to grasp the otherness of animal life and behavior. We are recognizing distortions and fallacies on each side of the ontological chasm that society dug between human and nonhuman animals, and ethology has broken down the thick walls of separation. Humans overestimate their own rationality as they underestimate the rationality of animals. Whereas humans have reduced animals to biology and thus denied animals culture, so too, focusing only on the voluntarist facets of their own behavior, they have failed to grasp the biological dimensions of human culture.

Much light can be shed on human behavior once we renounce cosmic narcissism and abandon the dualist and speciesist mindsets that block our understanding of other animals and ourselves and alienate us from other species. With as much arrogance as ignorance, we define ourselves as radically unique beings that are not the product of 4.6 billion years of evolutionary history on planet earth. Too often, humans do not see themselves as primates who began to walk upright millions of years ago, but rather as beings who emerged *in vacuo* and *ab novo*, building an empire on earth to fulfill a special divine, cosmic, or evolutionary purpose.

The carefully policed boundaries between human animal and nonhuman animal keep shrinking as it becomes increasingly obvious that *Homo sapiens* is not a singular being, a beacon of reason standing *apart from* a dark and primitive animal world, but rather a *part of* a vast, differentiated evolutionary continuum. The rich science of cognitive ethology supports Darwin's theory that humans differ from animals in degree, not kind, such that human forms of thinking, self-awareness, intentionality, communication, language, and social interaction are products of evolution that stem from our primate ancestors and are shared by numerous other species to varying degrees. "Human intelligence," note Dickie and Roth, "may be best likened to an upgrade of the cognitive capacities of nonhuman primates rather than an exceptionally advanced form of cognition."²³ The false dualisms and synthetic walls separating humans and other

sentient species are tumbling down, and we cannot put the Cartesian figure of Humpty Dumpty back again.

Only humans, we thought, experience a deep and broad range of emotions, such as love, joy, grief, jealousy, and embarrassment. Now we acknowledge that science has demonstrated these same feelings among many animal species. Mammals possess a limbic system and neocortex, the functions that enable human beings to experience emotions and have abstract thoughts. All mammals possess oxytocin, a hormone involved in the experience of pleasure during sex and that plays a key role in mother-infant bonding. Female bonobos and chimpanzees have been seen to put things on their heads and “primp” themselves in the mirror, suggesting that even fashion and vanity are not unique to humans. Humans alone, we have been told repeatedly, grieve over and bury their dead in some type of ritualized ceremony, yet grief and mourning emotions exist in other animals such as elephants, who enact burial rites for their dead.

For millennia, it was thought that only humans—*Homo faber*—make and use tools, until recent discoveries that chimpanzees, birds, and other species do also (for instance, chimpanzees use sticks to extract termites from their mounds, apply stones to crack open palm nuts, and craft spears to kill bush babies). The dogma that only humans—*Homo loquens*—have complex forms of language and systems of communication prevailed until it became clear that chimpanzees, dolphins, whales, prairie dogs, and other animals do, as well. To disparage these as pseudo-languages because they are not human languages and allegedly have no sense of syntax or grammatical rules is question begging, and provincial in its definition of language and communication. Washoe, Koko, Kanzi, and other primates fluent in American Sign Language or other languages demonstrate that symbolic communication is not unique to human animals.²⁴

With traits allegedly unique to humans running out, philosophers and scientists claimed that only humans have minds complex enough to allow a sense of *self-consciousness* or *self-identity*, but, alas, chimpanzees and other animals demonstrated significant degrees of self-consciousness too. Parallel to Levi-Strauss’ defense of the “savage”

mind, which is no better or worse than the “civilized” mind, but rather a different incarnation of the same human capacity for thought and culture, so Marc Hauser argues that all animal brains have to cope with various problems. Hence, each species has its own special “mental toolkits” for processing information about objects, number, and space, and so on.²⁵ Variations lead to differences among species, with *Homo sapiens* evolving toward an unprecedented complexity in many ways. Still, Hauser concludes, “We share the planet with thinking animals... Although the human mind leaves a characteristically different imprint on the planet, we are certainly not alone in this process.”²⁶ Similarly, many claimed that only humans live in cultures, in which behaviors and norms are transmitted by learning rather than inheritance. Bookchin’s crude bifurcation between first and second nature (see chapter 4) has been refuted by science itself, which shows gradations, not a gulf, between nonhuman and human animal cultures. Like humans, chimpanzees, bonobos, and other species also live within complex societies, whereby they formulate a technics and a moral outlook, and transmit knowledge through communication, teaching, and learning.

Rethinking Human “Uniqueness”

The much-vaunted claim that humans are “unique” is uninformative and tautological, for, by definition, *every* species is unique. The hawk, the rattlesnake, the silverback Gorilla, the African elephant, and the ocelot are all different from one another and from us. So, humans are not even unique in being unique, or rather, in being radically unique, as certainly humans are distinct animals in many ways, as again every species is novel and different from others.

The rationalist view of human beings as information processors whose choices and actions reflect preferences governed purely by reason and logic is as false as the Cartesian and behaviorist views of animals as creatures devoid of intelligence and complex behaviors. Certainly, no other species has written sonnets or sonatas, solved algebraic equations, or meditated on the structure of the universe. There

is no comparison between the counting skills of a bird and the mathematics of Einstein, between the rock used by a chimpanzee to crush a nut and the spaceships devised by rocket scientists.

Yet humans are not unique in their possession of a neocortex; of complex emotions like love, loneliness, empathy, and shame; of sophisticated languages, behaviors, and communities; of aesthetic and moral sensibilities; or of self-awareness. Indeed, not only do nonhuman animals have culture, art, technology, morality, and so on, they invented them (or were active agents of their development) within their own social contexts, environmental conditions, and evolutionary dynamics that predate the emergence of humans and their ancestors. Humans only enjoy the capacities they do because of their evolutionary heritage and biological roots in animality. Humans, however, are ingrates who withhold due credit to their primate and animal ancestors for “human” traits that often are elaborations of an evolutionary heritage not their own cultural innovations. In a perverse irony that is characteristic of a predatory and delusional species, humans then deny these traits to nonhuman animals in order to legitimate their violent subjugation of nonhuman animals, just as they do to groups of *Homo sapiens* that they deem subhuman.

Chimpanzee societies are a likely source of human morality in their creation of a stable family life community (even if hierarchical), implicit moral rules defining expectations and obligations, and looking after one another, for example, by mutual grooming and having concern for the general community. “Human morality,” de Waal says, “can be looked at as [primate] community concern made explicit.”²⁷ Humans do not acquire any traits whatsoever—whether emotions, brains, social and familial norms, or principles of justice—*ex nihilo*, but rather through elaborating on, often dramatically changing, the results of evolutionary development and dynamics of nonhuman animal communities.

Let us never forget that nonhuman animals have distinct and amazing traits that humans lack and the alleged rational nature of humans hardly justifies speciesist exploitation and the ongoing animal holocaust. Humans cannot fly like hawks, echolocate like bats, nor

communicate with their feet like elephants by sending vibrations through the ground. They lack the grace of the gazelle, the strength of the chimpanzee, and the speed of the cheetah. Just as animals are often faster, stronger, and more agile and graceful than humans, so, in some ways, they are smarter and morally superior. African Gray parrots, pigeons, and chimpanzees can outperform children and adults alike in capacities such as memory and analogical reasoning, and macaques can exhibit more compassion toward their fellow kind than humans show one another.²⁸ Further, one might consider animals morally superior in the sense that they often exhibit more kindness, compassion, and altruism than humans, despite the myth of nature being “red in tooth and claw.” Animals prey on, eat, and kill one another, but, with rare exceptions such as chimpanzees—not coincidentally our closest biological relatives—they are not pathologically obsessed with control, power, hierarchies, social status, violence, warfare, and mass killing.

Human beings are stereoscopic, bipedal, big-brained, language-using, technologically and linguistically sophisticated animals, but they are morally stunted, hierarchical, predatory, violent, and barbaric primates as well. As a species, they are unique in traits such as neotany (undergoing an unusually prolonged period of childhood and deferral of maturity); their ruthless proclivity toward violence, aggression, and war; and the degree to which they possess many qualities they deny other animals have in kind. They are land mammals, descendants of apes, and the sole heir of the *Homo* Genus. Humans today, therefore, are descendants of the “winners” of an evolutionary competition in which all other *Homo* species were the “losers,” and countless nonhuman animal species were bludgeoned into extinction along the path of our fabled “ascent” to the “top of the food chain.”

The definition of humanity typically extols our cultural brilliance as manifest through millennia of mythology, religion, philosophy, art, music, literature, dance, architecture, and science. The praise of humanity’s multifaceted achievements is well deserved, but this stunning radiance also has a macabre and dark side that is an inseparable part of human history and nature. This underbelly of “civilization” is

barbarism—the unbroken timeline involving hierarchy, domination, colonization, violence, war, genocide, extinctions, and environmental ruination. The species that decorated the caves of Lascaux, wrote *The Bhagavad Gita*, erected the Parthenon, painted the Sistine Chapel, and composed the Eroica Symphony also operated the ovens of Dachau, dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, butchered itself in tribal conflicts and world wars, laid waste to natural environments, and soaked the earth in blood. We are a complex, tortured, divided, ambiguous Janus-faced species capable of good and evil, creativity and destruction, Eros and Thanatos; we cannot be reduced to one facet or the other and no utopian society can dissolve our dysfunctional nature or remove our evolutionary baggage.

Homo sapiens is a brash, arrogant, brilliant, ignorant, and menacing species that in a very short period of time has colonized the entire planet and left death, destruction, and extinction everywhere it went. In the era of ecological crisis marked by species extinction, rainforest destruction, desertification, resource shortages, and climate change, the epithet “wise man” is intolerably pretentious and false. If intelligence and wisdom entails the ability to survive, exercise foresight, and adapt to one’s environment, then countless animal species are far more intelligent than human beings. Dinosaurs lived for hundreds of millions of years, cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) have survived for tens of millions of years, Homo erectus existed for over a million years, but Homo sapiens sapiens, emerging only fifty thousand years ago, may not survive another century or two, certainly not in enviable form. For all their sophistication, human beings are still primitive animals. Their neocortex—the seat of language, creativity, and abstract thinking—rests on ancient limbic and reptilian areas of the brain that evolved millions of years before symbolic thinking and it still conditions human behavior.

Animals: The Missing Element in the Radical Equation

After centuries of dramatic intellectual revolutions and discoveries, Homo sapiens have been knocked off its pedestal and now flails about

in the winds of uncertainty. We cannot overlook the paradox of a species who, boasting god-like powers of rationality, still does not comprehend itself and its place in the world. Humans are now close to exterminating their closest biological relatives, the great apes, as they dispatch up to thousands of other animal species to extinction every year, thereby ensuring that *Homo sapiens* will die as it was born—in ignorance of its own nature.

“Throughout recorded history,” Armesto notes, “almost every supposedly distinguishing feature by which humans have identified and differentiated themselves from other creatures, classified as non-human, turns out to be mistaken or misleading.”²⁹ Humans have clouded accurate understanding of their own nature and possibilities with irrational beliefs, religious fictions, primitive mythologies, logical fallacies, philosophical illusions, scientific dogmas, God-complexes, infantile needs, and narcissist fantasies. Although recent advances in philosophy, science, and other areas have refuted numerous myths about human and nonhuman animals alike, falsehoods persist because they conveniently promote elitist platforms, comfort human vanity, reinforce anthropocentrism and speciesism, and therefore advance base humanist agendas to exploit nature and animals for their own purposes.

Traditionally, the riddle of human existence was pondered through mythology and religion; however, today we know that an adequate understanding of human nature depends heavily on science. Although modern science—like religion, philosophy, and literature throughout Western history—has perpetuated pernicious errors about human and nonhuman animals alike, this deplorable betrayal of its stated methods, goals, and principles has been significantly redeemed with advances in various disciplines. Ecology, geology, anthropology, archaeology, paleontology, genetics, and cognitive ethology have revolutionized our understanding of ourselves, other animals, the formation of the earth, and the cosmos in general. But the painstaking acquisition of knowledge is no guarantee of its universal acceptance, or that truth-seeking inquiries will not be corrupted and co-opted by those with vested interests in profit and power.

Ethology in particular has been progressive and liberating. It has shattered Cartesian and behaviorist views of animals as machines or simple pre-programmed organisms devoid of thought or intentionality, and is only now liberating us from the prescientific era of understanding animals. During the European “Age of Discovery,” so-called civilized society debated whether dark-skinned and traditional peoples were anything but “savages” and subhumans. From our “enlightened” and “progressive” positions in the twenty-first century, we may laugh at the arrogance, racism, and ignorance of such views, without appreciating that the vast majority of the human population still view animals with an even greater crudeness, ignorance, and bias—a benighted outlook that informs the most violent, barbaric, and devastating practices ever unleashed, unprecedented in the degree of rage, insanity, and impact even for *Homo sapiens*, the most dangerous animal on earth.

