

# Corporate Power, Ecological Crisis, and Animal Rights

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The global ecological crisis, deepening with each passing year, threatens the world as never before, an outgrowth of unrestrained corporate power that today colonizes every realm of human life. The crisis intersects with virtually every social problem, from declining public health to chaotic weather patterns, growing poverty, resource depletion, agricultural collapse, even military conflict. It goes to the core of industrialism and modernity, to relentless efforts by privileged interests to commodify and exploit all parts of the natural world, including most natural habitats and species within it. The power of a neoliberal international system based in the United States and a few other advanced capitalist nations is so great, moreover, that a crisis which earlier might have been contained now veers out of control, with few political mechanisms or counterforces to resist it. Living habitats are being ravaged at such an alarming rate that the carrying capacity of the earth has already been exceeded, a process of destruction justified by resort to such high-sounding virtues as social progress, material prosperity, and national security. Since transnational corporations, bolstered by immense government and military power, recognize few limits to their quest for wealth and domination, anti-system movements will be forced to adopt increasingly radical politics—progressive socialization of the state and economy, alternative modes of production and consumption, a new paradigm of natural relations. This means nothing short of a qualitative break with longstanding patterns of development if the planet is to be saved from imminent disaster.

If a political shift of this magnitude seems utterly remote and utopian, that is to be expected: genuine alternatives to the global corporate-military tyranny are presently weak and fragmented, and what exists lacks strategic coherence. Some progressive forces retain the capacity to disrupt business-as-usual, others have the power to achieve limited reforms, but none pose any real threat to the power structure. There are no truly anti-system movements of any scope or permanence, including among the multitude of environmental organizations and groups, despite the urgency of the crisis. In the case of animal rights, three decades of popular struggles have shown that even modest gains have been won slowly, with great difficulty, and against imposing obstacles. Of course this problem is scarcely unique to the challenge of transforming natural relations: time-honored goals of disarmament, ending poverty, and conquering disease, for example, are today no closer to realization than they were many decades ago. Still, where struggles to dramatically uplift the world raise such compelling political and moral issues, pessimism or resignation is simply no option insofar as history shows that even limited victories can set in motion more far-reaching dynamics of change. In the existing state of affairs, moreover, an attitude of retreat makes less and less sense insofar as fissures and cracks in a seemingly efficient monolithic system have begun to widen as global capitalism reaps more and more of its own bitter harvest.

Home to an aggressive global empire, the United States has built far-flung networks of corporate, political, and military power that only grudgingly recognize boundaries to their restless ambitions. Across its history this imperial system has followed a path of continuous and violent expansion, colonizing whatever it could, including nations, cultures, working peoples, resources, all of nature—indeed anything that could be turned into profitable commodities. Its vast arsenal of doomsday weapons, now being refined and upgraded, have held the world at its mercy for many decades. Elites and their ideological mouthpieces celebrate this murderous order fueled by racism and national chauvinism and rooted in an arrogant exceptionalism—that is, the righteous conviction that the “American model”

rooted in Manifest Destiny is the very best ever invented, the perfect embodiment of progress, modernity, and democracy. Any violent methods deemed necessary to spread this “model” are considered rational and legitimate, in fact routine, part of the ordinary scheme of things. U.S. imperial domination has a long record of ruthless interventions unmatched in the postwar decades: repeated forcible overthrows of foreign governments, covert operations around the globe, several million dead along with tens of millions casualties, millions more displaced from homes and communities, ravaged natural environments from Korea to Vietnam to Iraq. In such a universe it is to be predicted that the fate of nonhuman animals would be many times worse, creatures also victimized without end by war and ecological assault—not counting those imprisoned and slaughtered each year by the tens of billions for food, sports, biomedical research, and entertainment.

The struggle for animal rights—for fundamentally altered relations between humans and nature—intersects in many ways with the modern crisis, and thus also with the imperatives of future social change—a concern that can no longer be so easily dismissed as the rantings of a few isolated misanthropes. Three decades ago Peter Singer called for a new kind of liberation movement, one demanding a radical expansion of human moral horizons—above all, rejection of the horrors people have for centuries visited on other sentient beings, a condition historically viewed as natural and unchangeable.[1] For Tom Regan, the problem revolves around humans choosing to instrumentalize nonhuman beings as simple resources within an exploitative system that must be overturned in toto, a system that fails to recognize a crucial moral principle—that all sentient beings have inherent value, each the experiencing subject of life, each a conscious being with defensible interests, including the avoidance of human-inflicted pain, suffering, and death. Regan insists that we go beyond the ethic of “humane treatment” to embrace the goal of abolitionism, implicit in a strong rights position taken from the progressive side of liberal theory.[2] Once animal interests are situated within a larger social and ecological context, as they sooner or later must be, the struggle for human and animal equity becomes part of an integrated whole. Accumulated evidence shows that animal exploitation is tightly linked to the ecological crisis in many ways, a connection that unfortunately seems to have escaped most environmentalists and leftists. The findings are clear: the same animal nightmares produced routinely by agribusiness, the meat industry, and fast-food companies also brutalize humans, as employees facing harsh working and living conditions as well as consumers suffering the toxic health effects of a meat-centered diet. The animal-food economy also devours massive resources in the form of water, land, and energy while consuming nearly half of all grains and vegetables produced in a world facing imminent and drastic food shortages and generating more pollution and dangerous wastes products than any other economic sector. This enormous meat complex is also the locus of increasing disease transmission worldwide, yet another blessing of “free market” corporate capitalism.

Today the global corporate system constitutes an ominous threat to both human and nonhuman life, an exploitative, repressive, and unsustainable juggernaut that treats all living beings as resources within a swollen production and marketing regime, as disposable commodities far removed from any moral status. If within this system the oppression of humans and animals is deeply intertwined—a guiding premise of this essay—it follows that pursuit of global justice entails new efforts to include groups (in this instance animals) previously excluded from the political calculus. At this point the ethical, political, and ecological case for advancing the interests of nonhuman sentient beings, for ending the regimen of institutionalized barbarism, is so overwhelming as to force debate from the realm of scientific “evidence” (do animals feel pain, for instance) to that of radical strategy. The main challenge ahead, therefore, is to reconstruct social and political theory to take fully into account the epochal struggle to transform natural relations within a broader, anti-system agenda of challenging the modern crisis.

Since the appearance of Singer’s *Animal Liberation* in 1975, followed by Regan’s *The Case for Animal Rights* in 1982, an incremental but clearly-visible shift in the public view of human-animal relations has occurred, inspired by a growing output of books, articles, and films, the appearance of organizations and grassroots movements, and lifestyle changes (vegetarianism and green consumerism, for instance) under the rubric of “animal rights”. [3] Previously obscured from critical inquiry, nonhuman nature became the object of philosophical discourse, mostly confined to universities in Europe and the United States. The result has been a series of reforms leading to more humane treatment of animals, the spread of direct-action politics around such issues as hunting, trapping, lab testing, and animal farming, and greater public readiness to take animal interests seriously, leading, for example, to stiffer prison sentences in cases of animal cruelty. There is a general heightened awareness, thanks partly to the Darwinian legacy, that humans and animals occupy the same temporal space, their fates organically bound together within the same planetary ecology. Yet the overall situation remains grim: long-established practices—hunting, trapping, slaughtering, lab experimenting, circuses—continue more or less without interruption, few debates over these gruesome practices

ever reaching the political sphere. Moreover, aside from its marginal leverage within the radical-ecology movement, animal-rights discourse has scarcely entered into or altered the work of left/progressive groups in the United States, across a span of some thirty years since Singer's book first appeared. Paradoxically, theoretical contributions to our understanding of natural relations have appeared mostly outside the ambience of left politics, from writers and activists with at best peripheral involvement in labor, socialist, anarchist, and left-liberal groups. Sadly, the result is that the project of animal rights remains alien to the major social-change enterprises of the current period.

