



UNPOPULAR VEGAN ESSAYS

UNPOPULAR ESSAYS CONCERNING POPULAR VIOLENCE INFLICTED ON THE INNOCENT



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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2011

Animal Cruelty: Who is to Blame?

I wrote this article with Angel Flinn, who is Director of Outreach for Gentle World — a [vegan intentional community](#) and non-profit organization whose core purpose is to help build a more peaceful society, by educating the public about the [reasons for being vegan](#), the benefits of [vegan living](#), and how to go about making such a transition.

This article was originally published September 23, 2011 on Care2.

- Dan Cudahy, author of *Unpopular Vegan Essays*

For many of us who are aware of the multitude of ways that animals suffer at the hands of humans around the world, this ubiquitous cruelty is the most pressing social justice issue of them all. From declawing to debeaking, ear clipping to tail docking, the suffering that human beings inflict on animals being used for food, clothing, research, 'pets' and entertainment appears to know no bounds, and the many brutal ways in which we force animals to succumb to our desires appear to be limited only by the scope of our imaginations.

But why does all this cruelty take place? And what can we do about this horrifying brutality as individuals? It's easy to point the finger at

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the direct perpetrators of animal cruelty as being villains who need to be brought to justice. It's much harder – and yet much more significant – to turn that critical eye inward and ask oneself, 'What am I doing to contribute to this?' But it is only by asking that question that the path toward emancipation from barbaric injustice becomes clear.

The vast majority of the time, money and effort of animal welfare organizations goes toward trying to develop new laws and regulations to address the many separate issues relating to animal cruelty, while at the same time trying to force the industry to adhere to those currently in place. As explained in [Are Anti-Cruelty Campaigns Really Effective?](#), these efforts consistently fail to create any significant improvement for animals.

Behind these campaigns lies a hidden assumption that the animal industry is responsible for animal cruelty. But is this assumption warranted? Isn't industry simply a middle agent put in place to do the dirty deeds requested by consumers of animal products? Although it's true that the animal industry is an *eager and aggressive* middle agent, its role is only that of middle agent. As such, while institutionalized exploiters certainly have a lot to answer for, *it is consumers who are primarily responsible for animal cruelty* through their purchases of animal products.

Many people will likely respond that their concern is not with the rights of animals not to be enslaved and killed, but with the excessive brutality in the animal industry; gratuitous violence for instance, and the cruelty that is inflicted on animals along the way to being slaughtered and butchered – debeaking, dehorning, detoeing, mulesing, castration, tail docking, etc. But as long as our society continues to [treat animals as property and economic commodities](#), our legal system will continue to accept such mutilations as a necessary evil on the way to providing goods and services to a human population largely indifferent to what is hidden behind remote sheds and slaughterhouses.

In any case, even if we did find some way to eliminate every single practice involving physical mutilation, it's impossible to make slavery and murder anything other than slavery and murder. We can slap fancy labels on the products of animal misery and market them as 'humanely-raised', 'animal compassionate', 'ethically-produced' or 'guilt-free', but needless killing is needless killing, and no amount of regulation can change that.

It is understandable that individual stories of horrific suffering make people want to seek out the perpetrators, bring them to justice, and protect potential victims from experiencing the same treatment. But pointing the finger at institutional exploiters ignores the most significant issue – that no matter what the suppliers do along the way, consumption of animal products ultimately requires taking animals' lives.

How can we expect morally decent behavior from the people we ask to carry out the task of breeding, confining and ultimately killing and butchering the animals we choose to enslave and eat? These are innocent beings who most people would rather caress and embrace than hurt and kill.

There is something very unjust about the fact that we delegate the most obscene work of our society to a select few who are emotionally hardened enough to carry it out, only to later denigrate them for their

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disconnection from their natural sense of empathy. When thinking about it honestly, most of us would be hard-pressed to find it in ourselves to slaughter an animal – or to rip off her skin, or slice open her body to remove the entrails, or butcher her flesh into supermarket-sized pieces... And yet, we continue to ask others to do it for us, while most people refuse to even watch these things on video or hear others describe them.

But our distaste toward being involved in such violent acts isn't something that should be squelched and suppressed, as Michael Pollan or [Julie Powell](#) would have us believe. No – we should be grateful for the revulsion we feel when we imagine what happens to animals in between being born and being on our plates. Our horror is a sane reaction to practices that are nothing short of horrifying.

We cannot separate ourselves from depravity simply because we have found a way to tuck the dirty deeds out of sight – behind the walls of slaughterhouses and other obscure buildings. And all the disconnection and indifference in the world cannot change the fact that it is impossible to distinguish the immorality of a Pollan-style DIY approach from the immorality of any other act of unnecessary violence.

In any court of law, those who are complicit in a crime are considered to be responsible along with those who carry it out.

As expressed so eloquently by Ralph Waldo Emerson,

“You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.”

POSTED BY UNPOPULAR VEGAN ESSAYS AT 10:58 AM     

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [Animals and the Moral Community: Mental Life, Moral Status, and Kinship](#)
- [Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation](#)
- [Animals, Property, and the Law](#)
- [Ethical Intuitionism](#)
- [Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog](#)
- [Rain Without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement](#)

VEGAN MENUS AND RECIPES

- [Incredibly Delicious \(highly recommended\)](#)
- [Raw on \\$10 a Day or Less](#)
- [Seitan Is My Motor](#)
- [Sporks or Chopsticks](#)

[The Natural Epicurean Academy of Culinary Arts](#)

[The Natural Epicurean Blog](#)

[Various Vegan Cookbooks](#)

[Vegan Baking and Other Vegan Cookbooks](#)

[Vegan Dad](#)

[Vegan Improv - Food and Wine](#)

[Vegan Parenting: This Little Piggy Had Tofu](#)

[Vegan Yum-Yum](#)

[veganize everything](#)

[What The Hell Does a Vegan Eat Anyway?](#)

VEGAN NUTRITION

[American Dietetic Association on Vegan Diets](#)

[The China Study](#)

[Becoming Vegan](#)

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Busting Five Vegan Myths - A Follow-Up

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The Vegan Solution

A Call to Vegetarians

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Working Class Vegan

"Plants are alive/have feelings too."

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Ethereal Blend Blog

There is no "Team Omnivore" and Vegans are not alone

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[Abolition of Speciesism \(In English and Spanish\)](#)

[Animal Rights Malta](#)

[Animal Rights Violations](#)

[Animal Rights: The Abolitionist Approach \(In French\)](#)

[Boston Vegan Association](#)

[Carolina Vegan Association](#)

[Gary L. Francione: Abschaffung der Tiersklaverei \(In German\)](#)

[Gary Steiner, Professor of Philosophy, Bucknell University](#)

[Gentle World](#)

[Green Kolibri \(In Russian\)](#)

[LiveVegan on Facebook](#)

[LiveVegan on YouTube](#)

[LOBSA](#)

[The Production of "I'm Vegan"](#)

[The Unofficial Gary Francione Website](#)

[The Vegan Life](#)

[Vegan Examiner: Adam Kochanowicz](#)

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