Once we see what flimsy, fallacious, and corrupt constructs anthropocentrism and speciesism are, and how deeply embedded they are in the philosophies, values, and narratives of “civilization,” we can begin to grasp their catastrophic effects and implications. The systemic institutional changes needed to avert social and ecological catastrophe must be accompanied by a parallel conceptual revolution that involves the construction of new values, worldviews, narratives, and species identities.

Although an intellectual vanguard is pulling humanity out of the quicksand of ignorance, unenlightened views persist throughout all sectors of society and overall, *we are still in the Dark Ages* of understanding other species, our planet, and ourselves. It is painful enough to contemplate the illiteracy and ignorance of the general population—such that, for example, the majority of citizens in the United States believe in angels, the Devil, and creationism. It is particularly disturbing, however, to see virtually all sectors of left and liberal cultures tenaciously clinging to atavistic moral and scientific views toward nonhuman animals as well as the earth, as they flatter themselves as “progressive” and “enlightened.”

If humans have for so long failed to understand animal minds, it is due to their own stupidity, insensitivity, arrogance, and speciesist

biases. But as the darkness begins to recede in various quarters of thought, it is time leftists attempt to reclaim the progressive science and ethics status they once held. While it took the Left a good century to catch onto the importance of ecology, and to begin merging concerns such as justice and autonomy to sustainability and ecology, leftists have consistently devalued or ignored the plight of animals, failing to understand this as a profound moral issue in its own right, and as an indispensable lens for understanding the current global social and ecological crisis. There can be no full or even adequate understanding of the systemic problems of capitalist society, of the origins and dynamics of hierarchy, and of a future rational, autonomous, ethical, and ecological society until we address the 10,000-year legacy of speciesism and the barbaric exploitation of other animals.

Until the Left engages the animal standpoint, in short, it cannot recapture the mantle of progressive thinking in the moral and scientific realms, and it cannot advance the new values and identities appropriate for the twenty-first century. By ignoring or deriding the profound ethical and scientific revolutions of animal rights and cognitive ethology, the Left and social progressive traditions have forfeited any claim they once had to enlightenment, progressive ethics, political vision, and commitment to radical change. It has become increasingly obvious that the deficiencies of leftism, progressivism, humanism, populism, and mass resistance movements toward the animal question vitiate the ability of these cultures to address—let alone resolve—urgent social and environmental crises. This is a tragic loss for humankind, at least, for only radical theorizing and social resistance/transformation movements can steer us out of the current evolutionary impasse that threatens to engulf humanity itself, in the rapidly advancing social and ecological crises that now stand as its most salient legacy on earth.

CHAPTER 6

Moral Progress and the Struggle for Human Evolution

We live in dark, disturbing times: we are witnesses to proliferating wars, perpetual genocide, predatory global capitalism, rampant militarism, unparalleled government surveillance and repression, and a phony “war on terrorism” that fronts for attacks on dissent and liberties. We are facing the ever-present threat of financial collapse and global depression, climate change, the sixth great extinction crisis in the earth’s history, and systemic planetary meltdown. Scientists warn that we are at a tipping point of global ecological collapse, and report the shocking speed of catastrophic changes such as those that turn icecaps into water and forests into savannas.

Welcome to the fruits of “progress.” The modernist ideology par excellence, progress is defined as the expansion of the human empire over animals and nature; as bringing other species and the natural world under human command; and as overcoming the “primitive,” “savage,” and “barbaric” stages of premodern human existence for full-blown techno-scientific, mechanistic, and market-dominated societies. The inherent fallacies and disastrous consequences of the long lineage of dominator cultures that peaked in modern European societies led to a volatile contradiction between the social and natural worlds. The question is not if this contradiction between fast-growing

market societies and slow-changing, sustainable-oriented ecological systems will be resolved—it will be one way or the other. The question, rather, is: will humans consciously and voluntarily change and adapt to nature, or will nature drastically reduce human numbers and their impact, through prolonged and painful means such as war, famine, and disease?

This is a difficult moment to argue for the notion of progress. Indeed, who thinks that tomorrow will be better than today? That their children will inherit a brighter future and jobs, wages, and retirement plans will be secure? Are we confident that homes, health care, and education will be affordable? Can we be certain that the plight of the poor and the needy will be overcome by waging war on poverty rather than on people? That the ecosystems which sustain life will convalesce, and not collapse? Did not the dream of the Enlightenment—which foretold that the spread of reason, science, technology and “free markets” would bring autonomy, peace and prosperity to all—die on the slaughter bench of the twentieth century? In reality, multiple conflicts including two world wars, fascism, totalitarianism, genocide, the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the threat of nuclear annihilation, growing corporate hegemony, and accelerating environmental breakdown led the dance of death during that entire macabre period. Barely out of the starting gates, the twenty-first century opened with attacks on the World Trade Center; the deployment of an endless “war on terror” masking a permanent war on democracy; and the unparalleled rise of surveillance and security states. It has already recorded resource scarcity crises; escalating wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa; and increasingly aggressive neoliberalism and capitalist globalization. It has witnessed ever-widening gaps between the world’s rich and poor, global market crashes, hastening species extinction, and catastrophic climate change.

Toward the end of the 1960s, a new wave of counter-enlightenment thinkers, or postmodernists, rose to prominence with denunciations of civilization, modernity, and the notion of progress.¹ They were influenced by Max Weber’s critique of the “iron cage of bureaucracy,” Martin Heidegger’s analysis of technological domination, and

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's dissection of the failure of the Enlightenment project and revolutionary Marxism. Whereas eighteenth-century theorists saw the spread of reason promoting autonomy, freedom, prosperity and peace, Horkheimer and Adorno described the perverse irony in which rationality instead produced technical domination, totalitarianism, fascism, irrationality, and mass conformity through sophisticated systems of propaganda, disinformation and cultural control. Whereas the "Age of Reason" "aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters," Horkheimer and Adorno witnessed a "wholly enlightened earth... radiant with triumphant calamity."²

Similarly, Michel Foucault rejected the Enlightenment equation that happiness and freedom advance in lockstep with the spread of reason, science, and technology. He resolved the "unity of Western history" into discrete eras devoid of developmental logic or coherence. Rather than producing an endless and undeviating road to human perfection, Foucault saw history as shifting power constellations that "progressed," if anything, toward increasing regulation and control of bodies, populations, and minds.³ Jean-Francois Lyotard diagnosed the fin-de-siècle "postmodern condition" as a jaded cynicism toward any "metanarrative" (Hegelian, Marxist, or capitalist) of history as the development of freedom and progress.⁴ Against the totalizing critiques of postmodernists, Jürgen Habermas championed the Enlightenment as an "unfinished project" that harbored not only the instrumental rationality of technical and bureaucratic domination, but also the "communicative rationality" underlying critical thinking, reasoned debate, and the dialogic skills vital for freedom and democracy.⁵

Progress is the preeminent myth of modernity, a potent ideology and, indeed, a pervasive and near-unwavering secular faith. It has promoted a fetishism of growth, control, and money. It functioned as an alibi for greed, exploitation, and genocide, along with the crushing of peoples, animals, biodiversity, and nature under the burgeoning corporate-military juggernaut. The discourse of progress helped to create and legitimate Eurocentrism, colonialism, industrialism, capitalism, imperialism, consumerism, and the systematic eradication of

organic life and inorganic environments. According to Enlightenment thinkers, progress involved emancipation from the domination of nature and the tyranny of ignorance, and advanced in proportion to the evolution of European modernity beyond the “savage,” “primitive,” “stagnant,” and “barbarian” cultures of the past. In particular, they believed, progress surged ahead to the degree that secular nation-states overcame the bondage of the medieval “Dark Ages,” escaped from the straightjacket of Christian dogma and irrationality, and moved boldly into the “Age of Reason.”

However, the new postmodern concept cannot hope to correct our perilous course and inspire true moral and institutional progress without a post-humanist foundation that repudiates the deep-rooted ignorance, arrogance, and errors of anthropocentrism and speciesism in favor of humility, respect, and connectedness. What is required is nothing less than a radical broadening of ethics and community to include all sentient beings and ultimately the earth itself. This demands overcoming entrenched dogmas, discrimination, bias, prejudice, and hierarchical institutions of all kinds—not only the domination of human over human, but also the elevation of humans over other animals and the natural world as a whole.

A Brief Genealogy of “Progress”

The notion of progress—which states that history advances in a definite, desirable and irreversible direction of constant improvement—has become so entrenched in modern thinking, it is easy to forget that it is a relatively recent invention. Certainly not all cultures were as dynamic as European modernity, few embraced change with such fervor (many resisted technological “advance” in favor of social stability), and none identified rapid and uprooting transformations as *progress*.

The progressivist narrative covers a historical sweep of at least 10,000 years, and in many accounts begins with the revolutionary shift from nomadic hunting and gathering (or “foraging”) lifeways to settled agricultural societies rooted in farming and herding. Many progressivists view the domestication of plants and animals as the

“great leap forward” from “savagery” to “civilization.” The champions of progress assume that more is good, bigger is better, and modernity is the apex of history, a kind of “maturity” over a “childlike” past. One can interpret the shift from dispersed hunting-gathering cultures to expansionist agricultural empires as the most decisive revolution in history; however, many progressivists (taking the opposite view of contemporary “primitivists”) tendentiously ignore or malign the many positive qualities of primal lifeways. This denies that for millions of years these modes of living well-served humans and their ancestors in many ways (such as providing better health, less work, more autonomy, and social equality). At the same time, of course, progressivists also exaggerate the benefits of farming, herding, population growth, city life, industrialization, market societies, and so on. The flip side of this fallacy involves discounting the regressive effects of domesticating plants and animals in societies that were large, labor-intensive, expansionistic, warlike, and increasingly stratified according to gender, class, and other dimensions. Nor do progressivists grasp how the domination of humans over animals, nature, and one another spawned the violent pathologies, unsustainable cultures, and debilitating systems of hierarchical domination that imperil us today in the form of severe crises in society, animal communities and biodiversity, and the planet as a whole.

“Progress” represented a radical departure from premodern and non-Western ways of thinking. Modern thinkers broke with the pessimistic, cyclical model of the ancient world that saw time as repetitive rather than innovative, as an eternal recurrence rather than an evolving process. According to the ancient outlook, history played out in the rise and fall of civilizations, in endlessly repetitive cycles of chaos and order and birth and destruction, driven by monotonous dynamics that seemed to yield societies devoid of purpose, goals, meaning, or direction. As evident in Plato’s metaphysics, many ancient philosophers and historians equated the passage of time with corruption and decay; they denigrated the empirical world as mere appearance and falsehood, while seeking truth in timeless essences. The Greco-Roman worldview was fatalistic, determinist, and cyclical

rather than optimistic, open-ended, and linear. From Homer to the Roman Stoics, the ancients believed in *Moirai*, an inflexible law of the universe to which human beings must acquiesce. Their cosmology did not allow, let alone inspire, people to conceive of gradual improvement in human affairs and to look forward to a future better than the present and past.

Unlike the theological Providential vision of history, secular-oriented progressivist accounts demand a positive view of change, a rejection of an inalterable universe hostile to our purposes, a renunciation of a fixed human nature, an affirmation of technological ingenuity, and an optimistic belief that people can gradually improve their lives over time. Modernists thus typically operated with stage theories of history and linear narratives depicting inexorable improvements in life, advancing from generation to generation.⁶ Key roots of Western progressivism, nevertheless, lie in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The enigmatic belief that history had meaning—human beings struggling to realize God’s purpose and plan—and the view that time involved a steady advance from sin to salvation (for an elite few) was a radical departure from the pessimistic, cyclical model of the ancients.

Yet, the ascendance of progressivist history required not only a linear narrative and stage model of ameliorative change, but also brilliant advances in science, technology, medicine, the arts, and culture. Cumulatively, these innovations inspired the optimistic mindset associated with many Enlightenment and modernist thinkers. From the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, the preconditions necessary for a full-fledged progressivist discourse took shape, such as prepared by the Renaissance, modern science, the Enlightenment, the French and American Revolutions, capitalism, and the industrial revolution. Beginning in the eighteenth century, Enlightenment visionaries praised what they viewed as unheralded advances in learning, reason, criticism, liberty, individuality, and happiness. Progress would emerge, they thought, through the unstoppable achievements of science, industry, and rational modes of government. Despite skeptics, the growing consensus was that the laws of history were discernible; that reason, freedom, and markets could spread peace and

prosperity worldwide; and even that human nature and society were “perfectible.”