## **Institutionalized Barbarism**

Efforts to overturn the system of animal exploitation will have to begin the difficult process of ideological delegitimation, that is, subversion of those hegemonic beliefs and attitudes which maintain speciesism in its multiple forms. Unfortunately, despite new theoretical inroads, the brutal treatment of other species remains outside what is considered respectable public debate, understandable given the corporate largesse involved, the huge propaganda apparatus employed by the food, gun, and biomedical interests, and the undiminished power of ingrained cultural traditions. The meat phenomenon alone amounts to something of a national secular religion, helping to shape perceptions of gender and class, national identity, and even race relations.[4] Influential philosophical, religious, political traditions serve to justify and even celebrate the use of animals for every imaginable purpose, endowing human preferences with a veneer of moral righteousness and social progress: the major God-based theologies, exalted philosophers (Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, and Kant), Enlightenment rationality with its fetishism of technological and industrial growth. These traditions carry forward, and help solidify, the very imperatives of domination and speciesism that block any political solution to the modern crisis.

Radical voices, fortunately, can nowadays be heard with increasing frequency, many offering at least passing glimpses into an alternative, ecologically-viable future, with natural relations in particular developing into a crucial zone of ethical contestation. Regan, the pioneering rights theorist, probably best articulates the thesis that no sentient being ought to be "viewed or treated as a mere receptacle or as one who has value merely relative to the interest of others." [5] Robbins, author of the seminal *Diet for a New America* and *The Food Revolution*, has done more than any other writer to ask humans to reflect on the torture that food animals are forced to endure. In a typical passage he states: "As I've learned what is done to farm animals in modern meat production, there have been times that I've not known how to live with the pain I felt. It can be overwhelming to think of each of these billions of creatures as individual beings with personalities and feelings, yet forced to endure such deprivation." [6] Gary Francione, in his comprehensive *Introduction to Animal Rights*, critically interrogates the ideology that says "animals are commodities that we own and that have no value other than that which we as property owners choose to give them." [7] Writing in *Beyond Beef*, a book deserving far more attention than it has received, Jeremy Rifkin argues: "The modern cattle complex represents a new kind of malevolent force in the world. In a civilization that still measures evil in very personal terms, institutional evil born of rational detachment and pursued with cold calculating methods of technological expropriation has yet to be assigned an appropriate rung on the moral ladder." [8] Jeffrey Masson, widely-known for his excellent work on the varied and intricate subjective capacities that animals possess, writes in *When Elephants Weep* about "innocent sufferers in a hell of our own making" whose "freedom from exploitation and abuse by humankind should be the inalienable right of every living being." [9]

Such far-reaching critiques demand a fundamental break with speciesism, that is, the ethos of human supremacy in which the rest of nature is viewed as a font of resources for human appropriation—an ethos rationalizing cruelty and killing as necessary to civilized entitlements and conveniences. Humans are exalted as basically different from other species, an undeniable contention and scarcely a topic of rational debate when it comes to assessing the sorts of mental capabilities that people valorize. Historically it was thought that only humans possessed an immortal soul, or were the only beings capable of using tools, or were the only species that could build orderly societies. Following the Great Religions and the Great Philosophers, Enlightenment thinking has come to attach to humans a range of qualities identified as unique to the species—thought, reflection, morality, planning, and empathy. It turns out that most of these traits are possessed to varying degrees by members of other species, as modern research shows, although public views have not caught up with such findings (as for "tools", it is true that only humans have massively created and deployed them for the purpose of killing). A greater problem for speciesism is that human behavior more often than not has little in common with this idealized self-conception; the dark side of humanity,

extensively recorded across history, is either ignored or downplayed, contextualized. As Jane Goodall observes in *Through a Window*, the familiar hallmarks of humanity are violated millions of times daily within the mammoth torture complexes known as packing houses, to say nothing of the never-ending chain of wars and other forms of mass murder that human beings have visit upon themselves over the centuries. “Cruelty is surely the very worst of sins”, she writes. “To fight cruelty, in any shape of form—whether it is towards other human beings or non-human beings—brings us into direct conflict with that unfortunate streak of inhumanity that lurks in all of us.”[10] Responding to self-serving human proclamations of a unique moral compassion, Singer, in *Animal Liberation*, points out “that we rarely stop to consider that the animal that kills with the least reason to do so is the human animal.”[11] Routinized killing under human auspices is practiced not only for food but for the even more questionable ends of sport, entertainment, and biomedical testing.

Animal-rights agendas face stiff challenges from agribusiness, the meat industry, the media, biomedical interests, and the resistance bred of established lifestyles. Animal-food production in the United States alone has increased no less than four times since the 1950s, despite the more recent spread of popular knowledge concerning the harmful effects of meat consumption. At present there are an estimated 20 billion livestock on earth. In the United States more than 100,000 cows and calves are slaughtered every day, along with 14,000 chickens. The Tyson plant at Noel, Missouri kills some 300,000 chickens daily while the IBP slaughterhouse at Garden City, Kansas and the ConAgra complex at Greeley, Colorado both disassemble more than 6400 steers a day.[12] All told 23 million animals are killed worldwide to satisfy human and food demands daily. In a McDonaldised society Americans now eat on average 30 pounds of beef yearly, with seemingly little concern for well-known health risks. Conditions of factory farming, said to be improved owing to reforms, are in fact worse by most standards—more crowded, more painful, more disease-ridden, more drug-saturated even than at the time of Upton Sinclair’s classic *The Jungle* (written in 1906).[13] The great misery of animals subjected to such conditions and cut off from normal social life has brought few changes from within the political system. More than half of all animals (pigs, chickens, ducks, and so forth) are afflicted with diseases like cancer and leucosis at the time of slaughter. The Federal Humane Slaughter Act supposedly ensured that animals would be rendered unconscious before being ripped to pieces but Robbins and other critics say that 90 percent are conscious as they are processed through the assembly-line terror.[14] The meat industry has virtual *carte blanche* to do whatever it wants with its commodities insofar as government monitoring ranges from sporadic to nonexistent—a situation that, as Robbins argues, amounts to a crime not only against helpless animals but against nature and indeed against humanity itself.[15] That such practices are so routine, so concealed from public sight, and so ideologically sanitized hardly subtracts from the horrors. So long as living creatures with physiological makeup very close to our own are reduced to resource-objects for human appropriation, virtually anything is possible.

The relentless assault on nonhuman nature is rooted in the same corporate-imperial order responsible for ecological crisis, militarism, resource wars, global poverty, and political repression. The old religious and philosophical belief-systems notwithstanding, no rational defense of such barbarism has been brought forward—nothing beyond blind obedience and crude prejudice. As in comparable instances of ideological convention, prejudice takes many forms. Thus Masson writes: “It has always been comforting to the dominant group to assume that those in subservient positions do not suffer or feel pain as keenly, or at all, so that they can be abused or exploited without guilt or impunity.”[16] According to such mindless bias, perfectly healthy, intelligent beings with normal survival impulses are deemed unworthy or life; their fear and misery met with (usually silent) contempt. Immersed in the meat complex materially, institutionally, and psychologically, most people cannot allow themselves to see anything unusual, much less unethical, in the pain and suffering of other creatures. Sinclair argued in *The Jungle* that anyone visiting a slaughterhouse would be quickly converted into vegetarianism, but alas these zones of torture remain invisible to the ordinary person, far removed from the sanitized and convenient supermarkets, restaurants, and fast-food outlets.

Those profiting from the food, gun, and biomedical industries see absolutely no moral problem with the killing machine, which is fully protected by Constitutional “freedoms”. On the contrary, their work is understood to be for the benefit of all humankind—after all, meat is needed for good health, hunting gives individuals much-needed diversion, lab testing helps cure diseases, and circuses provide entertainment for kids. Little in the way of explicit moral justification or even factual evidence seems required in support of such notions, since the blessings of human supremacy (God-given or otherwise) appear sufficient. As with other modes of domination, cruel and lethal practices are simply taken for granted by otherwise educated and progressive individuals. In reality *homo sapiens* do exercise “dominion” over nature given their obviously superior material and psychological advantages, an element of “anthropocentrism” that is hardly debatable. Of course humans seize every opportunity to claim special moral

qualities, placing themselves above brutal nature and the “beasts” that populate it. Yet while it is no great intellectual triumph for humans to establish their primacy over nature—they have done so for millennia—the real question turns on the exact character that primacy assumes as it is historically played out. In the present context “dominion” (as spelled out in “Genesis” and other texts) has meant exploitation and abuse, that is, domination largely bereft of positive ethical content. A different kind of human obligation would point in the direction of stewardship, calling attention to equity, balance, ecological sustainability, and coexistence between humans and the natural world.[17] So far, however, human beings have done little to distance themselves from a “brutal” or Hobbesian state of nature, having repeatedly proven themselves the most destructive and murderous of all creatures.

The view of natural relations adopted here derives from Regan’s philosophical work—namely, that all sentient beings have inalienable rights to be free of pain and suffering at the hands of humans.[18] This line of thinking holds to several interrelated premises: (1) no moral justification exists for overriding animal interests in order to serve “higher interests”; (2) what matters is not specific intellectual or communication skills but rather the capacity to experience pain, suffering, and loss; (3) while much of nature is inescapably used by humans as resources to satisfy material and other needs, this logic should not extend to other sentient beings; (4) humans ought to be stewards of nature and other species within it to the extent possible; and (5) human and animal interests are closely bound together within the same social and historical processes. Moving from these assumptions, a guiding aim of social change should be the ultimate elimination of animal exploitation in all its forms. This rises to the level of a moral imperative: if barbarism cannot be justified by necessity or by ethical precepts, then all that remains is the force of habit, prejudice, and material gain.

While humans have always dominated nature, their capacity for harm and destruction—greater today than ever—can be progressively reduced through the introduction of an animal-rights politics leading, eventually, to the end of speciesism or at least the diminution of its harshest manifestations. If the rights agenda is constrained by the very inequities of capitalism, as Ted Benton argues, that is surely no reason to reject it completely any more than we would consider jettisoning any of the multiplicity of long-established human rights.[19] In a state-corporate system where domination pervades the entire social landscape, the promise of full equal rights will always run up against limits in the form of wealth, power, and ideology. It follows that rights, given adequate legal codification, will have to be deepened as part of long-term social transformation. Conversely, any theory of animal interests will be inadequate unless integrated into a more comprehensive schema engaging issues of corporate power and ecological crisis, a challenge taken up in the following pages.

## **Neoliberal Illusions**

As with other areas of personal life now viewed as having larger public relevance, meat has traditionally been regarded as a “private” issue, in this case one’s dietary choice—a matter of individual preference. The past few decades have witnessed some changes in popular attitudes toward meat, yet most people see no connections between meat and general social problems. And these problems are indeed plentiful: resource depletion, pollution, food shortages, deforestation, global warming, and disease. Worldwatch magazine has observed: “. . . as environmental science has advanced, it has become apparent that the human appetite for flesh is a driving force behind virtually every category of environmental damage, including the growing scarcity of fresh water, loss of biodiversity, spread of toxic wastes and disease, even the destabilization of countries.”[20] This predicament is aggravated by the fivefold increase in global demand for meat in just the past four decades: with more than 6.2 billion humans on the planet, at least 90 percent consumers of meat, it takes no genius to see that the Earth’s capacity for renewal is rapidly being outstripped. The source of astronomical profits for agribusiness, meatpackers, grocers, and the fast-food industry—in fact a bulwark of the entire corporate system—meat is today a decisive factor in altering planetary life. [21]

In a word, meat is highly unsustainable, and is destined to become more so over time unless existing consumption patterns are reversed. It demands great reservoirs of energy in the form of fossil fuels—pesticides, fertilizers, transport, processing, for example—and this, along with enormous waste and toxics from animal farming, is the largest source of water and soil pollution. In the United States, moreover, nearly 60 percent of all grains are fed to animals. Great expanses of land worldwide have long been overgrazed, leading to soil erosion while vast regions are being deforested to make room for animal grazing and farming. Half of all water is utilized in meat production, which, owing to toxics and runoffs, also contaminates shrinking water tables. Overall, meat drains a staggering

amount of resources and energy at a time when their availability is peaking or declining. In the case of global warming, livestock account for more than 20 percent of world methane emissions, not including fossil fuels used in agriculture and transport. Though the staggering material wastefulness and ecological dysfunctions of the meat industry is no secret, the sad reality is that as societies develop economically and their middle strata grow, meat consumption tends to increase sharply as it is widely considered a symbol of affluence and good-living. The public demand for meat escalates at precisely the historical moment when arable land is shrinking, oil resources are peaking, soil is becoming depleted, and water supplies are more problematic than ever.

Meanwhile, agricultural surpluses dwindle and more than one billion people around the world are chronically hungry—a figure that is sure to increase dramatically. Although world grain output has tripled since 1950, with the introduction of fertilizers and high-yield seeds, such growth has reached an end as farmers globally are now, in Lester Brown's words, "faced with shrinking supplies of irrigation water, rising temperatures, the loss of cropland to nonfarm uses, rising fuel costs, and a dwindling backlog of yield-raising technologies." [22] At the same time, world meat consumption rose from 47 million tons in 1950 to 260 million tons in 2005, a fivefold increase, while out of 220 tons of soybeans produced globally (in 2005) just 15 million tons were consumed by humans. World population is expected to reach over 9 billion by 2050, but life-support systems will never be able to satisfy food demands of even half that many people given present trends. The result is we now have a degree of unsustainability that is taking the planet toward catastrophe. Concludes Brown: "Our global economy is outgrowing the capacity of the earth to support it, moving early twenty-first century civilization closer to decline and possible collapse." [23]

Spurred by unfettered corporate expansion, neoliberal globalization thus subverts ecological balance by its very logic, but an often neglected component of this downward cycle is animal-based agriculture. Neoliberalism legitimates its unsustainable practices on a foundation of technocratic arrogance, mythological belief in "free market" economics, an instrumental view of nature, and contempt for other species. If U.S. elites stand at the forefront of such thinking, they are hardly alone: the global ecosystem has little value to corporate ideology in any setting, for that would intrude on profit-making. Insofar as sustainability requires developmental balance, respect for nature, limits to growth, and renewal of resources, a transformed relationship between humans and animals logically follows, as does a worldwide move toward population reduction.

This last point deserves further elaboration. World population is expected to double over the next fifty years, at which time a sustainable economy—assuming present trends—will be a long-forgotten possibility. Rapid population growth brings a steady decline in per capita resources, increase in toxic wastes and pollution, extreme crowding in major cities, intolerable demands on public infrastructure, drastic loss of biodiversity, diminution of remaining species, and intensified global warming well beyond anything currently imagined. Food and water resources will be consumed far past crisis levels. Both agriculture and industry will be stymied, spreading poverty, joblessness, social chaos, ecological breakdown, and general calamity. [24] The Pimentels are not overstating the case when they observe that "Humanity is approaching a crisis point with respect to the interlocking issues of population, natural resources, and sustainability." [25] Since sustainable global population has been estimated at roughly two and a half billion people, we can assume that a population of 12 billion will tax planetary capacity to the point of catastrophe. [26] And if meat production continues anywhere close to present levels—and it is projected to rise sharply—the crisis will be simultaneously hastened and exacerbated. Unfortunately, at present no serious political counter-forces exist, with the United States taking the lead in stonewalling even modest attempts to curtail global warming and related environmental threats. And very few observers (left, center, or right) have even posed the question of how meat production and consumption heavily weighs on sustainability.

For corporate managers across the globe unlimited accumulation has always trumped social and ecological imperatives. Having for years pretended that global warming is a liberal myth, the George W. Bush administration was forced to backtrack, but still insisted that any challenges could be met by benevolent functioning of the "free market", itself an actual conservative myth. In December 2005 more than 10,000 delegates from 189 countries met in Montreal to discuss how to reverse climate change, but the United States, (source of no less than 30 percent of all greenhouse emissions) sought to obstruct reform efforts as its chief negotiator, Harlan Watson, walked out of the proceedings, continuing a rejectionist pattern established at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. If a sustainable economy requires emphasis on the process of natural renewal, then neoliberal globalization—by far more exploitative, coercive, and destructive than in the past—can no longer be tolerated by either humans or other species. Under existing conditions, nature cannot begin to renew itself, meaning that conscious human intervention, relying on those special ethical and political qualities people claim to possess, is an urgent imperative. (Anthropocentrism

in this sense cannot be denied, and in fact ought to be welcomed.) Ecological balance depends on a shift away from corporate agendas, toward a regimen of public goods, long-term social planning, renewable energy resources, reduced population levels, and a vegetarian-based agriculture—now less a matter of individual preference than of collective survival. Progressive social change today is unthinkable without confronting an ensemble of problems: corporate power, ecological crisis, population pressures, meat-based agriculture. How theorists and activists of the left have managed to avoid this constellation of issues remains one of the great puzzles of the current period.