Modern thinkers embraced the progressivist form of the Christian narrative, while nonetheless giving the Providential vision a secular coding. Modern science did not break with the anthropocentric and speciesist ideology of orthodox Christianity (and earlier cultures), but rather bolstered the project of dominating nature and exploiting both it and animals by seizing full advantage of innovations in science, technology, and markets. Thus, in the transition from providential to progressivist history, from the “dark ages” to the “era of Enlightenment,” people usurp the throne of God. Humanism becomes the new Gospel, science and technology pave the road to salvation, and profit and competition become indubitable truths and sacred values.

As evident by the unshakeable confidence of Marquis de Condorcet, jailed and executed by the functionaries of the French Revolution that he rapturously praised, the Enlightenment’s faith in progress was often as dogmatic as the Christian conviction in Providence. Although modernists de-deified the historical process, they formed a new God in “Man,” and built a new “Church of Reason” (August Comte). Consequently, many Enlightenment figures espoused a secularized Providential and salvationist narrative that traced the development of humanity from ignorance to knowledge, from slavery to freedom, and from coarse animality to spiritual perfection. In many ways, humanism is less a novel philosophy than a repackaged theology in which people deify themselves as Lords of the Earth, and claim the right to commandeer its teeming life forms and fecund resources for their own purposes and benefits.

Despite the “Renaissance” in knowledge and arts, and the awakening of autonomy and critical reason in the Enlightenment, regnant dogmas and ignorance were perpetuated by modern European cultures. They replicated anthropocentrism and speciesism; reproduced cruelties, torture, pogroms, and conquests; replaced monarchical domination with the oligarchic tyranny of capital; and intensified hierarchies while disseminating oppressive power systems. Orthodox Christian ideologies combined with humanism and the emerging

techno-sciences to reinforce the ontological and moral chasm dividing human and nonhuman animals, and to promote unprecedented pathologies of power that targeted global peoples, “brute beasts,” and hostile “wilderness.”

Thus, dramatic advances in science and technology; the emancipation of rational inquiry from Church strictures; the hegemony of instrumental over communicative reason; a grow-or-die market society organized around profit, commodification, and accumulation imperatives; and exponential population growth—all these factors and more produced a massive, expanding, intensive, and unprecedented system of power and animal slavery. The modern “civilized” and “enlightened” world proved itself more barbarous than any past culture, as it confirmed the non-sentient status of animals and only now it tortured them mercilessly without anesthetic in the hidden dungeons of vivisection laboratories. Subsequent developments in technological and scientific domination led to the industrialization of animals through slaughterhouses, meatpacking plants, and factory farms, as well as to technologies of genetic engineering and cloning based on the most invasive control and manipulation of animal bodies possible.⁷

With strong roots in political economy and the capitalist theory of *Homo economicus*, the progressivist vision assumes that humans are rational, self-interested beings who seek constant change, technological advances, and increasing material comforts and wealth. Since the seventeenth century, progress has been measured in strictly quantitative terms, such as growing powers of technical control over nature, expanding markets and wealth creation, and spreading “peace and prosperity” throughout the globe. Modernist measures of progress rely on indices such as production quotas, employment rates, profit margins, housing sales, consumer confidence levels, and the Gross National Product. Aside from ignoring the catastrophic impact of growth on exploited peoples, animals, and the environment, the quantitative model cannot measure intangibles such as human meaning, satisfaction, and happiness. Thus, in crucial ways, this paradigm cannot address the question of whether industrial capitalism is a “better” social system than premodern forms. Indeed, the evidence points

decisively in the other direction, showing that in myriad ways modernity regresses behind or eliminates many advantages of precapitalist, primal, and nonhierarchical societies.

As there is no direct connection between changes in the objective and subjective worlds, between wealth and well-being, and between the quantity of goods and the quality of life, and as happiness and satisfaction cannot be measured mathematically, there must be a *qualitative* measure of progress that one can use in critical contrast to the dominant model. Indeed, a dramatic indicator that modern Western societies are *not* progressing in crucial areas like health and happiness is the phenomenon that psychological, social, and physical afflictions climb in proportion to the rate of modernization. It is a well-known fact that the more “advanced” a society, the higher its rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, mental illness, depression, job dissatisfaction, crime, murder, divorce, and so on.⁸ Given the inverse relation between social and technological development and human fulfillment, and between economic growth and ecological balance, we clearly need new, varied, and more reliable means of measuring progress.⁹

Advances in “progress” were determined not only according to a narrow range of material indicators that charted growth and innovation in realms such as science, technology, medicine, and economic profits. A few theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Condorcet, and Karl Marx rejected any concept of progress that enriched a small minority of elites by exploiting and impoverishing the vast majority of people whose lives dramatically worsened in the factories and slums of capitalist society. For socialists, Marxists, anarchists, feminists, abolitionists, and reformers, one could only speak meaningfully of “social progress” when the immense potential of modern knowledge and industry benefited all people more or less equally, rather than by creating conditions in which the few exploited the many. The technical and democratic potential of industrial capitalism, radicals insisted, could be realized in a socialist, communist, or anarchist society in which workers and citizens collectively owned, democratically managed, and equally shared the benefits of advanced science, technology, and industry.

The Limitations of Humanism

Modernity is a huge subterfuge constructed as a *zero-sum game*, a situation in which some gain if, and only if, others lose, with the consequence of distributing resources such as money, status, and influence in increasingly asymmetrical patterns, and thereby creating or exacerbating hierarchical domination. Thus, capitalists are rich only because workers are poor and workers are poor because capitalists exploit their labor power and appropriate surplus value as profit. Powerful states and empires amass wealth and power by stealing resources and enslaving people from vanquished states. The world's "developed" nations become rich and powerful by siphoning resources and wealth from "undeveloped" states, which in fact were intentionally *underdeveloped* and suffered poverty and a crumbling social structure brought on by colonization. The cities and palaces of Europe could not have been erected without reducing African cities to rubble and its peoples to slaves.

The obscenity involving what one human group or class does to another to advance its own interests in the name of "progress" is exponentially greater if we consider the worst case of this injustice, which involves how humans exploit other animals. The entire human species gains at the expense of millions of nonhuman animal species and countless billion of animals that humans enslave, exploit, and kill. In the greatest zero-sum game of all, human advances exist in inverse relation to the massive losses of freedom and life suffered by other animals. Thus, the more humans gain, the more animals lose; the greater the human comfort, the more suffering and death for animals; and growth in human population numbers bring extinction to other animals and reduces biodiversity. While helping humanity in highly uneven ways (as determined by class, state power, imperialism, systems of hierarchy, and so on), modern techno-science intensified the misery and slaughter of animals, and exacerbated the destruction of the earth. This is evident in the growing horrors of vivisection, factory farming, slaughterhouses, fur farming, and sundry systems of exploitation, which polluted and poisoned all aspects of their immediate physical surroundings, and provoked catastrophic climate change on a global scale.

From the animal and ecological standpoints, therefore, “progress” is regress, science is sadism, humanism is barbarism, and the “light” of Reason brings darkness and madness. Since injury and damage to nonhuman animals and ecosystems inevitably undermines human existence itself, the “gains” resulting from modern innovations are short-term and partial at best. The bill for the true social and ecological costs of industrial capitalism is now due, and will be shouldered most by underdeveloped nations who contributed least to conditions of crisis, while future human and animal generations will incur the heaviest costs and greatest suffering, as climate change is already taking a huge toll on humans and other animal species.

Against the metanarrative that links the first step in social advance with the rise of agricultural society, Jared Diamond identifies the shift from foraging to farming cultures as “the worst mistake in the history of the human race.”¹⁰ Agriculture brought infectious diseases, malnutrition, a shorter life span, and more work; it worsened the position of women, introduced economic and political stratification, and overall it “inextricably combines causes of our rise and our fall.”¹¹ Thus, the agricultural revolution came at a huge cost, and brought numerous regressive developments, especially for nonhuman animals. The creation of surplus food and the building of ever-larger towns and cities enabled the rapid expansion of the human population, which encouraged increasingly intensive exploitation of animals. Gradually, humans commandeered animal bodies for food, clothing, labor, transportation, and warfare. From chance and haphazard experimentation to increasingly sophisticated forms of knowledge and control, humans learned how to shape virtually every facet of animal existence to their own advantage. They discerned, for instance, how to manipulate the reproductive lives of animals by castration (to make males more docile) and, more generally through artificial selection. Over time, humans dominated other animals through hobbling, confinement, whips, prods, chains, and branding to auction them as commodities and mark them as private property. Today, domination and manipulation extends to the cellular and genetic levels of animal bodies through genetic engineering and cloning in order to breed and

mass produce “farmed animals” such as cattle, pigs, and chickens to grow as fast and large as possible for maximum profit.

To call capitalist modernization and the current state of the world “progress” is madness. The dominator societies that spread across the globe over the last 10,000 years have been a calamitous error. The narratives, values, and identities of anthropocentrism and speciesism that brought us to this evolutionary dead-end cannot possibly provide the solutions to the problems dominator cultures created. The fallacious consequences of separating humans from other animals and from the earth as a whole; the hubristic and ignorant efforts to “dominate” and “control” nature and bend it to the human will; and the arrogant dismissal of limits to growth in favor of the fantasy of unending abundance, is evident in the ecological crisis reverberating through the world.

No coherent, consistent, or defensible definition of progress would sanction the exploitation of the majority of humans for the benefit of a minority whose lives dramatically worsened, so that ruling elites could prosper. For the same reason, no viable notion of progress is possible that focuses on the “advantages” that human beings gain, however democratic, universal, and justly distributed the benefits might be, at the expense of animal suffering and lives and the ecological integrity of the planet. Progress cannot be defined in reference to the human community alone, for however many its beneficiaries, the exploitation of staggering numbers of other species and individuals cannot be justified. Only a pathologically violent, disconnected, ignorant, and egoistic species—*Homo sapiens*—could call this legacy of madness and murder “progress.” The fatally flawed nature of humanism grows ever clearer and more malignant each day. Contrariwise, while much of humanity has proven itself incapable of learning the most basic lessons of ecology, such as to appreciate the limits to nature and the need to live in harmony with its surroundings, others have clung to the knowledge of ancient cultures or appealed to the insights of ecology. For a viable human world is impossible without humility, respect, connectedness, and recognition that what people do to the animals they do to themselves.

We most assuredly need new, multidimensional ways of measuring progress that gauge the *quality* of life (such as relate to meaningful work and leisure time) rather than fetishizing the *quantity* of innovation, growth, and wealth. In spite of this, the new paradigms proposed by reformists such as Edward Burch (who advanced a more diverse but still limited, “General Progress Index”), various apolitical visionaries, or revolutionaries of any leftist stripe are fatally flawed and deeply inadequate. The new concepts of humanity and society, the bold models of progress, the novel blueprints and moral compasses of life, must be more far-reaching than most dare to envision or can even imagine. Human identity, philosophy, social theory, and ethics must *transcend the limits of humanism*, however democratically conceived, in order to bring animal liberation and ecological ethics into the forefront of a postmodern consciousness—one that deconstructs and reconstructs the concept of progress. This involves abandoning the illusions of zero-sum logic in favor of the truth of mutual aid, and developing a profound understanding of holistic interrelationships, interdependencies, and shared fates. It requires refashioning the social world so that humanity can live in harmony with, rather than in contradiction to, the flourishing of biodiversity and the integrity of the natural world.

The Task of Reconstruction

In the current era of the sixth great species extinction crisis, rainforest destruction, accelerating global warming, and runaway human population growth, we must recognize that the Emperor has no clothes. It is time to call Western civilization for what it is—a metastasizing system of domination, war, slavery, slaughter, omnicide, exterminism, and ecological devastation. The fallacious and disastrous consequences of separating human animals from nonhuman animals and the natural environment, attempting to dominate and subjugate complex beings and physical systems of which we have no grasp, while fantasizing that the earth is an inexhaustible cornucopia of resources, is dramatically evident in the ecological crisis reverberating through the world.¹²

The earth itself is refuting the dualistic, speciesist, anthropocentric, and hierarchical philosophies that informed Western thought from Aristotle and Aquinas to Descartes and Bacon to Marx and beyond into the present day. But rather than merely *deconstruct* progress and strand ourselves in a nihilistic wasteland without a moral compass, we can *reconstruct* the concept to effect a rupture with the past and to chart a radically new way forward that can potentially stave off social chaos, unimaginable suffering and loss of human and animal life, and catastrophic ecological collapse.

Only through reference to some notion of progress can we assess whether our lives and societies are moving in a positive direction. Unlike traditional peoples, the modern-day populace lives in dynamic societies and expects its conditions to “improve” over time, as parents expect—or once did—that their children will lead better lives and have more opportunities than what they inherited. Of course, since the quality of individual lives is directly bound up with the state of their societies, people need correspondingly diverse criteria to assess whether their society is moving in a positive or negative direction.