## **Addicted to Meat**

If it can be said that the United States is addicted to militarism and war as the famous volume *Addicted to War* graphically puts forth then it might equally be argued that the nation is addicted to meat and all that comes with it, including the fast-food mania. A major difference is that meat permeates the entire society to a degree even beyond the culture of violence. Psychological habituation occurs and is reinforced on several levels—political, economic, cultural, personal, even religious—and is reproduced by agricultural, industrial, and service networks that have grown dramatically over the past few decades. Fast food alone has exploded since the 1970s, helping reshape the entire American landscape: home, schools, media, sports, and workplace.[27] According to Eric Schlosser, Americans spent \$134 billion on fast food alone in the year 2000, more than was spent on college education, personal computers, or new cars.[28] Animal products now fuel the modern industrial system everywhere, a (false) symbol of human prosperity but also a source of mounting social, workplace, health, and environmental ills. Poor people and youth are most heavily targeted by fast-food advertising campaigns indifferent to the great harm their products bring to the workers who manufacture them, human health, the environment, and the animals they disassemble.

Rifkin illustrates how the beef complex, long ago seen as a vehicle of modernity, developed historically alongside an Enlightenment project fixated from the outset on the total commodification of nature.[29] Scientific discovery, technological innovation, and industrial growth were all harnessed to the sprawling meat enterprises that in the U.S. became especially valued as part of the frontier expansion. At the time of the Westward push meat was a dominant economic and cultural force, reinvigorating the capitalist ethic of material acquisition and masculine ethic of rugged individualism.[30] Since then the cattle system celebrated in hundreds of Western books and movies has become a pervasive element of the social order, a staple of the American diet, site of bountiful profit-making, and a nightmare for animals that Sinclair was just the first to bring to (U.S.) public attention. By the 1950s meat could be linked to the rise of suburbia, the automobile culture, and an expanding electronic media that helped drive McDonaldization, a food regimen integral to fast-paced urban and suburban lifestyles while the apparatus itself (both production and consumption) came under Fordist operating principles: uniformity, speed, efficiency, standardization, affordability. All the historical components of animal farming and meat processing were thoroughly rationalized, generating and satisfying public demand for hamburgers, hot dogs, steak, luncheon meats, and related fare. Workers at factory farms, slaughterhouses, canning plants, and fast-food outlets were mostly recruited from low-wage minority labor and subjected to alienating, routinized, toxic, and dangerous jobs involved in the disassembling of animals. As for cattle, they were (and are) dehorned, castrated, injected with hormones and antibiotics, sprayed with insecticides, and transported to automated slaughterhouses before being killed, then broken down into countless marketable parts, ultimately to wind up at butcher shops, stores, and restaurants. Used in literally hundreds of industrial and food products, beef alone generates huge profits for corporations like ConAgra, Cargill, Tyson, IBP, and McDonalds. The same ritual is repeated for chickens, ducks, pigs, sheep, turkeys, and other creatures, by the millions each day, all subject to similar assembly-line horrors.

As McDonaldization appears to symbolize modernity in food production and consumption, meat has evolved into one of the most saleable commodities for corporations that benefit from mobile lifestyles dependent on relatively cheap energy sources. Champions of advertising and marketing, the meat companies fiercely resist government regulation precisely in that sector (food) most desperately in need of it to monitor health threats, toxic emissions, harsh working conditions, and extreme cruelty to animals. The industry has emerged as a bastion of rightwing politics infatuated with neo-Darwinian economics, including union-busting and the fight against minimum wage. If those who run the meat empires have nothing but reckless contempt for their own workers and only slightly better regard for consumers, what can be expected of their treatment of those millions of hapless creatures processed through the extermination chambers? As Ken Midkiff observes, “In the concentrated feeding operations, animals

are treated as nonsentient beings, as if incapable of feeling pain.”[31] Schlosser’s vivid account of life at ConAgra’s giant plant near Greeley, Colorado reverberates with horrific narratives right out of *The Jungle*. There hundreds of thousands of cattle are squeezed together in huge feedlots, so close they can barely move, handled as nothing but units of production. Animal wastes, toxic runoffs, and chemical emissions fill the slaughterhouse, spreading disease to cattle and humans alike. Workers are powerless cogs in a rationalized machine operation that similarly reduces them to manipulable objects. At Greeley, Schlosser reports three overpowering odors—burning hair and blood, grease, and a rotten-egg smell from hydrogen sulfide—with people, animals, and meat all contaminated by the same toxins and pathogens.[32] This uniquely “American” contribution to food production is now being exported to every corner of the globe.

Aside from the military, no sector of American society matches the frightening consequences of the meat complex: ecological devastation, food deterioration, routinized violence, injury, disease, and death to both humans and animals, rampant corporate power. The health of consumers addicted to fast foods loaded with fats, salt, sugar, and calories worsens with each passing year, marked by a growing obesity epidemic connected to health problems like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and chronic infections. The American junk-food diet, now more often than not a source of habituation at an early age, must be considered one of the great contemporary tragedies. As mentioned, public awareness of health problems stemming from meat consumption has recently increased, thanks to a new generation of critics and such documentaries as *Diet for a New America*, *McLibel*, *Supersize Me!*, and *The Corporation*. No doubt too the alarming scope of health problems, afflicting even the very young, has given rise to something of a backlash. In response, the meat industry has stepped up its propaganda crusades hoping to short-circuit any thoughts people might have of turning to vegetarianism. Consumers are told, falsely, that meat is essential to good health, that it is an indispensable source of protein and other nutrients, that vegetarianism is a silly and harmful fad, that “barnyard” animals are treated with great care, that critics of meat addiction are behaving like “food dictators” and “lifestyle Nazis”. People are warned against the sinister and intrusive schemes of a “culinary police”, big brother taking over the kitchen. Lobbies like the National Cattlemen’s Association and the American Meat Institute, reinforced by friendly “diet” crazes like those of Robert Atkins, have waged multibillion dollar media counteroffensives to persuade Americans that meat is the (only) path to true health and a sign of prosperity.[33] Meanwhile, despite abundant scientific, medical, and environmental evidence to the contrary, the familiar habits live on with daily reinforcement from the corporate media.

The terror that animals routinely experience at the hands of humans has for several decades been a taken-for-granted part of everyday existence, far removed from any possible set of ethical concerns. Of course such collective sense of denial owes much to simple habit rooted in traditions, customs, and lifestyles, readily justified (and fiercely protected) as culinary preference. Yet where addiction of this sort causes extreme harm to the environment, to animals, and of course to the addicts themselves, much deeper explanations seem in order. Beyond the role of an indefensible speciesism, there is the power of transnational business interests that help define media culture, but that is not all. The break with old habits, however destructive, is more difficult where such habits are legitimated by hallowed belief-systems, long inscribed in religion and philosophy, that philosophy, which celebrate homo sapien supremacy over an objectified nature. When people are questioned about what they eat, for example, they instinctively fall back on time-honored myths inherited from Christianity, Judaism, Cartesian and Kantian notions of human superiority, Enlightenment (scientific, technological) views of progress, or simple liberal-capitalist norms of possessive individualism. From these traditions it is a logical (and all too quick) journey to the factory farms, packing houses, fast-food enterprises, hunting clubs, and biomedical labs. Criticism of such traditions strikes most people as nonsensical, an unwarranted intrusion into their personal lives and values. Barriers insulating people from the daily carnage are just as much ideological as physical (distance from source), permitting comfort in detachment, in the same way victims of technowar remain unseen by the perpetrators. What Western religion, philosophy, and political ideology instill is a conviction of human uniqueness and superiority: “man” possesses a level of intellect, communication skills, language, and emotional capacity that other species cannot match. While humans are capable of distinctly moral discourses and noble actions, “wild” animals are trapped in their biological immediacy—crude, primitive, violent, and devoid of ethical impulses. The gulf is seen as unbridgeable. Such self-serving mythology, wrapped around certain kernels of truth, conflicts with Darwinian evolutionary principles but it does give humans a sense of entitlement over nature—easy justification for exploiting other species for food and other ends.[34]

Great distance and concealment allows people to isolate themselves from atrocities, so that moral discourses around animal interests readily fall on deaf ears; removed from sight, the pain and suffering does not register on the

supposedly empathetic human psyche. Of course relatively few people are directly involved in the killing apparatus, while fast-food outlets and supermarkets (employing millions) package meat as just another customer item like bread, cereal, and soft-drinks. The harm done to living creatures is relegated to the margins of social life, rarely broached as a topic of conversation much less a source of moral outrage. Paradoxically, however, it is people's intimate daily connection to animal flesh as food staple that renders meat addiction so difficult to break, or even to grasp as a problem. The end product of killing is viewed as vital to culinary and health benefits, reinforced through a constellation of daily habits, tastes, rituals, ceremonies, and special occasions, often linked to traditions and/or psychological identities. Habit further requires powerful defense mechanisms: denial, cynicism, insulation, cultivated indifference. Any challenge to meat-eating, moreover, can quickly be taken as an insult to personal rights often associated with sensitive religious, national, or ethnic traditions. Few meat-eaters are prepared to hear that their food decisions are somehow unethical, harmful, and costly to human well-being, the environment, and animals possessing traits little different from those of domestic pets. Like other destructive behavior, the meat habit is embedded in complex social relations as well as ideological beliefs, thus working its way into systems of domination. An ostensibly premium, nutritious food, meat has long signified good health and strength while more mundane foods (grains, vegetables, fruits) were associated with inferior, cheap diets of the poor and lower classes. Even today meat (above all beef) represents power, especially masculine power, of the sort wielded by strong leaders and warriors, a kind of special nourishment needed to carry out tough work. Writes Carol Adams: "According to the mythology of patriarchal culture, meat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods." [35] A meat-centered diet is still regarded as a source of great virility. With the planet driven past its ecological limits, and with meat consumption more wasteful, destructive, and unhealthy than ever, humans remain locked in a closed universe of myths and addictions, immobilized by years of inbred practices.

Collective addiction can easily serve as a psychological bulwark of established interests, but in the end it provides no excuse for sidestepping important ethical choices. As Gary Francione points out: "Many humans like to eat meat, they enjoy eating meat so much that they find it hard to be detached when they consider moral questions about animals. But moral analysis requires at the very least that we leave our obvious biases at the door. Animal agriculture is the most significant source of animal suffering in the world today, and there is absolutely no need for it." [36] Radical change will insist upon moral and psychological as well as economic decisions that the vast majority of people anywhere will be reluctant to support, especially since habits are so deeply rooted in social institutions. Meat consumption is sustained at high levels by such vigorous corporate advertising and marketing that any significant break with existing patterns appears unlikely—that is, unless the modern crisis intensifies to the point where it forces basic alterations in daily life. For such alterations to occur, human-animal relations would finally have to be subjected to a full recasting. One might argue that, as in the case of the impact of fossil fuels on global warming, a sharpening crisis has already shown that it can provoke changes in both the social and ecological realms. If humans are indeed endowed with unique intellectual and moral potential, not to mention a capacity to plan for the future, then a new historical path ought to be within sight.

## **Theoretical Myopia**

As Francione observes, addictive human behavior can seem to justify an impulse to ignore the moral and political consequences of such behavior; some of the worst human crimes across history were rooted in longstanding habit and custom, later to become the targets of resistance and change. Critical reflection implies a willingness to reconsider any personal or institutional practice known as harmful to others or to the common good. In the case of natural relations, as we have seen, barbarism rooted in human convenience and monetary profit not only thrives but is legitimated within the media and popular culture. However, if meat addiction is deeply-implicated in the modern crisis across many fronts, then we are faced with a new set of political challenges. Such critics as Robbins, Rifkin, Masson, and Schlosser have written extensively about some of these connections, calling at least tacitly for decisive changes in the whole system of food production and consumption, but progressive/left responses have given rise to one long deafening silence. It is probably no exaggeration to say that human-animal relations have been systematically ignored within the Marxist and labor traditions, and to a lesser extent within liberalism, major social movements, and community organizations. Important left journals (*The Progressive*, *Monthly Review*, *Dissent*, *Z Magazine*, *The Nation*) have, with only rare exceptions over many decades, closed their pages to the discourse, as if the matter of

animal interests were something of an ideological embarrassment.[37] For progressives, animal-rights work has been dismissed as the misguided work of a motley assemblage of pet extremists, eco-misanthropes, and fringe new-agers. Whether such leftist cluelessness derives from sheer ignorance or the simple prejudice of an addicted population, or simply reflects an intellectual myopia—or some combination of these—is difficult to tell. The problem is that, in the area of natural relations at least, the left has abandoned any claim to critical thinking much less oppositional politics, following instead the safe contours of mainstream ideology and its defense of powerful interests and conventional wisdom. Meanwhile, animal-rights activism has generated one of the largest and most influential movements of the past two decades.

Such theoretical paralysis on the left assuredly runs deep, as does a preferential weighting of issues that exhibits an irrational contempt for nonhuman nature. One might suspect that the growing impact of animal exploitation on the environmental predicament, its role in sustaining corporate power, and its connection to miserable working conditions, the spread of disease, and worsening of human health—problems historically championed by progressives—might in fact compel serious engagement. But nothing along these lines has happened. The left has exhibited total disregard for the contributions of highly-accessible critical public intellectuals like Singer, Regan, Robbins, Rifkin, and Masson among others. Despite its radical implications, this work has scarcely resonated among progressive writers, journals, groups, and movements otherwise dedicated to open and critical thought.

The reasons for such deficiency of critical spirit surely fall along psychological as well as intellectual or political explanations. Lifestyle habits clearly matter, but the religious and philosophical traditions mentioned above still exercise hegemonic power. On the other hand, animal-rights discourse has its own distinct limits, in at least three ways. First, theorizing often follows rather narrow, exceedingly abstract, lines of inquiry, with animal concerns isolated from wider (social and ecological) priorities. Second, the rights concept so prevalent in framing animal interests is tied overwhelmingly to questions of individual moral choice, a product of the liberal tradition in which motifs of social structure, institutional power, and ideology are deemphasized. Benton writes that “The problem for the rights perspective is not that it purports to offer protection too widely but, rather, that it is too restrictive in the purchase it gives to moral concerns.”[38] These points logically intersect with a third: even the most far-reaching critiques of speciesism fall short of political articulation, with change posed largely in terms of personal ethics, detached from general strategic choices. Most attempts to reconceptualize human-animal relations fail to confront the weight of corporate power and supporting liberal-capitalist institutions. Beneath the façade of democratic practices we face a corporate system that, in the USUnited States. above all, pursues agendas guaranteed to bring ecological calamity. With its civilized flourishes and highmindedhigh-minded discourses, this system is integrated by a growing concentration of economic, governmental, and military power intent on world domination. It is a global order legitimated by Enlightenment ideology which, as William Leiss says, approaches “the kingdom of nature is like any other realm subject to conquest by those who command the requisite forces.”[39]

The question at this juncture is not whether humans really “dominate” nature—the capacity to do so is undeniable—but what form their intervention will or should take. Liberal-capitalist development, merging technocratic and market principles, is fueled by conquest and exploitation, turning vital ecosystems into lifeless machines, reservoirs of accumulated wealth and power. Nor is the question one of people simply using nature to advance their own interests, since the only alternative would be total depopulation of the planet so that no water, foodstuffs, metals, wood, and paper could ever be extracted—an extreme approach to sustainability, to put it charitably. Again, the problem turns on precisely what forms human use of the natural habitat will take, including whether the developmental model will be sustainable, consistent with the Earth’s biospheric potential. Any radical break with past ecological dysfunctions will require a new mode of natural relations including a qualitative leap forward in the human treatment of animals.