One can easily recognize the need for better policies—*for progress*—in critical areas such as education, health care, and employment, as well as ameliorating social inequality, poverty, and homelessness. Similarly, one can envision a marked improvement in human attitudes and practices toward other animals in addition to restoring the integrity of the natural environment. “Progress” entails two distinct conditions: (1) change (from one state or situation to another), and (2) improvement (the new state or situation is an “advance” over the prior one). Whereas the second condition entails the first, the first in no way demands the second, as change can bring about worse, rather than better, conditions for individuals, society, humankind, animals, and the earth as a whole. Positive assurances to the contrary, the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, for instance, considerably worsened environmental and labor conditions in Canada, the United States, and Mexico while greatly benefiting multinational corporations. Since the 1980s, paralleling developments globally, US corporate profits have risen, CEO

salaries have skyrocketed (now over 400 times the wages of the average worker), and the gap between rich and poor has grown steadily wider. In recent years we have witnessed the “Athenization” of European Union countries with the neoliberal assault on pensions, benefits, and social programs, and the subsequent social unrest.

In a world predicated on rapid, chaotic, directionless flux for its own sake (or rather, for the sake of destroying traditions that conflict with market growth and the production of new “needs”), “progress” is an indispensable critical and normative concept. It can advance democracy, autonomy, ecology, and animal liberation, and thereby help guide society in a healthy, humane, and sane direction, rather than barreling down the same dysfunctional and destructive path that we have embarked upon for ten thousand years. The concept of progress is a means of guiding and directing change in the direction of greater democracy, freedom, biodiversity, ecological integrity, and animal liberation. Even anarcho-primitivists like John Zerzan—who rejects the totality of civilization and longs for a mode of existence prior to the emergence of speech and symbolic thought—imply some notion of progress by assuming that things would greatly improve with the collapse of “civilization” and return to Paleolithic lifeways.¹³

Today it is patently obvious that no viable concept of progress can be dominionist, anthropocentric, and speciesist, or can ignore the evolutionary and ecological unity and coherence of the human, animal, and natural worlds. A definition of progress that violently elevates humans over other animals; that enslaves every being from which it can draw blood, labor, and profit; that obsesses over growth and mandates plunder; and that is bound up with addiction to fossil fuels and unsustainable levels of consumption, implodes under the weight of its massive contradictions. A sound concept of progress, in contrast, would be holistic in outlook, and grasp the interrelations and evolutionary continuity among the natural, animal, and human worlds. In reconstructed postmodern and post-humanist form, a viable notion of progress abandons hackneyed hierarchies, pseudo-separations, and indefensible prejudices of all kinds, as it views non-human animals as sentient subjects of a life with their own inviolable

purposes and value, and are respected as equals who share with us core needs, wants, and interests. It grasps that the requisite moral and psychological revolutions that humanity must rapidly undertake to overcome its formidable evolutionary impasse are impossible without equally profound transformations of all social institutions.

A postmodern, post-humanist concept of progress repudiates the zero-sum game of winners and losers. The only meaningful definition of progress refers to improvements in life and conditions for all—not just all humans, but rather all species, and the staggeringly complex and interconnected systems of planetary ecology. A notion of progress that sanctions the exploitation of the majority for the benefit of a minority is dysfunctional and disastrous. The new concept I have advocated, in contrast, breaks with domineering, hierarchical, and dualistic mindsets and institutions that succumb to the hubristic “human first” mentality. This mindset defines human interests in opposition to other species and nature, rather than understanding humans as inseparably involved with the vast biocommunity and entire earth. The democratic principle of equal consideration extends in principle not only to all human interests (and therefore underpins a theory of equality, autonomy, and global justice), it also gives equal consideration to the interests of animals and the requirements of ecological systems.

Quite unlike the humanist definition, however broad, “radical,” and “egalitarian,” a new account of progress must incorporate non-human animals into the category of “all” who benefit from, or at least are not harmed by, social practices and policies. We need to advance a *new universalism*, unparalleled in scope, that transcends the arbitrary and parochial mindset of humanism to respect the inherent value of nonhuman beings and the physical environment, as we cultivate harmonious relationships among humans, animals, and the earth. In contradistinction to postmodern attacks on “totalizing” theories and grand narratives, the problem is not with overly broad stories that occlude cultural differences, but rather with frameworks that are not universal and inclusive enough.

Accordingly, it seems prudent to define progress as occurring whenever social values, practices, laws, and institutions advance democracy,

equality, rights and community in ways that promote, balance and harmonize the needs and interests of humans, animals, and nature. On this conception, progress is measured according to the degree that change promotes the well-being and integrity of three overlapping communities. A policy promoting development or resource consumption that advances human interests at the expense of animals and the earth is an anthropocentric and speciesist approach, which gives insufficient consideration to the biocommunity as a whole. This orientation, therefore, is not likely to promote harmonization, sustainability, or “progress” in our new sense and more accurate definition.

Truthfully, given the metastasization of global capitalism, the rise of authoritarian police states, the growing severity of social and environmental problems, and the inveterate human failure to prevent looming or potential problems with foresight, restraint, and precautionary measures leaves one with little optimism. Hence, it is hard to view the ideals of total liberation and balancing human, animal, and ecological requirements as anything less than utopian (see Chapter 7). But utopian visions, too, can be critical and constructive, and can offer progressive guidance however inadequate the results.

Nonlinear History

History is neither repetitive and random, nor linear and teleological (seeking some preordained goal); it is formed in the complex matrix in which humans shape—and are shaped by—biological, environmental, and social determinants, as they co-evolve with other animals (see Chapter 1). As we see in the work of thinkers ranging from eighteenth century philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder to Foucault and Manuel de Landa, the singular concept of “history” must be broken up and dispersed into a plurality of histories, involving different cultures that develop unevenly and semi-autonomously from one another (but often in parallel evolution as well).¹⁴

Yet, despite its nonlinear complexity, history is not as random and meaningless as postmodernists like Foucault or Jean Baudrillard suggest.¹⁵ Rather, one can find developmental dynamics and patterns

comprehensible only through a unifying narrative. History is not a smooth, linear trajectory, unperturbed by contingency, chaos, conflict, contradiction, spontaneity, stagnation, regression, and ambiguity. Against a single, uniform, homogeneous, and totalizing “metanarrative” that sees history as a grand story of *either* freedom and progress, *or* domination and disaster (a “metanarrative in reverse”), social evolution exhibits competing and often contradictory norms, values, policies, institutions, and developmental tendencies. Thus, since “Western culture” is not a monolithic, uncontested, and seamless advance of anthropocentrism, speciesism, racism, patriarchy, and hierarchy, it is important to trace the *simultaneous* development of two opposing lineages. We therefore need a *dual narrative* that maps competing dynamics and contradictory values, traditions, and tendencies.

Throughout Western history, cultures of complementarity and hierarchy have developed dialectically, side-by-side, simultaneously, in opposition and antagonism to one another. In addition to the domineering humanist conceptions of ancient, medieval, and modern cultures, there emerged vital alternatives through the *ahimsa* ethic and holistic vegetarian ideals born in ancient Eastern religious cultures and that influenced Western outlooks as well. Thus, great historical beings—such as Pythagoras, Porphyry, Ovid, Jesus Christ, Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, Thomas More, John Milton, Alexander Pope, William Paley, Michel de Montaigne, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Blake, Caroline Earle White, Leo Tolstoy, George Bernard Shaw, Gandhi, Henry Salt, Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, and growing legions of contemporary thinkers and activists from diverse backgrounds—have all repudiated one facet or another of speciesism, anthropocentrism, human supremacism, carnivorousness, and violent hierarchical lifeways. Each has striven to promote peaceful, compassionate, and egalitarian values that can unite humans, animals, and the earth in one vast community of unity-in-difference and difference-in-unity.

Tragically, however, the egalitarian and non-hierarchical traditions remained marginalized and dominator cultures and their hierarchical mentalities and institutions prevailed, wreaking violence and

destruction in a fornicating and colonizing spread of *Homo sapiens* throughout the planet. From Aristotle, the Stoics, Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, and Martin Luther to Descartes, Bacon, Kant, Marx, humanists, Social Darwinists and the present time, the hierarchical tradition sought to marginalize, repress, and silence the voices of complementarity and to establish human supremacy as natural and unquestionable.

Among the many evolutionary possibilities and narrative interpretations of history, one can trace a broad evolutionary trend, a developmental pattern, a coherent movement, a meaning and a potentiality. Despite the massive failures indelibly etched into the slaughter bench of history, such as played out in an endless stretch of hierarchies, regimes, wars, empires, territories, classes, genocide, and omnicidal devastation, one can *also* find—in particular, by examining the last few centuries of European and American history—a discernible advance of moral progress.

One can define and gauge moral progress as the broadening of the moral community toward ever-greater degrees of inclusiveness and equality. From another perspective, and in a different (admittedly capitalist and individualist) language, one can map the dynamic movement of *the universalization of rights*.¹⁶ The struggles for freedom, rights, justice, autonomy, democracy, inclusiveness, and community, while not unfolding in a linear or inexorable way, provide *a kind of coherence* to the last few centuries of modern Western history. As vital as sympathies and sentiments are to mutual aid and the ethical life, critical reason is also crucial to developing more expansive and inclusive communities of “subjects-of-a-life” (Tom Regan) with inherent value. The shift from uncritically accepting customs to demanding a logical justification for their assent, moves society away from dogma and tradition toward the rational viewpoint crucial for ethics, justice, equality, community, and ecological sustainability.

The expansion of the moral community was not a linear development encompassing all humanity in a single, continuous, irreversible, and irrevocable trajectory. Affirmations of biological and moral relatedness of species are evident through history and various cultures,

and were present throughout Western society, but advances in moral reasoning (always related to democracy-building) were often lost, delayed, or reversed, and still have a long way to go. “Nevertheless,” Peter Singer writes, “it is the direction in which moral thought has been going since ancient times,” a process of increasingly expansive moral values and a movement in which, since the eighteenth century, egalitarian philosophies and moral and legal rights have widened in scope and influence.¹⁷

Dynamically developing throughout the turbulence of the last two centuries, the notions of value, rights, and community were moving moral concern beyond humans, beyond animals, beyond even sentience, into a holistic ecological ethics that enfolded the entire natural world and physical environment into a new moral paradigm. From Albert Schweitzer and Aldo Leopold to deep ecologists, enlightened thinkers in the twentieth century have broadened the notion of community beyond the human sphere to include other animal species and the earth as a whole. Schweitzer, for instance, advocated a general ethics of “reverence for life” that encompassed the organic and inorganic world. For the authentically ethical person, no person, animal, or element of nature should be harmed, all must be protected, and “life itself is sacred.”¹⁸ Leopold championed a “land ethic” rooted in respect for and awareness of the complex interrelatedness of all matter and life on this planet.¹⁹ The new ecological sensibility and “biocentric” ethics that assigned intrinsic value throughout the world was bolstered considerably by the tradition of deep ecology, which was developed by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the 1970s and was elaborated by a wide range of thinkers including George Sessions and Bill Duvall.²⁰ In 2008, Ecuador became the first nation to include the “Rights for Nature” in its Constitution.

Moral progress entails *a new form of enlightenment* that overcomes all forms of discrimination, including speciesism; that recognizes and respects the basic rights animals have as sentient beings; and that treats animals with the same respect it accords members of its own species. We must elaborate a new concept of progress that is ecological, humane, holistic, and rooted in a new ethics of nature, one that

dialectically mediates the needs and interests of humans, animals, and the earth. The new Enlightenment promotes a paradigm shift in the way we think about and relate to the natural world, it widens the boundaries of community to other species and inorganic matter, and it extends basic rights to nonhuman animals by application of the same logic used to grant human rights.

An Imperiled Future

The Western concept of progress and the system that spawned it have brought us to an evolutionary crossroads where we must now confront profound options and choices. Under the spectral shadow of climate change, resource scarcity, biological meltdown, environmental entropy, nuclear threats, and escalating global conflicts, the future of human evolution is problematic at best and unlikely or doomed at worst. *Progress is something human beings still must aspire to and can achieve*, but only with revolutionary changes in society, culture, politics, worldviews, values, and human identity. We desperately need a new moral compass to guide and inform the radical institutional and conceptual changes necessary to stave off catastrophic social and ecological collapse.

After millions of years of prehistory, only two hundred thousand as *Homo sapiens* and just 50,000 years as *Homo sapiens sapiens* (modern, language-speaking humans), we have reached a *pivotal point in history*, a *crossroads* for the future, such that we can choose either *breakdown or breakthrough*. In the language of chaos theory, there have been numerous bifurcation points of social disequilibrium in history when a fundamental system transformation could have occurred, but the new fluctuations did not provoke sufficient change in the fundamental structures and mindsets. As social and ecological crises deepen, however, new arrangements will arise that must be exploited for their transformative potential.

Moral progress should not be conceived in idealist terms as an autonomous development of human ethical capacities. Reason and emotion have played key roles in the development of ethics, but moral

evolution also develops in and through political rebellion and social movements for rights, justice, autonomy, community, and liberation. Arguably, the best vehicle for continued ethical and social advance today is the politics of total liberation, which views the emancipation of humans, animals, and the earth as one interrelated, comprehensive, unified struggle. As such, it demands an alliance politics of unprecedented breadth, diversity, and inclusiveness.

It is indisputably obvious that the fates of humans, animals, and the earth are inextricably bound. Progress can no longer entail the zero sum game of human “gain” at the expense of animals and the environment. Rather, a deeper concept of progress must emerge that eliminates the opposition between human and animals and society and nature. Most fundamentally, it would understand the profound interrelatedness of all aspects of planetary ecology, thus enabling us to become good citizens of the biocommunity (*Gaia* [Greek: earth]), rather than being wretched barbarians, invaders, mercenaries, juntas, and death squads, hell-bent on bringing down the whole house.

CONCLUSION

Reflections on Activism and Hope in a Dying World and Suicidal Culture

We are winning some battles in the fight for a decent and viable world for humans, animals, and the environment.

But without question we are losing the larger war.

The war against greed, violence, plunder, profits, and domination.

The war against class domination, hierarchical power, state repression, transnational corporations, world banks, imperialist aggression, and militarism.

The war against metastasizing systems of economic growth, technological development, overproduction, and overconsumption.

The war to stop biological meltdown and planetary eco-collapse.

The war to save the forests, oceans, rivers, wetlands, mountains, and soil.

The war to preserve biodiversity.

The war against the animal holocaust.

The war against the warmakers and their relentless assault on the planet and all life.

We must focus like a laser beam on an unpalatable truth. Despite the efforts of social, environmental, and animal advocacy movements

over the last two centuries, we are nevertheless losing ground in the battles for democracy, equality, autonomy, ecology, peace, and sustainability. In the last three decades, neoliberalism and global capitalism have destroyed social democracies, widened gaps between rich and poor, dispossessed farmers, assaulted indigenous peoples, and marketized the entire world, all the while escalating the war on animals and intensifying the assault on every ecosystem and on the earth as a whole.

Signs of ecological distress are evident everywhere, from shrinking forests, dying oceans, and grasslands turned into deserts to melting ice caps, rising sea levels, proliferating superstorms, and climbing temperatures. Throughout history, societies have devastated *local* environments. But only in the last few decades has humanity upset the planetary ecology to the point where it is bringing about *global* climate change.

Moreover, we are now living in the era of the sixth extinction crisis in the history of the planet, the last one occurring 65 million years ago when a meteor struck the Gulf of Mexico and annihilated half of existing species including the dinosaurs. Unlike the last five, however, the sixth extinction crisis is caused by human activity. Conservation biologists predict one-third to one-half of the world's plant and animal species might vanish in the next few decades. The ice caps could melt by 2040, around the time sea life vanishes from the oceans. By 2050 the human population will top 9 billion, and world meat consumption will likely double. After 2050, some scientists believe, the world—ravaged by climate change, scarcity, and struggle—will be “unrecognizable.”¹

For decades, concerned scientists have warned humanity of impending ecological catastrophes. The climate change debate is over, the skeptics have been exposed or refuted, and planetary breakdown is exceeding the most pessimistic predictions of recent years. We are already at, or well past, the “tipping point” of runaway climate change, such that the changes that we have brought about will play out for thousands of years. Scientists agree that the absolute threshold of global warming we must not cross is an increase of two

degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Since 1800 and the rise of the Industrial Revolution, humans thus far have raised the average temperature of the planet 0.8 degrees Celsius, enough already to cause severe ecological damage. Even if we stopped increasing all carbon dioxide gas production right now, computer models predict the average global temperature will rise another 0.8 degrees, moving us already to nearly three-quarters of the two-degree limit. In spite of this, carbon emission rates keep growing annually and the coal already set aside for burning will push us past the two degrees threshold, perhaps up to 6 degrees Celsius over the next hundred years or less. We are clearly on a runaway train heading toward unimaginable disaster.²

The uniqueness, importance, and decisive character of the times in which we live cannot be overemphasized. This is an entirely new era in the history of the earth, not just society, and we are all witnesses to the dynamic changes as we stand together at this evolutionary crossroads that demand decisive choice. The Holocene Epoch, which prevailed for the last 12,000 years, has given way to a new stage in evolutionary history, the Anthropocene Epoch, an era in which human actions have become the most determinant influence on the planet and natural events.³

In 1989, American environmentalist Bill McKibbin anticipated the recent naming of this new epoch, in his book titled, *The End of Nature*.⁴ What McKibbin described was not the literal death of nature, but rather a natural world that has become so colonized, dominated, and transformed by human populations and technologies that there is not a raindrop or breeze not somehow influenced or altered by human existence. The combination of capitalist and industrial revolutions resulted in structural imperatives for growth, addiction to fossil fuels, surging populations concentrated in sprawling megacities, paving wilderness and natural habitats, draining wetlands and damming rivers, spreading poisons and waste everywhere, and eventually altering the global climate.

We monopolize solar energy, fresh water, and habitats, and we degrade and destroy it all. The human species has exceeded all

ecological boundaries and has grossly overextended its presence on this planet, such that it has become a malignant force devastating the natural environment and robbing life from other species and future human generations. *Homo sapiens*, this “wise man” and crown of creation we pretend to be, have stripped the earth bare of its rich fruits.

Perhaps the greatest irony of our time is the inverse relation between the aggressive attack on all life and the planet and the apathetic and passive response. Forces of resistance exist, to be sure, but are fragmentary and momentary. Despite the all-out assault on the planet and the overt devastating effects, the overwhelming response has been one of apathy, complacency, and timidity. Whatever measures have been taken against the ongoing holocaust and omnicide, they have been too little, and likely too late.

We now face the grim choice posed by revolutionaries over the last two centuries, which involved “revolution or barbarism.” Our situation has deteriorated so dramatically that we must choose between revolution or ecological collapse, mass extinction, and possibly our own demise. The twenty-first century is a time of reckoning. This is undeniably a pivotal time in history and an evolutionary crossroads where very different possible futures lay ahead. Nevertheless, windows of opportunity are closing. The actions that humanity now collectively takes—or fails to take—will determine whether the future will be only dire or completely catastrophic, merely difficult or totally disastrous, incredibly challenging or simply impossible.

In the aftermath of 10,000 years of incessant growth and endless wars that humanity waged upon itself, other species, and the earth, we now live amidst unsustainable global capitalism and a system of growth that is driving natural systems to an irreversible tipping point. The greatest challenge in the history of our species is staring us right in the face: Can humanity dramatically change its entire mode of existence—from moral and psychological outlooks to their economic and political institutions—in order to forestall planetary catastrophe? Or will people remain inert, apathetic, delusional, and fail to mount global and united resistance movements adequate

to stop the aggression, nihilism, and death drive of an omnicidal system?

We need the largest, broadest, boldest, and most systemic and inclusive visions and strategies possible. We require the most uncompromising, militant form of politics we can muster. To stop the machinery of planetary war, we must employ every means at our disposal—from nonviolent resistance to civil disobedience, from sabotage to liberation, and from guerilla warfare to armed struggle. We must not take anything off the table, for everything is at stake. From Athens to Paris, from New York City to Brazil, there is growing realization that politics as usual just will not cut it anymore.

We will always lose if we play by “their” rules rather than invent new forms of struggle, new social movements, and literally arm ourselves against unconscionably violent forces. The defense of the earth requires immediate and decisive action: logging roads must be blocked, driftnets should be sliced, whaling ships need to be scuttled, and cages of every kind need emptying. But beyond these minimal defense measures, we must forge a powerful resistance movement and build a revolutionary alternative to the current “system.” We need to radically change our values, identities, worldviews, economic systems, social and political institutions, and our relations to one another, to other animals, and to the earth as a whole.

The global capitalist world system is inherently destructive to people, animals, and nature. It is unsustainable and the bills for three centuries of industrialization are overdue. It cannot be humanized, civilized, or made green-friendly, but rather must be transcended through revolution at all levels—social, economic, political, legal, cultural, technological, moral, and conceptual. We must replace single-issue approaches and fragmentary struggles with systemic battles and political alliances. In the most encompassing terms, these clashes address the war against humans, animals, and the earth, and must combine in a politics of total liberation. We must link the liberation of humans to other animals to the planet as a whole. We need to build a revolutionary movement strong enough to vanquish capitalist hegemony and to remake society without the crushing loadstones of anthropocentrism,

speciesism, patriarchy, racism, classism, statism, heterosexism, ableism, and every other pernicious form of hierarchical domination.

Articulating connections among human, animal, and earth liberation movements will be challenging, to say the least. Given the advanced nature of the crisis, the feeble and fragmented resistance to total war, the tribalist tendency of humans to divide rather than unite, and the ferocity of repression one can expect to the degree this struggle could advance, we must acknowledge this truth.

Thus, I am not being glib, naïve, or complacent in advocating the project of total liberation. On the contrary, I am acutely aware of the difficulties and complexities involved in such an epic political battle and harbor no illusions about humanity, anymore than I entertain fantasies about the good intentions of corporations or the benevolence of the state.

Despite the inspirational platitude, we must realize that failure *is* an option. Our future is problematic at best and doomed at worst. There is no inherent purpose we are here to fulfill, no destiny at which we are assured to arrive at in glory, however tardy, tattered, bruised, and blackened we might be. There are no guiding angels to protect us from failure and no God to save us from an apocalypse. Countless millions of species have been annihilated in past extinction events, our Homo ancestors are gone forever, we are dispatching thousands of other species into oblivion, and there is nothing but the determination of aware, concerned, and committed peoples to save Homo sapiens from vanishing into nothingness as well. As Michael Boulter notes, the earth is a self-organizing system that strives toward balance, and species lose out, if necessary, to the larger dynamics of ecological imperatives. “Extinctions are an essential stimulus to the evolutionary process,” and humans are not only expendable in the overall calculus, their demise would be a positive and necessary event.⁵

Nor are there inexorable laws or wheels of fate that have predetermined disaster and demise. We must change our course, and we can—*if* a critical mass of people throughout the world can understand the current crises and respond with the level of urgency, solidarity, and militancy necessary to transcend this evolutionary impasse.

That Is a Big “if”

While horrifying to contemplate from our perspective, *Homo sapiens* may not have the will, intelligence, or resolve to meet the greatest challenge and threat it has ever faced. It might thereby succumb to the same oblivion that engulfed all its hominid ancestors, and into which it dispatched countless thousands of other species. Just as ancestral hominids have gone extinct, so have prior civilizations collapsed. As Diamond has shown, numerous civilizations throughout history (including the inhabitants of Easter Island, the ancient Mayan, and the Greenland Norse) have suffered economic and social collapse due to overpopulation, overfarming, overgrazing, overhunting, deforestation, soil erosion, and starvation.⁶ We are repeating the same mistakes of the past, still refusing to recognize ecological laws and limits to growth; the future is as bleak as the historical pattern is monotonously clear.

In an era of catastrophe and crisis, the continuation of the human species in a viable or desirable form, is obviously contingent and *not a given or a necessary good*. But considered from *the standpoint of animals and the earth*, the demise of humanity would be the best imaginable event possible, and the sooner the better. The extinction of *Homo sapiens* would remove the malignancy ravaging the planet, destroy a parasite consuming its host, shut down the killing machines, and allow the earth to regenerate while permitting new species to evolve. After 4.6 billion years of evolution, earth is only middle-aged, and there is ample time for an amazing abundance of stunning new life forms to emerge.

This time it is we who are the meteor crashing into the earth, and we keep crashing and crashing and crashing, never allowing the planet to recover. We are a meteor *storm* that continuously, repetitively keeps slamming into the planet, precluding adaptation and blocking recovery. If we cannot learn how to live on this planet and harmonize our existence with other species and the biocommunity as a whole, then, frankly, we have no right to live at all. If we can only exploit, plunder, and destroy, then surely our demise is for the greater good. Whereas worms, pollinators, dung beetles, and countless other species are vital

to a flourishing planet, *Homo sapiens* is the one species the earth could well do without.

Every crisis harbors opportunities for profound change, whether it is a disease in the body or a deep disturbance in a species and its dysfunctional mode of existence. The current state of emergency and the severity of the social and ecological crises haunting humanity and the planet are so grave as to demand radical positive changes in humanity itself. It requires nothing less than our drawing on every positive capacity we have and forcing us to evolve at every level, individually and collectively, spiritually and politically.