Marxism and the socialist politics it inspired throughout the twentieth century accentuated class struggle in some form, the anticipated prelude to large-scale social transformation—a negation of liberal-capitalism, in theory if not always in practice. Yet, in its main strategic formulations (above all social democracy) Marxism followed liberalism in its attachment to Enlightenment values, rapid industrial growth, and maximum exploitation of nature. Classical Marxism held that human alienation could be abolished by eliminating the capitalist division of labor, a necessary stage in the full realization of species-being, or ultimate liberation. Nineteenth-century socialists—not only Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels but Karl Kautsky, George Plekhanov, and others—inherited a strong modernizing faith in science and technology, in the blessings of economic development. The egalitarian side of Marxism signaled a radical shift in what it meant to be human, but it never went so far as to redefine human-naturehuman nature or human-

animal relations, a hardly surprising void given the ideological constraints of the period. The positivist, scientific side of Marxism, wedded to an implicit speciesism, militated against any such reformulation. Marxism was also productivist in its obsession with economic forces as the driving force of history, as the determinant of a new society. [40] Again, such theoretical bias was inevitable given the *Zeitgeist* of the times: Marxism, after all, gained ascendancy during the early modern period, forged between 1840 and 1880, and then reached its peak in the decades preceding World War I, reflecting established intellectual currents of the time and place (Europe), including a strong optimism in the future of technology and the industrial order.

It has been argued that Marx (and later Marxists), despite the ideological confinements of time and place, arrived at a conceptual framework universally relevant not only to class struggle but to ecology. The socialization of production, a shift toward egalitarian class and power relations, breakdown of the division between urban and rural life, emphasis on collective consumption—all this is said to point toward a model of sustainable growth resting on a balanced relationship between humans and nature.[41] Whether this imputed vision effectively counters a productivist fixation on limitless industrial growth and triumph over scarcity is problematic, but even if we recognize an ecological Marx we are still left with his well-known silence regarding natural relations. There is nothing in Marx (or indeed later Marxists) to indicate serious theoretical reflection on this issue, nor indeed has anyone ever made such a claim. As Benton, generally sympathetic to Marx, observes, the overall thrust of the theory is to give humans a freer hand in utilizing the natural world for human purposes, with class struggle a vehicle of the “humanization of nature.”[42] The much-celebrated “humanism” of the early Marx actually replicates the deep-seated speciesism of Western religious and philosophical thought. For Marx, following in the tracks of Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, humans are innately creative and self-reflexive, potentially free to remake history, while nonhuman creatures are trapped within a pre-designed biological realm. Instead of an organic connection between humans and animals, sharing the same ecological fate as Darwinian theory affirmed, Marx saw dualism and opposition between the two—a tendency that would become more pronounced in later, more crudely materialistic, variants of Marxism.

Twentieth-century Marxists were no more likely to address ecological issues than were the founders: “Western” Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukacs, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Herbert Marcuse took up a range of distinctively non-productivist concerns—culture, aesthetics, bureaucracy, the family, media, to name many—but, with the partial exception of Marcuse, seemed no more interested in ecology than were nineteenth-century thinkers. “The environment” would become a challenge taken up by theorists outside the Marxist tradition, since for Marxism (and socialism) change was a project for and by humans struggling to conquer nature—“conquest” meaning here what we normally define as exploitation. Nowhere, of course, did issues related to ecological crisis, much less animal rights, get placed on the political agenda. By the time writers like Rachel Carson, Murray Bookchin, and Barry Commoner began calling public attention to ecological problems in the 1960s, Marxism was already in decline.[43] The crucial point is that the underlying productivism of Marxist/socialist thought imposed strict limits on its capacity to reconceptualize natural relations; it has had little more to offer than liberal-capitalism.

By the early twenty-first century strong attempts to merge ecology and Marxism were under way not only within and around Green parties and movements but in socialist circles, yet reconceptualization of natural relations in line with an ethic of animal rights had made little headway. Now as before animal interests, where considered worthy of intellectual discourse, are explored in isolation from other problems, while those other problems are usually taken up separately from questions of animal rights. As for Marxism, John Sanbonmatsu has recently pointed out that the familiar theoretical impasse remains: although the global economy depends increasingly on the cultivation, killing, and disposal of billions of animals yearly, this horrific reality continues to be untheorized (in fact untheorizable) within the socialist tradition.[44] In this regard little has changed since the time of Marx and Engels: only human consciousness matters, only human suffering and pain enter the political calculus. Thus Joel Kovel, in an otherwise incisive work on the ecological crisis, maintains that animal-rights concerns are “fundamentalist” and “forget that all creatures, however they may be recognized, are still differentiated and that we make use of other creatures within our human nature.”[45] Left unexplained here is just what element of “human nature” (itself a problematic concept) justifies the practice of institutionalized barbarism. An article by Marxists Theresa Ebert and Mas’ud Zavarzadeh elevates blind prejudice to higher levels, arguing that human consumption of meat (“real food”) is essential to the “proletarian diet” since it furnishes healthy, high-protein, strength-giving nutrition to workers who depend on it for every ounce of physical energy. As they put it in boosting the fraudulent Atkins diet, “Meat is the food of the working people; a food of necessity for the class that relies on the raw energy of its body for sustenance.” In contrast to the sophisticated “bourgeois diet” containing a large proportion of grains, vegetables, and fruits, animal foods give

workers exactly what they need while these upper-class foods are more appropriate for people with abundant leisure time to savor the “Zen moment”. The authors conclude that such dietary opposites reflect a social order now in the process of splitting up into two great classes.[46] Leaving aside their total contempt for animal welfare and seeming ignorance of the way in which agribusiness, meatpacking, and fast-food corporations make obscene profits off both human and animal misery, Ebert and Zavarzadeh faithfully repeat every myth passed on by the meat interests—that animal foods are the most nutritious, are needed for physical strength, are the best thing for mundane lifestyles, are easier and less time-consuming to prepare. In fact these foods are just the opposite of what the authors pretend—their harmful effects well-documented by thousands of hardly-secret studies conducted in the United States alone, as explored in such texts as Robbins’ *The Food Revolution*. Reflecting on such an ill-informed diatribe, one is tempted to conclude that meat addiction is a much deeper problem for the progressive left than for mainstream or even working-class culture. As the ecological crisis veers out of control, the limits of Marxism become more obvious by the day—and these limits are all the more glaring when it comes to animal rights. Yet its conceptual apparatus still offers crucial insights into the workings of economic power, corporate globalization, and class domination, vital to deciphering the nature of material forces in a transformed world.

Ecological politics, still relatively embryonic in its modern incarnation, grows out of an uneven legacy of theories and movements the ideal of which has been to overcome the destructive consequences of industrialism, to restore balance between society and nature. Its radical, at times utopian vision has followed a trajectory largely independent of Marxism, grounded in themes of local community, environmental renewal, mutual aid, limits to growth, and generalized opposition to hierarchy. What might be called “ecocommunalism” or “ecosocialism” passes through the seminal ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, utopian socialism, anarchism, Peter Kropotkin, and the later contributions of modern anarchists and “left-Greens” like Bookchin and Rudolf Bahro. This rich tradition embraces a distinctly anti-authoritarian outlook—meaning hostility to the entire fabric of domination—and a fierce dedication to what might be called an ecological renaissance. Here we have something along the lines of a radical, or “Green” democracy, defined through ongoing popular struggles for local self-management.

Bookchin’s social ecology, an extension of classical anarchist thought and developed across prolific writings going back to the early 1960s, represents probably the most sophisticated ecological radicalism today. His theory is shaped by a “dialectical naturalism” in which efforts to transform history and nature, society and environment, unfold simultaneously, leading to organic community—a process defined by local struggles against multiple forms of domination: class, bureaucratic, racial, gender, cultural, and ecological. An ecological society would mean full realization of “free nature” through human self-activity, fully dependent on revival of natural relations and the locus of an entirely new consciousness. In Bookchin’s words: “Such a change would mean a far-reaching transformation of our prevailing mentality of domination into one of complementarity, in which we would see our role in the natural world as creative, supportive, and deeply appreciative of the needs of nonhuman life.”[47] Here the human and nonhuman worlds would be intimately connected, reunited after long centuries of harsh opposition and conflict. Bookchin inherits the political radicalism of Marx in his embellishment of dialectics and popular struggles to overthrow capitalism, but he goes beyond it in two important ways: a view toward overturning all modes of domination and a commitment to ecological reconstruction that is at best only implicit in Marxism.