Human evolution is not a *fait accompli*—either in the sense that things will improve with the passage of time or that our species will continue at all. Thus, the future of human evolution—in a viable and desirable form, rather than in a post-apocalyptic, barren, Social Darwinist, Mad Max world—is something that will not come easily, if at all, and demands a *struggle* on an unprecedented scale.

The main challenges of our time are these: Which road will humanity choose—the path leading to peace and stability, or the one verging toward greater war and chaos? Will we advance in a direction that establishes social justice, or which exacerbates inequality and poverty? Will we recognize that we have come to the crossroads of uncontrolled global capitalist growth and neoliberalism, or will we find an alternative route that radicalizes the modern traditions of Enlightenment and democracy and is guided by new signposts toward a future that is just, egalitarian, participatory, healthy, happy, and sane? Will we move, in David Korten's words, toward the "Great Unraveling" and plummet deeper into the abyss, or will we undertake a "Great Turning," where we finally learn to live in partnership with one another, other animals, and the earth?⁷

The only certainty is a growing planetary crisis and the need for revolutionary opposition and change. We are living in the twilight of optimism and pessimism, in the tension of hope and despair. As Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci wrote, "The challenge of modernity is to live without illusions and without becoming disillusioned."⁸

Notes

Preface: Crisis and the Crossroads of History

1. For a critical contrast between alliance politics and single-issue approaches such as relate to identity politics, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. (London and New York: Macmillan Press and Guilford Press, 1991), and “Dawns, Twilights, and Transitions: Postmodern Theories, Politics, and Challenges,” *Democracy and Nature*, vol. 7. no. 1, March 2001, pp. 101–117, http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol7/best_kellner_postmodernism.htm.

1 The Animal Standpoint

1. “Speciesism” is the belief that humans are superior to animals by sheer virtue of having human attributes such as reason and language. Only human beings, according to this mindset, have these traits, and they endow humans with the power and the right to enslave, exploit, torture, and murder animals in any way they see fit.
2. On Nietzsche and perspectival theory, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).
3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968).
4. See, for instance, Nancy Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism,” in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (New York: Springer), pp. 283–310.
5. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

6. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).
7. On Marxist and Foucauldian theories of history, see Steven Best, *The Politics of Historical Vision: Marx, Foucault, and Habermas* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).
8. See, for instance, Stephan L. Buchmann and Gary Paul Naghan, *The Forgotten Pollinators* (Washington DC: Island Press, 1996). The role of pollinators is becoming increasingly appreciated due to the immanent crisis posed by “colony collapse disorder,” such that in countries like the United States one-third of all honeybee populations have vanished due to the deadly effects of pesticides, among other causes.
9. For an overview of the environmental impact of animal exploitation, meat production, factory farms, and the agribusiness model, see David Kirby, *Animal Factory: The Looming Threat of Industrial Pig, Dairy, and Poultry Farms to Humans and the Environment* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010).
10. See Erica Fudge, “The History of Animals” at: http://www.h-net.org/~animal/ruminations_fudge.html.
11. Ibid.
12. On animal resistance to human oppression, see Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Oakland, CA: AK Press/Counterpunch Books, 2011), and my review of this essay at: <http://drstevebest.wordpress.com/2011/01/25/animal-agency-resistance-rebellion-and-the-struggle-for-autonomy>.
13. Jim Mason, *An Unnatural Order: The Roots of Our Destruction of Nature*. (New York: Lantern Books, 2006).
14. See Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture* (New York: Plume, 1995).
15. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), p. 91.
16. Ibid., p. 86.
17. On the profound influence of animal viruses on human health and society, see Michael Greger, *Bird Flu: A Virus of Our Own Hatching* (New York: Lantern Books, 2006).
18. Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002), p. 109.
19. Quoted in Franklin Le Van Baumer, *Main Currents of Western Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 774.

20. Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Enemies, a Love Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p. 257.
21. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 114.
22. Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).
23. Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit* (New York: Bantam, 1995).
24. Hardy cited in Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 43.
25. See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
26. Here, as in chapter 3, I often use the word “violence” with quotation marks to resist conflating damage caused to property (sabotage) with harm caused to sentient life.
27. Jensen, “What Goes Up Must Come Down,” in Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella (eds.), *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), p. 287.
28. Ibid.
29. Derrick Jensen, “World at Gunpoint: Or, What’s Wrong with the Simplicity Movement,” *Orion Magazine*, May/June 2009, <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/4697/>.
30. For a critique of animal studies as well as its “critical animal studies” counterpart, see Steven Best, *The Rise (and Fall) of Critical Animal Studies*: [http://www.liberazioni.org/articoli/BestS-TheRise\(and%20Fall\)ofCriticalAnimalStudies.pdf](http://www.liberazioni.org/articoli/BestS-TheRise(and%20Fall)ofCriticalAnimalStudies.pdf).

2 The New Abolitionism: Capitalism, Slavery, and Animal Liberation

1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1* (1867), trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 926.
2. See Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).
3. Tom Regan, <http://www.cultureandanimals.org/pop1.html>.
4. *Walker’s Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life by Garnet and Walker* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/16516>).
5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.
7. Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America, Buffalo, N.Y., 1843," <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/8/>.
8. Garrison cited in *Before the Mayflower*, pp. 152–53.
9. Douglass cited in *Before the Mayflower*, p. 160.
10. For a thorough historical, philosophical, and political discussion of the controversies and conflicts surrounding use of the term "animal holocaust," see Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002). In the final section of his book, Patterson describes the schism in the Jewish community, whereby many Holocaust survivors completely understood the close parallels between what Nazis did to Jews and others and what humans do to animals, between concentration camps and factory farms and slaughterhouses, and stopped eating animals. Others who lacked this empathetic insight resented and rejected the analogy to animals and insisted that the term holocaust could only be used to describe the Jewish experience in Nazi Germany.
11. Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1997).
12. Dick Gregory, <http://www.peta.org/animalliberation/angerOverExhibit.asp>.
13. See Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Oakland, CA: AK Press/Counterpunch, 2011).
14. For a classic example of the speciesist leftist denial of this basic fact and "animal liberation" discourse, based on Cartesian-mechanistic assumptions, see Takis Fotopoulos and John Sargis, "Human Liberation vs. Animal 'Liberation,'" *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, vol. 2, no. 3 (June 2006): http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol2/vol2_no3_Takis_Sargis_animal.htm.
15. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994 [1903]), p. v.
16. See Steven Best, "The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act: New, Improved and ACLU Approved," *International Journal for Inclusive Democracy*, vol. 3, no. 3 (July 2007): http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no3_best.htm.
17. For the classic statement of how advanced capitalist societies easily disarm, co-opt, and commodify protest and resistance movements, see

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991 [1964]).

18. Francione first developed his critique of “new welfarism” in his book *Rain without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), and he reiterated the main points of that book ad nauseam in subsequent books, articles, and blog posts.
19. Joan Dunayer, *Speciesism* (New York, Lantern Books, 2004), p. 69.

3 The Paralysis of Pacifism: In Defense of Militant Direct Action

1. As I employ it, the term “militant direct action” refers to actions taken against exploiters by people who forego relying on a corrupt state apparatus to bring about change in order to take justice into their own hands. Direct action can be legal or illegal, nonviolent or violent, in nature, but in either case involves activists confronting oppressors without the mediation of the state. I add the qualifier “militant” to contrast bona fide social resistance movements from the lifestyle consumerism that pacifist vegans attempt to dignify as direct action. Lifestyle vegans and fundamentalist pacifists thereby conflate differences between individualist-oriented and mass-based tactics, erase a rich history of social movements, and dilute the political meaning of direct action. Typically, I used the term “militant direct action” to refer to underground liberation and sabotage approaches such as employed by the ALF.
2. See Eric Hoffer’s classic work, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002 [1951]). Written about converts to dogmatic philosophies such as Christianity or Marxism, Hoffer’s insights clearly apply to rigid pacifists, “vegan abolitionists,” and assorted cultists as well.
3. For a partial list of animal and environmental activists killed worldwide by various industries and governments, see Bert Bently, “Killing Earth Angels,” *Lowbagger.Org*, December 20, 2006, at: <http://lowbagger.org/killingeearthangels.html>, and the “Environmental and Animal Activists Injured or Killed,” *SourceWatch* (http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Animal_activists_who_have_been_injured_or_killed).

4. Malcolm X, "Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity" (1964), <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity>.
5. Tom Regan, "How to Justify Violence," in Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella II (eds.), *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals* (New York: Lantern Books, 2004), pp. 231–36.
6. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. xii–xiii.
7. On animal resistance to human slave masters, see Steven Best, "Animal Agency: Resistance, Rebellion, and the Struggle for Autonomy," <http://drstevebest.wordpress.com/2011/01/25/animal-agency-resistance-rebellion-and-the-struggle-for-autonomy/>.
8. For background and updates on elephant and rhino poaching in Africa, see the website *Bloody Ivory* at: <http://www.bloodyivory.org>) and the news archives of *Cee4Life* (<http://cee4life.org/cee4life.php> and *New York Times* at: <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/i/ivory/index.html>.
9. "Martial Law of the Jungle," *Boston Globe*, December 21, 2008, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2008/12/21/martial_law_of_the_jungle/.
10. See, for instance, *Bite Back* at: <http://directaction.info/>, *Animal Liberation Frontline* at: <http://www.animalliberationfrontline.com/>, and *Animal Liberation Front.com* at <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Actions-index.htm>.
11. See "Terrorists or Altruists?" *New Internationalist*, issue 215, January 1991.
12. For details on many ALF victories, for instance, see the Introduction to *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?* Also see "Blast From the Past— '80s Lab Raids," *No Compromise*, issue 15, Winter 1999/2000, http://www.nocompromise.org/issues/15blast_past.html and "Timeline of Animal Liberation Front Actions, 1976–1999," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Animal_Liberation_Front_actions,_1976%E2%80%931999.
13. Both quotes cited in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?* p. 43. Also see "Animal Welfare Advocates Win Victories in Britain with Violence and Intimidation," *New York Times*, August 8, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/08/international/europe/08rights.html>.

4 Rethinking Revolution: Veganism, Animal Liberation, Ecology, and the Left

1. I use the term “left” in both broad and narrow senses. We can distinguish “left” from “liberal” politics in that the former seeks revolutionary transformation of capitalist society while the latter seeks to reform institutions it deems to be basically sound rather than inherently flawed. Specifically, by “left” I mean the entire spectrum of radical ideologies and politics that have evolved since the nineteenth century, including Marxism, socialism, communism, anarchism, and countless variations on these themes. I also use the term “social progressive” to refer to people or groups or movements seeking to promote “progressive” change in society—namely reforms ameliorate some of the harshest inequities and injustices of capitalism and promotes core modern values such as democracy, equality, rights, and autonomy. I sometimes use the terms “leftist,” “left-liberal” or “progressives” to designate all tendencies that seek positive changes in society, whether from a radical or reformist perspective. The point of lumping these different approaches together in some contexts is to emphasize that despite their differences, radicals and reformists share a speciesist worldview that leads them to dismiss or deride vegan and animal rights viewpoints. As I find all dogmatic humanist philosophies to be regressive, discriminatory, hypocritical, and inconsistent with the values championed by leftists and liberals, I resist as much as possible to put redundant scare quotes around terms such as “radical” and “progressive.”
2. For further analysis and example of various kinds of alliance politics, see Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella II (eds.) *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006).
3. The intense hostility the Left has toward vegans and animal rights, to some extent understandable, is embarrassingly flaunted in an endless stream of infantile, ignorant, ad hominem, and abusive attacks in essays and commentary on anarchist sites such as Indymedia and Libcom.org.
4. Personal correspondence with Fotopoulos in December 2005, cited with permission.
5. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

6. See, *Marx and Engels on Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), p. 322.
7. Gail Eiznitz, *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997).
8. Michael Albert, “Progressives: Outreach is the Key. The *Satya* Interview with Michael Albert,” *Satya*, September, 2002, <http://satyamag.com/sept02/albert.html>.
9. Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, rev. ed. (Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1991). See Steven Best, “A Critical Appraisal of Murray Bookchin’s *The Ecology of Freedom*,” *Organization and Environment*, volume 20, number 3. September 1998: 283–99.
10. On the environmental impact of factory farming, see Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture* (New York: Dutton, 1993), and David Kirby, *Animal Factory: The Looming Threat of Industrial Pig, Dairy, and Poultry Farms to Humans and the Environment* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010).
11. See Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), and *The Race for What’s Left: The Global Scramble for the World’s Last Resources* (New York: Picador, 2012).
12. “Assessing the Environmental Impacts of Consumption and Production,” http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/pdf/DTIx1262xPA-PriorityProductsAndMaterials_Report.pdf.
13. “Greenpeace Urges Kangaroo Consumption to Fight Global Warming,” Karen Collier, *Herald Sun*, October 10, 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22562480-662,00.html>.
14. David Nibert, *Animal Rights/Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

5 Minding the Animals: Cognitive Ethology and the Obsolescence of Left Humanism

1. On recent scientific and technological revolutions and their implications for human nature and identity, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure: Science and Technology Studies at the Third Millennium* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001).

2. Bruce Mazlish, *The Fourth Discontinuity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).
3. David Orr, http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~cses/csessite/restricted/EreadDocs/Orr_chapter_9.pdf.
4. J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), pp. 160—61.
5. See Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); and Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
6. Richard Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes toward Speciesism* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), p. 247.
7. See “Mother of Man—3.2 Million Years Ago,” *BBC Science and Nature*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/prehistoric_life/human/human_evolution/mother_of_man1.shtml.
8. See Dale Peterson and Richard Wrangham, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Mariner Books, 1997).
9. See “Chimps Genetically Close to Humans,” *BBC News*, May 20, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3042781.stm>.
10. Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
11. To provide just some recent examples of this literature, see Roger Fouts, *Next of Kin: What Chimpanzees Have Taught Me About Who We Are* (New York: William Morro, 1997); Frans de Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex Among Apes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995); Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorry, and Empathy—and Why They Matter* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2007); Marc Bekoff, *Animals Matter: A Biologist Explains Why We Should Treat Animals with Compassion and Respect* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2007); Steve Wise, *Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2000); and *Drawing the Line: Science and the Case for Animal Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2002). For evidence that the paradigm shift of cognitive ethology is indeed finally taking

- hold, see Marc Bekoff, “Scientists Finally Conclude Nonhuman Animals Are Conscious Beings,” *Psychology Today*, August 10, 2012, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animal-emotions/201208/scientists-finally-conclude-nonhuman-animals-are-conscious-beings>.
12. See Donald Griffin, *Animal Thinking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), and *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
 13. See, for instance, Rebecca Morelle, “Birds Show Off Their Dance Moves,” *BBC News*, April 30, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8026592.stm>.
 14. See Irene Maxine Pepperberg, *The Alex Studies: Cognitive and Communicative Abilities of Grey Parrots* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
 15. See “Monkeys ‘Grasp Basic Grammar,’” *BBC News*, January 22, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3413865.stm>. On bonobo and chimpanzee communication, see Rowan Hooper, “Bonobos and Chimps ‘Speak’ with Gestures,” *NewScientist.com*, April 30, 2007, <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn11756-bonobos-and-chimps-apes-speak-with-gestures-.html>.
 16. See David Whitehouse, “Monkeys Show Sense of Justice,” *BBC News*, September 17, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3116678.stm>; and Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
 17. Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development* (Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1992).
 18. See “Chimps are Cultured Creatures,” *BBC News*, June 16, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/370807.stm>. For a sustained argument in favor of animal culture, see Eytan Avital and Eva Jablonka, *Animal Traditions: Behavioural Inheritance in Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). A famous example of animal culture in the sense of transmitted learning concerns macaque monkeys on the island of Koshima who upon discovering the benefits of washing sweet potatoes in a stream have handed down this teaching over many generations. Similarly, once some blue tit birds learned how to open milk bottles, the behavior spread across England. Other studies have shown that dolphins in Australia use sea sponges to protect their snouts when foraging, and teach this practice to their young; see Rowan Hooper, “Dolphins

- Teach Their Children to Use Sponges,” *NewScientist.com*, June 2005, <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn7475>.
19. See Frans de Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics*.
 20. See Barbara Smuts, “Orangutan Technology: How Did the Great Apes Get to Be So Smart?” *Scientific American*, November 22, 2004, <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=orangutan-technology>.
 21. See Frans de Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics*; Dario Maestripieri, *Machiavellian Intelligence: How Rhesus Macaques and Humans Have Conquered the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Natalie Angier, “Political Animals (Yes, Animals),” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/22/science/22angi.html>.
 22. See Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*.
 23. See Ursula Dickie and Gerard Roth, “Animal Intelligence and the Evolution of the Human Mind,” *Scientific American*, August 2008, <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=intelligence-evolved>.
 24. See Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Roger Lewin, *Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind* (New York: John Wiley, 1994).
 25. See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Marc D. Hauser, *Wild Minds: What Animals Really Think* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).
 26. Hauser, *Wild Minds*, p. 257.
 27. Frans de Waal, *Good Natured*, p. 207.
 28. See George Page, *Inside the Animal Mind: A Groundbreaking Exploration of Animal Intelligence* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); Michael Hanlon, “The Disturbing Question Posed by IQ Tests—are Chimps Cleverer Than Us?” *Daily Mail*, December 5, 2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-499989/The-disturbing-question-posed-iq-tests--chimps-cleverer-us.html#>; Christine Kenneally, “Animals and Us, Not So Far Apart,” *Washington Post*, April 13, 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/11/AR2008041103329_pf.html; and “Still Dumber Than a Chimpanzee,” *New Scientist.com*, February 13, 2009, <http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/shortsharpscience/2009/02/still-dumber-than-a-chimpanzee-1.html#more>.
 29. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Humankind: A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 12.

6 Moral Progress and the Struggle for Human Evolution

1. See Steven Best and Douglass Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).
2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1998 [1944]).
3. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
4. The writing of “grand narratives” runs counter to recent postmodern critiques of “metanarratives” of history which are simplistic, teleological, and homogenize disparate dynamics and events in a homogenous framework. Whereas metanarratives defined by postmodernists are indeed problematic, we should not lose sight of the narrative aspects of theory and science and the importance of macro-, or “grand,” narratives. The grand narrative of “moral progress” tries to avoid the fallacies of metanarratives, without reducing history to mere randomness. See Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*.
5. See Jürgen Habermas, “Enlightenment: An Unfinished Project,” in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983); and Jürgen Habermas and Thomas McCarthy, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
6. To be sure, some modernists had more complex and dialectical models of progressive change that allowed for regressions and reversals (which nevertheless ultimately triumphed in progressive changes). Some thinkers such as Rousseau or Nietzsche were anti-progressivist, and others such as Diderot were quite pessimistic or skeptical about the possibilities for a rational society and benevolent humanity. See Steven Best, *The Politics of Historical Visions: Marx, Foucault, and Habermas* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).
7. See Steven Best, “Genetic Engineering, Animal Exploitation, and the Challenge for Democracy,” in Carol Gigliotti (ed.), *Leonardo’s Choice: Genetic Technologies and Animals* (New York: Springer Press, 2009), pp. 3–20.
8. Island cultures and Latin American nations, in contrast, rank highest in life expectancy and happiness; see Philip Thornton, “Wealthiest Countries at Bottom of List of Happiest Societies,” *New Zealand Herald*, July 12, 2006.

9. Thus, for example, Edward Burch replaces the narrow Gross National Product index with the broader General Progress Index (GPI). Incorporating data from the United Nations “Human Freedom Index,” the GPI model employs 22 different criteria to assess human, social, and environment needs (including leisure time, educational attainment, and reduction in global warming emissions) and their levels of attainment. See Edward Burch, “Gross National Happiness,” *Clamor Magazine*, issue 35.5, January/February 2006 (http://www.clamormagazine.org/issues/35-5/content/economics_1.php).
10. Jared Diamond, “The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race,” *Discover Magazine* (May 1987), pp. 64–66.
11. Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 139.
12. On the cornucopian worldview, that essentially there are no limits to resources or growth, see Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource 2* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1998).
13. See John Zerzan, *Future Primitive: And Other Essays* (Williamsburg, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1994).
14. See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Vintage, 1980); and Manuel de Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 2000).
15. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); and Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994).
16. On the universalization of rights as a key indicator of moral progress, see Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
17. Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), p. 113.
18. Albert Schweitzer, *Philosophy of Civilization* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1987).
19. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986).
20. See Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2001).

Conclusion: Reflections on Activism and Hope in a Dying World and Suicidal Culture

1. “Planet Could Be ‘Unrecognizable’ by 2050, Experts Say,” *Phys.org*, February 20, 2011, <http://phys.org/news/2011-02-planet-unrecognizable-experts.html>.
2. See Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,” *Rolling Stone*, July 19, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>.
3. See Mike Davis, “Welcome to the Next Epoch,” *TomDispatch.com*, June 26, 2008, http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/174949/mike_davis_welcome_to_the_next_epoch.
4. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 2006).
5. Michael Boulter, *Extinction: Evolution and the End of Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 183.
6. Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin, 2011).
7. David Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2006).
8. This oft-cited quote was the phrase Gramsci used as the masthead for the radical newspaper, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, which he edited in Turin after the First World War.

Index

- ableism, 100, 105, 164
- abolitionism, 25–9, 44–9, 54
- Adorno, Theodor, 11, 139, 178n2
- agriculture/agricultural societies, xi, 8, 20, 23, 86, 93, 95, 103, 105, 140, 141, 147
- Albert, Michael, 94, 174n8
- alliance politics, xi–xiv, 19, 26, 45, 47, 48, 49, 80, 82, 83, 102, 103, 105, 158, 167n1, 173n2
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), 41
- Americans for Medical Progress, 73
- Angier, Natalie, 177n21
- animal advocacy movement, 28, 43, 48, 51, 53, 55, 69, 80, 81, 83, 87, 88, 89–90, 101, 102, 103
- animal agency, 4–6, 126, 168n12, 172n7
- Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), 73, 170n16
- animal holocaust, 29, 30, 31, 32, 37, 42, 51, 56, 61, 63, 76, 78, 83, 86, 92, 94, 96, 101, 130, 159, 162, 170n10
- animal liberation, xi, xii, 17, 19, 21, 23, 39, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 40, 41, 46, 47, 49, 55, 60, 62, 65, 70, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 81, 82, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 95, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 149, 151, 164
- Animal Liberation Front, 39–41, 43, 55, 65, 67, 70–1, 73, 84, 88
- animal rights, xi, xii, 17, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 52, 70, 71, 73, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, 91, 135, 157, 173n3
- animal slavery, 23, 29–40, 86, 87, 91, 96, 144
- animal standpoint (theory), 1–20, 37, 77, 86, 92, 99, 101–2, 104, 135, 147, 163
- animal studies, 18, 169n30
- animal welfare, 38, 42–3, 45, 46, 47, 71, 82, 83, 84, 85, 92, 96
- animality (human), 107, 110, 113, 118, 130, 143
- Anthropocene Epoch, xiii, 161
- anthropocentrism, 93, 95, 97, 99, 110, 114, 133, 140, 143, 148, 154, 163

- Aquinas, St. Thomas, 67, 140, 155
 Aristotle, 6, 126, 150, 155
 Armesto, Felipe Fernandez, 133, 177n29
 Augustine, St., 67, 155
 Avital, Eytan, 176n18
- Bacon, Francis, 111, 150, 155
 Battle of Seattle, 80
 Baudrillard, Jean, 153, 179n15
 Bekoff, Marc, 175–6n11
 Bennett, Lerone Jr., 169n2
 Bentham, Jeremy, 154
 Bentley, Bert, 171n3
 Best, Steven, 167n1, 168n7, 169n30, 172n7, 174n9, 178n1, 178n7
 Black Panthers, 58
 Blake, William, 154
 Bookchin, Murray, 95–7, 129, 174n9
 Boulter, Michael, 164, 180n5
 Boyle, Robert, 111
 Brown, John, 27, 38, 40
 Buchman, Stephan C., 168n8
 Burch, Edward, 149, 179n9
 Burnett, James, 120
 Bury, J. B., 112, 175n4
- capitalism, xiii, 18, 21, 22, 37, 43–9, 75, 78, 85, 86, 87, 92, 95, 98, 100, 105, 114, 142, 144, 145, 147, 153, 162, 173n1
 Christ, Jesus, 154
 civil disobedience, 52–5, 65, 76, 77, 163
 civil rights, 29, 30, 41, 58
 civilization, xiii, 8, 12, 13, 19, 22, 30, 89, 93, 110, 131, 134, 138, 141, 149, 151, 165
 class, 3, 4, 8, 18, 21, 29, 33, 44, 45, 48, 59, 70, 80, 85, 87, 100, 102, 114, 141, 146, 155, 159, 164
 classism, 102, 164
 climate change, ix, xiii, 45, 65, 78, 90, 97, 132, 146, 147, 157, 160
 co-evolution, 1, 7, 19, 153
 cognitive ethology, 107, 108, 109, 115, 118, 121, 122, 123, 127, 133, 135, 175–6n11
 colonialism, 11, 17, 22, 37, 85, 100, 139
 Condorcet, Marquis de, 145
 consumerism, 48, 87, 139, 171n1
 contextualism, 74–5, 78
 co-optation, 42, 80, 170n17
 Copernicus, Nicolaus, 113, 118
 critical animal studies, 169n30
- Da Vinci, Leonardo, 154
 Dart, Raymond, 120
 Darwin, Charles, 113–15, 118, 123, 125
 Davis, Mike, 180n3
 de Waal, Frans, 126, 130, 175n11, 177n19
 deLanda, Manuel, 153, 179n14
 Descartes, Rene, 111, 121, 150, 155
 Devall, Bill, 156, 179n20
 Diamond, Jared, 9, 121, 165, 168n15, 175n10, 179n10, 180n6
 Dickie, Ursula, 127, 177n23
 direct action, 16, 17, 27, 40, 45, 49, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 78, 82, 84, 87, 88, 103, 171n1
 discontinuities, 109–18