But when it comes to animal rights Bookchin remains just as implacably attached to Enlightenment values and speciesism as Marxism. Indeed, animal interests are roundly dismissed as “misanthropic”, a form of “primitive” ecocentrism he sees, incorrectly, as a logical manifestation of Deep Ecology. For Bookchin, DE and animal rights share a mystical anti-humanism that inevitably undercuts radical politics. Humanity possesses a singular capacity to reappropriate “first nature” and create an elevated “second nature” grounded in reason, planning, and creativity, qualities that set humans apart from other species confined to the biological realm—a view that places Bookchin squarely within the mainstream of Western philosophy.[48] Other species remain tied to “genetic imperatives” and immediate needs of survival, so that “freedom . . . is not attainable by animals.”[49] As we have seen, “special” attributes of human beings might be compatible with “freedom” (in human terms) but have absolutely no relevance to an abiding interest that other species might have in avoiding misery and death at the hands of their (“free”) human masters—a moral issue Bookchin never confronts. Again, what matters here is the specific relationship humans are able to establish with nature—that is, whether “dominion” becomes “conquest” in the form of institutionalized barbarism, or something altogether different. In the final analysis, humans possess nothing special that can ethically justify the terror of slaughterhouses, lab testing, and hunting, although they obviously have the power to carry out such practices. In Bookchin’s social ecology, we end up with an emancipatory theory of radical (human-centered)

transformation that supports an arrogant speciesism where animals have no protection against whatever horrors people decide to visit upon them. As with neo-Marxism, social ecology has been impervious to the radical influence of animal-rights theory and practice since the early 1980s.

Reacting against Marxism and social ecology, Deep Ecology—its influence on Green currents strongly felt over the past two decades—looks to systemic change in human-nature relations, marked by an ecocentric break with modernity and industrialism. DE shares with social ecology a rejection of all forms of domination but, given the depth of the ecological crisis, identifies natural relations as the privileged site of human efforts to transform the world. It dismisses liberal environmentalism and its narrow project of limited reforms in favor of a deeper “paradigm change” in consciousness, lifestyles, and values that would define the new community. DE rejects the Enlightenment legacy tout court, urging limits to economic growth, “bioregional” living arrangements, population reduction, self-sustaining agriculture, and unyielding reverence for natural habitats. More fundamentalist DE theories call for a return to preindustrial society, consistent with basic Green principles of equality, democracy, peace, spiritualism, and ecological renewal. As George Sessions argues, human self-activity is attainable only through organic unity with the surrounding ecosystem.[50] Many DE currents adopt the view that virtually any human intervention in nature is destructive and must be avoided. The modern crisis, according to this extreme formulation, would be surmountable only at that point when humans finally exit the scene—a view bringing charges of misanthropic and even fascist politics. Most variants of DE, it must be said, retreat from such dogmatism.

DE theory stresses moral obligation to nature and living systems within it, a biospheric equality that conflicts sharply with the requisites of industrial society. Departing from Marxism and social ecology, DE argues for full-scale transformation of social life and natural relations consistent with the abolition of speciesism, or “anthropocentrism”. This is no contrived “second nature” but rather progressive adaptation to “first nature”, transcending the age-old dualism between society and nature, humans and other species. Here the DE agenda seems compatible with animal rights given its reverence for nature and attraction to “wild nature” unspoiled by human contamination.[51] Yet the theory both exceeds and falls short of animal-rights objectives as spelled out in this essay. First, its moral stance covers the entire natural world, beyond individual sentient beings to include natural habitats as such (trees, water, insects, even rock formations as well as animal species) within an interconnected ecological system. It transcends and even trivializes “rights” to embellish all life-forms, so that animal interests fall short of what needs to be considered as part of a “deep” ecological revolution. Beyond the formal (one might also say legalistic) goal of “rights”, radical change insists upon a qualitative shift in the economy, social structures, lifestyles, and popular consciousness—all indispensable for planetary survival.

At the same time, DE ecocentrism runs up against its own limits and contradictions. If animal-rights discourse lacks a holistic, global outlook, DE offers no theoretical construct that would prohibit institutionalized barbarism as the system is currently maintained. Within DE thinking it has been easy for partisans to hedge on their rejection of anthropocentrism which, in any case, mistakenly poses the question of human domination itself as opposed to looking at how precisely that domination unfolds. The result is that Deep Ecologists lean toward an open, malleable attitude regarding how individual members of other species are expected to be treated in actuality. As Arne Naess writes, reflecting the tone of many DE passages: “My intuition is that the right to live is one and the same for all individuals, whatever the species, but the vital interests of our nearest [i.e., humans], nevertheless, have priority.”[52] He goes on to defend the use of animals as “resources” for human appropriation,[53] and one finds scattered references throughout DE literature to the acceptable use of animals as food sources. At another point Naess writes that humans should be allowed to intervene in nature “to satisfy vital needs”, clearly a departure from the ethic of biocentric equality.[54] Lacking a theory of rights or its equivalent, biospheric egalitarianism shades into a vague general orientation, leaving moral and political space for humans to continue their meat addictions and related activities. Ecological radicalism would not be so “deep” as to interfere with the brutal treatment of animals if that treatment can be viewed as contributing toward “satisfying vital needs”. Conceivably “wild nature” would remain untrammled, but in other locales sentient creatures would be eligible for merciless abuse from their human betters.

Another difficulty with DE is that its exit from modernity—indeed its very idea of organic bioregionalism—turns out to be rather abstract, a utopian fantasy. Modernity is so thoroughly a part of the existing world, so embedded in social institutions and practices for so many generations, that ambitious moves to “escape” its global reach would lead to immediate calamity—even conceding the possibility of such an escape. The idea of abolishing all or even most human intervention into the natural world, which no DE theorists has in fact ever concretized, winds up as just another hopeless romantic myth. Biocentric equality, itself a fanciful human construct, is so far beyond any realizable

goal that down-to-earth political action is rendered moot. It is hardly surprising that in the sphere of animal rights DE lacks specificity: “natural” entities from elephants to shrubs, insects, and rocks appear to enjoy the same putative moral standing, however nebulous and subject to myriad qualifications. The grandiose notion of extending moral status across the entire ecological landscape seems on the surface laudatory enough but, as Tim Luke observes, such sacralization of nature fails to rise above a vague sense of “moral regeneration” devoid of political meaning.[55] Despite its deep, radical formulations, therefore, DE in itself offers little guide to an animal-rights strategy much less to a political way out of the modern crisis.

## **Liberating Theory**

We have yet to arrive at a theory of animal rights sufficient to engage all dimensions of the challenge. Both Marxism and social ecology, though vital departures for analysis and change, are much too attached to Enlightenment rationality, with its fetishism of technology and deeply-ingrained speciesism, to inspire any revolution in natural relations. Their view of animal rights is essentially one of contempt—where the issue is not ignored altogether. DE, on the other hand, breaks with Enlightenment ideology and affirms the moral standing of living habitats and the integrity of nonhuman species, but retreats so far into romanticism that it cannot by itself furnish any strategic way forward. The theory contains vague references to moral renewal and organic community that have no relevance to actual political outcomes, including animal liberation. Further, as we have seen, its stated position on animal rights is ambiguous at best. As for the animal-rights movement itself, both in theory and in practice it has veered toward insularity, cut off from larger social and ecological concerns even as it generates militant and often highly-effective popular struggles. The discourse has regularly been framed as a set of normative ideals to be achieved within the liberal-capitalist order, in the tradition of earlier “rights” movements. While this is eminently understandable, the problem is that no far-reaching animal liberation (or ecological) project can be sustained without challenging domestic and international corporate power, though partial reforms benefiting animal welfare (for example, no-kill zones, hunting bans) do obviously matter and ought to be defended. As David Nibert argues, social changes leading to the liberation of both humans and animals are mutually reinforcing, fueled by a common material exploitation that goes back thousands of years.[56] My argument here is that a new theoretical synthesis is urgently needed, incorporating dynamic elements of Marxism, radical ecology, and animal rights, if the modern crisis is to be fought with any hope of success. Corporate capitalism has grown ever-more authoritarian, exploitative, violent, and unsustainable over time, nowhere more so than in the United States, thus forcing political strategy along a more radical path. If the crisis is a product of multiple and overlapping factors, then countering it means proceeding along diverse fronts: class and power structures, the globalized economy, culture, ecology, and natural relations. Even the most transformative change, however, can occur only within the parameters of an already existing urban, modernized order, part of a lengthy historical process, as opposed to any sudden “exit” from the present, or immersion in “wild nature”.

An expanded moral sensibility requires the normative obligation to other life-forms, species, and individual sentient beings—a sensibility basic not only to animal rights but to historical ideals of social justice, democracy, peace, and sustainability. Such ideals demand no mythical biocentric community for their actualization, but they do assume prohibitions against exploitation, torture, and killing in any form, which clearly applies to institutionalized barbarism of the sort perpetrated against billions of sentient creatures today. As Herbert Marcuse, never known for his embrace of animal rights, observed in the 1960s, human beings in their great wisdom have managed to create a general “Hell on earth”, and a significant “part of this Hell is the ill-treatment of animals—the work of a human society whose rationality is still the irrational.”[57] Today Marcuse would probably agree that the struggle to overcome the dualism of society and nature, humans and other species—barely theorized so far—ought to inform any future radical politics worthy of the name.

Whatever its lacunae in conceptualizing natural relations, Marxism remains indispensable to this project, its class analysis and anti-capitalist theory vital to forging anti-system movements against transnational corporate power. The most imposing problems of the current period, including worker exploitation, global poverty, militarism, and ecological decline, cannot be grasped much less reversed in the absence of class-based movements that break with the hardened rules of corporate globalization—a dialectic best theorized within the Marxist tradition. A deep flaw in Marxism is filled by social ecology, given its more systemic view of ecology and sharpened attention to the multiple forms of domination. Attuned to the complex ensemble of relations, social ecology resists the productivism

and class reductionism that works against a full ecological Marxism. On the other hand, Deep Ecology (including ecofeminism) embraces a more distinctly subversive outlook toward natural relations, conferring moral status on all of nonhuman nature. Neither Marxism nor social ecology rival DE in the sense of gravity it attaches to habitat destruction and the global ecological crisis, in its potent critique of rampant industrial growth and obsessive pursuit of material abundance. Criticized (for the most part inaccurately) for its misanthropic ideas, DE calls for alternative modes of agriculture, production, and consumption in harmony with sustainable development—a viewpoint scarcely articulated within the Marxist tradition. Such a qualitative shift in social and ecological arrangements is necessary because, as the Pimentels observe, “Humanity is approaching a crisis point with respect to the interlocking issues of population, natural resources, and sustainability.”[58]

The final and perhaps most contentious element of the synthesis, animal rights, calls attention to an institutionalized barbarism that has been routinely ignored but which does so much to sustain corporate wealth and power, thereby helping further intensify the modern crisis. For the short term, like other protocols and standards, the rights of animal ought to find universal codification in the U.N. Charter, the U.S. Bill of Rights, and every other national constitution. Viewed over the long term: insofar as animal interests pose far-reaching challenges to the status quo regarding agricultural practices, the industrial system, diet and health, natural relations, and the ecological crisis, any movement that addresses the general interests of animals has undeniable anti-system potential. Nascent struggles to overturn institutionalized barbarism represent a blow, however limited, against escalating human assaults on nonhuman nature, perhaps opening a new phase in the development of a truly liberatory politics. Taken to new historical levels, animal rights, in tandem with the great moral questions it raises, clashes with those megacorporate interests -agribusiness, fast food, biomedical, media and Big Pharma among others—that will stop at nothing in their efforts to amass greater wealth, power, and profits.

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## Endnotes

1. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. xii.
2. Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. xiii.
3. For a recent comprehensive anthology on questions of animal welfare, see Peter Singer, ed., *In Defense of Animals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
4. Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef* (New York: Penguin, 1992), p. 235.
5. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, p. 332.
6. John Robbins, *The Food Revolution* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 2001), p. 220.
7. Gary Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. xxiv.
8. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 283.
9. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *When Elephants Weep* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), p. 236.
10. Jane Goodall, *Through a Window* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 250.
11. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 235.
12. Ken Midkiff, *The Meat You Eat* (New York: St. Martin's, 2004), p. 39.
13. Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Tucson: Sharp Press, 2003).
14. Robbins, *The Food Revolution*, p. 211.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 221. See also Midkiff, p. 13.
16. Masson, *When Elephants Weep*, p. 29.
17. For a powerful statement on stewardship values, situated within a philosophical discourse, see Holmes Rolston III, “Challenges in Environmental Ethics”, in Michael E. Zimmerman, et. al., eds., *Environmental Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1993), pp. 135-57.
18. Regan's views are best summarized in his *The Case for Animal Rights* (2004 edition), ch. 9. This approach, in my opinion, is superior to either the Utilitarian framework adopted by Singer (in *Animal Liberation* and elsewhere) or the “capabilities approach” employed by Martha Nussbaum in her *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2006). Both views allow for entirely too many qualifications and exceptions to any rule against animal cruelty and exploitation. The weaknesses of Utilitarianism are well known: virtually anything can be justified if it can be

said to maximize pleasure for the majority. In the case of Nussbaum, she argues forcefully for a ban on all forms of cruelty to animals but then makes room for exceptions when “there is plausible reason for the killing”. (p. 393) Elsewhere she writes that the use of animals for food and for biomedical research provide thorny, but still unresolved, moral questions. (pp. 403-03). Regan’s case for a strict abolitionism, of course, permits of no such moral ambiguity.

19. Ted Benton, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights, and Social Justice* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 152.

20. “Is Meat Sustainable?”, *Worldwatch* (July-August, 2004), p. 12.

21. The widely-acclaimed Albert Gore documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, provides a brilliant investigation into the problem of global warming, but contains not a single word about the impact of agriculture, meat, and dietary habits on this aspect of the ecological crisis.

22. Lester R. Brown, *Plan B 2.0* (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 164.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

24. David Pimentel and Marcia Pimentel, “World Population, Food, Natural Resources, and Survival”, in Ervin Laszlo and Peter Seidel, eds., *Global Survival* (New York: SelectBooks, 2006), pp. 31-33.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

27. See George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2000), ch. 1.

28. *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 2006.

29. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, chs. 11-16.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

31. Midkiff, *The Meat You Eat*, p. 27.

32. Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), pp. 149-50; 154; 195.

33. Robbins, *The Food Revolution*, pp. 60-65.

34. Masson, *When Elephants Weep*, p. 24.

35. Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 43.

36. Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights*, pp. 187-88.

37. Aside from journals and magazines, animal-rights concerns have also been excluded from progressive radio. For example, nothing has been historically aired

on the influential Pacific stations devoted to this issue, except for a brief stint by Karen Dawn at KPFF in Los Angeles during 2004. Dawn’s excellent program, however, was taken off the air after several months—the agreement was not renewed—at the insistence of the Program Manager.

38. Benton, *Natural Relations*, p. 196.

39. William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: George Braziller, 1972), p. 55.

40. See especially Ronald Aronson, *After Marxism* (New York: Guilford, 1995), pp. 90-123.

41. See, for example, “Ecology, Capitalism, and the Socialization of Nature”, an interview with MR editor John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review* (November 2004), pp. 1-12.

42. Benton, *Natural Relations*, pp. 23-31.

43. Probably the most comprehensive overview of the environmental crisis during the period was Barry Commoner’s *The Closing Circle* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

44. John Sanbonmatsu, “Listen Ecological Marxist! (Yes, I Said Animals!)”, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* (June 2005), p. 107.

45. Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 210.

46. Teresa Ebert and Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, “Our American Diet Divides Us into Classes of Workers and Bosses”, *Los Angeles Times* (appeared in fall 2000).

47. Murray Bookchin, “What is Social Ecology?”, in Zimmerman, et. al., *Environmental Philosophy*, p. 355.

48. Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990), pp. 115-16.

49. Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 236.

50. See George Sessions, “Ecocentrism and the Anthropocentric Detour”, in Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Shambala, 1995), pp. 169-77.

51. On “wild nature” see, for example, Jack Turner, “In Wildness is the Preservation of the World”, in Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, pp. 331-338.

52. Arne Naess, “Equality, Sameness, and Rights”, in Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 222.

53. See Naess, “Deep Ecology and Lifestyle”, in Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 260.

54. Naess, “The Deep Ecological Movement”, in Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, p. 68.

55. Timothy W. Luke, *Ecocritique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 23.

56. David Nibert, *Animal Rights Human Rights* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 237.

57. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 237.

58. Pimentels, in *Global Survival*, p. 46.