- discrimination, 14, 29, 33, 41, 91,
 105, 140, 156
 dominator cultures, 2, 17, 18, 37,
 99, 104, 109, 137, 148
 Douglass, Frederick, 27–8, 170n9
 Du Bois, W. E. B., 37, 47, 170n15
 Dunayer, Joan, 47, 171n19

 Earth First!, 18, 78, 80
 earth liberation, xii, 49, 64, 70, 78,
 80, 81, 88, 89, 96, 98, 191, 105,
 106, 164
 Earth Liberation Front (ELF), 40,
 67, 73, 78
 earth standpoint, 16, 104, 165, 147
 ecology, 56, 90, 95, 97, 104, 105,
 107, 118, 119, 133, 135, 148, 151,
 152, 156, 158, 160
 Einstein, Albert, 154
 Eisnitz, Gail, 94, 174n7
 Engels, Friedrich, 92–3, 173n5,
 174n6
 environmental/ecological crisis, 78,
 90, 95, 96, 132, 135
 environmental determinism, 4–5
 environmental movements, 17, 48,
 68, 79, 80, 81, 91, 101, 102, 159
 extensional self-defense, 53, 63,
 67–9
 extinction crisis, xiii, 45, 78, 96,
 132, 137, 149, 160, 164

 Far Right, 79, 81, 85, 87, 88, 89,
 102–3, 105
 fascism, 88, 100, 101, 103, 105,
 138, 139
 feminist standpoint theory, 3–4
 Feuerbach, Ludwig, 4

 Foreman, Dave, 98
 Fotopoulos, Takis, 87, 170n14,
 174n4
 Foucault, Michel, 3, 139, 153,
 178n3, 179n15
 Fouts, Roger, 175n11
 Francione, Gary, 42–8, 55, 171n18
 Frankfurt School, 18
 Freud, Sigmund, 57, 115–16, 118
 Fudge, Erica, 6, 168n10
 fundamentalist pacifism, 43, 52,
 56–74, 171n1
 future generations' standpoint,
 16–17

 Galileo, 113, 118
 Gandhi, Mohandas K., 13, 52, 53,
 55, 56, 58, 60, 74, 76, 154
 Garnet, Henry Highland, 26–7,
 170n7
 Garrison, William Lloyd, 27, 170n8
 global warming, 96, 98, 149,
 174n13, 179n9, 180n2
 Goodall, Jane, 120–1, 126
 Gramsci, Antonio, 168, 180n8
 Green Hill Occupy Movement, 76
 Green parties, 98
 Greenpeace, 98, 174n13
 Greger, Michael, 168n17
 Gregory, Dick, 30–1, 170n12
 Griffin, Donald, 122, 123, 176n12

 Habermas, Jurgen, 139, 178n5
 Haeckel, Ernst, 119
 Hanlon, Michael, 177n28
 Hardy, Thomas, 13
 Hartstock, Nancy, 167n4
 Hauser, Marc, 129, 177n26

- Hegel, G. W. F., 3, 167n5
- Heidegger, Martin, 138
- Herder, Johann Gottfried von, 153, 179n14
- hierarchy, 6, 17, 18, 19, 21, 31, 32, 33, 46, 47, 99, 105, 109, 126, 132, 135, 146, 154, 174n9
- Hobbes, Thomas, 113
- Hoffer, Eric, 171n2
- Holocene Epoch, xiii, 161
- Homo sapiens, xiii, 11, 13, 33, 57, 58, 99, 108, 110, 115, 117, 119, 129, 121, 124, 127, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 148, 155, 157, 162, 164, 165, 166
- homophobia, 88, 102, 105
- Hooper, Rowan, 176n15
- Horkheimer, Max, 139, 178n2
- Hribal, Jason, 168n12, 170n13, 177n22
- human evolution, 1, 4, 17, 58, 93, 107, 109, 110, 114, 115, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123, 127, 130, 131, 153, 157, 158, 161, 164, 165, 166
- Human Genome Project, 121
- human liberation, xi, 19, 32, 35, 49, 64, 80, 81, 88, 101, 105, 106, 170n14
- human nature, xii, 2, 11, 36, 37, 57, 58, 65, 74, 78, 110, 116, 119, 133, 142, 143
- human rights, 31, 80, 91, 92, 102
- human slavery, 3, 8, 10, 13, 17, 18, 21–39, 47, 91, 92, 96, 100, 143, 149
- human uniqueness, 111, 113, 117, 119, 126, 129–32
- Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), 41, 42, 43, 52, 72, 84
- humanism, 18, 19, 29, 54, 80, 90, 92, 98, 99, 104, 105, 109, 110, 113, 116, 135, 143, 146–9, 152
- Inge, William Ralph, 11–12
- Jablonka, Eva, 176n18
- Jensen, Derrick, 15, 169n27–9
- Johanson, Donald, 120
- just war, 64, 67–9
- Kant, Immanuel, 13–14, 155, 169n25
- Kellner, Douglas, 167n1, 174n1, 178n1
- Kenneally, Christine, 177n28
- Kierkegaard, Soren, 63
- King, Dr. Martin Luther Jr., 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 98, 100
- Kirby, David, 168n9, 174n10
- Klare, Michael T., 174n11
- Korten, David, 166, 180n7
- Kropotkin, Peter, 6, 125, 126, 176n17
- Kurzweil, Ray, 175n5
- Le Mettrie, JulienEffray de, 113
- leftism, 3, 29, 79–109, 116, 134, 135, 149, 170n14, 173n1
- Leopold, Aldo, 156, 179n19
- Levi-Strauss, Claude, 128–9, 177n25
- Lewin, Roger, 177n24
- Luther, Martin, 155
- Liotard, Jean-Francois, 139

- Marcuse, Herbert, 171n17
 Marx, Karl, 3, 4, 18, 21, 22, 92–3,
 145, 155, 169n1, 173n5, 174n6
 Marxism/Marxist, 3, 92, 94, 110,
 139, 145, 168n7, 171n2, 173n1
 Mason, Jim, 86, 168n13
 Masson, Jeffrey, 175n11
 Mazlish, Bruce, 111, 116, 118,
 175n2
 McCarthy, Susan, 175n11
 McKibben, Bill, 98, 161, 180n2
 Merchant, Carol, 3, 168n6
 metanarrative, 139, 147, 154, 178n4
 Milgram, Stanley, 125
 militant direct action, 17, 49,
 51–78, 103, 171n1
 Milton, John, 154
 modernity, 3, 22, 37, 109, 117, 138,
 139, 140, 146, 166
 Montaigne, Michel de, 154
 moral evolution, 22, 36, 37, 91
 moral progress, 13, 75, 90, 92,
 137–58, 178n, 179n1
 Moravec, Hans, 175n5
 More, Thomas, 154
 Morelle, Rebecca, 176n13

 Naess, Arne, 156, 179n20
 Naghan, Gary Paul, 168n8
 Nash, Roderick Frazier, 169n24,
 179n16
 new abolitionism, 23, 36–41, 47
 new social movements, 79–80
 Nibert, David, 174n14
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 2, 57, 63, 74,
 115–16, 117, 118, 167n2
 nonlinear history, 153–7

 Occupy Movement, 81
 Orr, David, 175n3
 overpopulation, 45, 165
 Ovid, 154

 pacifism, 2, 16, 46, 47, 48, 51–78
 Page, George, 177n28
 Paley, William, 154
 Paris, Susan, 73
 passivism, 54, 55, 77
 patriarchy, 3, 8, 17, 18, 100, 154, 164
 Patterson, Charles, 10, 86, 168n18,
 170n10
 Paul, 155
 People for the Ethical Treatment of
 Animals (PETA), 30–1, 42, 43,
 51, 72
 Pepperberg, Irene Maxine, 176n14
 perspectivalism, 2
 Peterson, Dale, 175n8
 Pierce, Jessica, 176n16
 Plato, 141
 pluralism, 42, 75–7
 politics of nature, 80
 Pope, Alexander, 154
 Porphyry, 154
 post-humanist, 108, 140, 151, 152
 postmodern, 27, 103, 138, 139,
 140, 149, 151, 152, 153, 167n1,
 174n1, 178n1
 pragmatic standpoint, 62–3, 69–73
 principled standpoint, 62–7
 progress, xiv, 8, 13, 22, 28, 29, 46,
 58, 75, 90, 92, 93, 99, 137–58
 Prosser, Gabriel, 27
 Ptolemy, Claudius, 112
 Pythagoras, 154

- Quinn, Daniel, 12, 169n23
- racism, 11, 17, 18, 22, 23, 25, 29, 31–3, 88, 98, 100, 102, 103, 105, 134, 154, 164
- Regan, Tom, 25, 41, 42, 64, 155, 169n3, 172n5
- resource scarcity, xiii, 32, 45, 65, 69, 81, 97, 128, 157
- Rifkin, Jeremy, 8, 168n14, 174n10
- Rights of Nature, 156, 169n24
- Roth, Gerard, 127, 177n23
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 145, 154
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), 41, 72
- Rumbaugh, Sue Savage-, 177n24
- Ryder, Richard, 118–19, 175n6
- Salt, Henry, 154
- Sargis, John, 170n14
- Schopenhauer, Arthur, 12, 169n21
- Schweitzer, Albert, 154, 156, 179n18
- Sessions, George, 156, 179n20
- sexism, 32, 188, 102, 105
- Shakespeare, William, 154
- Shaw, George Bernard, 154
- Shelly, Mary, 12, 169n22
- Shelly, Percy Bysshe, 154
- Sierra Club, 98
- Simon, Julian, 179n12
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis, 12, 169n20
- Singer, Peter, 41, 65, 156, 172n6, 179n17
- single-issue, 26, 46, 48, 53, 55, 73, 83, 85, 86, 87, 88, 100, 102, 105, 163, 167n1
- Smuts, Barbara, 177n20
- Social Darwinism, 110, 114, 115
- social justice, xi, xii, 31, 41, 80, 81, 85, 102, 103, 152, 158, 166
- social movements, xi, 41, 44, 48, 54, 72, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 85, 88, 89, 91, 94, 101, 102, 103, 135, 158, 159, 163, 171n1, 173n1
- species extinction, xiii, 45, 65, 131, 132, 133, 137, 138, 149, 160, 162, 164, 165
- speciesism, 2, 3, 6–11, 17, 19, 30–4, 43, 73, 75, 77, 82, 86, 88, 90–1, 93, 95, 99, 100, 101, 105, 109, 110, 114, 117, 118, 123, 133, 134, 135, 140, 143, 148, 154, 157, 164, 167n1
- Spencer, Herbert, 114
- Spiegel, Marjorie, 30, 170n11
- Stockholm syndrome, 49, 78, 84
- Stoics, 155
- sustainability, xii, 5, 19, 135, 153, 155
- Thornton, Philip, 178n8
- Tolstoy, Leo, 154
- total liberation, xi–xiv, 46, 47, 49, 74, 81, 82, 88, 95, 103, 105, 153, 158, 164
- Truth, Sojourner, 28
- Tubman, Harriet, 28
- Turner, Nat, 27, 40
- universalization of rights, 37, 155, 179n16
- veganism, xi, xii, 43–9, 53, 56, 79, 81, 86, 87, 90, 95, 98, 100, 101, 109

- Vesey, Denmark, 27
- violence, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20,
21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 37, 40,
52–78, 91, 92, 94, 98, 99, 100,
104, 109, 131, 132, 154, 159,
169n26
- Voltaire, 154
- Walker, David, 26, 169n4
- Washington, Booker T., 47
- Watson, Paul, 16–17
- Weber, Max, 138
- White, Caroline Earle, 154
- Whitehouse, David, 176n16
- Wise, Steve, 175n11
- World Wildlife Fund, 98
- Wrangham, Richard, 175n8
- X, Malcolm, 58, 63, 67–8, 172n4
- Zapatistas, 80
- Zerzan, John, 151, 179n13