

# Human liberation vs. animal "liberation"

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Steve Best's article presents in a powerful way the philosophical and political case for animal liberation and eloquently attempts to locate the Animal Liberation Movement (ALM) within the broader political framework of the anticapitalist Left. However, if for Best the ALM is an anticapitalist force, for other parts of the anticapitalist ecological Left, the broader animal liberation movement – which includes animal welfare, animal rights, and animal liberation currents– what Best calls Animal Advocacy Movement (AAM), of which ALM is the most radical part– is potentially a fascist movement because of the common preoccupation with purity.<sup>[1]</sup> In our view neither the ALM is an antisystemic<sup>[2]</sup> movement nor is the broader AAM a potentially fascist movement. ALM is not an antisystemic movement, because an antisystemic movement presupposes a universal project to replace the present system and not just a single-issue project (as the ALM's project essentially is), whatever its targets may be. By analogy, the IRA (the Irish national liberation movement) was never an antisystemic movement either, despite the fact that its main targets were crucial political and economic institutions of the system. The fact, therefore, that capitalist political and economic institutions constitute the main targets of the ALM activists does not in itself render this single-issue movement into an antisystemic one, as long as it is not –nor aims to become– an organic part of an antisystemic movement. For the same reason, AAM is not a potentially fascist movement either, since fascism was a universal project aiming at the total transformation of society and not just at its transformation with respect to its attitude towards a particular aspect of social behaviour –as in the AAM case. Furthermore, although there may well be right-wing currents within the AAM –as we shall see below– there are also radical left wing currents within it, and Steve Best admirably represents their case.

In our view, the AAM is simply another expression of today's hegemony of post-modern pseudo-pluralism, within which single issue movements of various kinds have replaced the universal movements marking modernity up to the emergence of the New World Order, characterised by the universalisation of the internationalised market economy and representative 'democracy'. Furthermore, the development of an urgently needed new antisystemic movement is not simply a matter of combining various single issue movements into a broader movement since, without a common universal project and strategy, the 'synthesis' that could ever be derived from such a combination would not only be an ideological soup (like the one characterising the World Social Forum and its continental branches<sup>[3]</sup>) but would also inevitably be a reformist one, as it would represent the lowest common denominator of its components.

Having said that, we fully agree with Best's conclusion that the animal perspective can deepen the ecological component of Inclusive Democracy, even though, as we will try to show below, our understanding of the interconnections between domination of animals and domination of humans is very different, given the incommensurable paradigms used by Animal Liberation (AL) and Inclusive Democracy (ID). It is true that the goal of ecological

democracy –a basic component of an Inclusive Democracy– cannot be achieved without working to eliminate the worst forms of animal exploitation, such as those occurring in the global operations of factory farming, and also without eliminating any use of animals for food or medical research that is not absolutely necessary for the survival of human beings. The institutionalisation of the equal distribution of all forms of power among all citizens is the necessary (though not the sufficient) condition for the elimination of all forms of domination and exploitation among humans. The sufficient condition for the elimination of domination and exploitation among human beings and for the corresponding change in their attitude towards animals is a struggle for *paideia*, whereby an enlightened citizenry decides not to eat at McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC and other fast food conveniences that are a part of factory slaughterhouses which fuel the standardized tastes of a homogenized heteronomous society. Furthermore, it would be totalitarian to shut down those poison-food operations willy nilly –as the AL approach in the last instance implies– after the attempt to persuade all people to abandon killing animals for food has failed. On top of this it would, at least, be doubtful whether this would stop people from wanting to consume those poisons. The Russian communists shut down the churches, but did not end people's desire –however delusional– for that opium and religion went underground. Morality cannot be legislated, particularly if it requires changing people's long-established habits. In other words, animal exploitation will be eliminated only when a well-informed citizenry realizes its importance.

## **Instrumentalism, “speciesism” and anthropocentrism**

The institutionalisation of the equal distribution of all forms of power among citizens is, also, a precondition for the creation of a corresponding culture of non-domination and non-exploitation of animals for commercial or similar purposes. Another similar precondition is, as Best stresses, a profound critique of instrumentalism –although we see instrumentalism very differently. Best sees instrumentalism as ‘a profound psychological root of hierarchy, domination, and violence’, which can be traced back to the domination of animals beginning with the transition from hunting and gathering cultures to agricultural society, and emerging as ‘speciesism’ –a key part of anthropocentrism. On the other hand, for the ID project, instrumentalism is simply a basic component of human culture, which sees Nature as an instrument for achieving human aims.

However, there is a crucial difference between the pre-capitalist form of instrumentalism and the capitalist one. The former took the form of human beings –either individually as hunters, or collectively as farming societies– seeing Nature in general and animals in particular as instruments for satisfying basic human needs for food and clothing. On the other hand, instrumentalism in growth economies (capitalist and post-capitalist –i.e. those of ‘actually existing socialism’– alike) was a fundamental component of the growth ideology<sup>[4]</sup> which was used by the ruling elites to justify the growth economy. In this form, Nature and animals were seen as instruments for achieving the goals of the elites controlling them and particularly the growth objective that characterises these economies.

The difference in how we see instrumentalism is not just semantic but it has important political implications. For the ID project, instrumentalism in particular and the growth economy/growth ideology in general are directly responsible for such phenomena as intensive farming and all its implications on animal welfare. Therefore, the abolition of instrumentalism and consequently of intensive farming is not simply a matter of

attempting to persuade people that it is morally wrong to kill animals for food and to exhort them to become vegetarians instead, as most currents in the AAM seem to believe, but it is clearly a systemic issue. This is because only the replacement of the present socio-economic system with an ecological democracy, as part of an ID, could bring about this outcome.

But, the above should not be taken as implying some kind of 'speciesism' in the sense of the belief that nonhuman species exist to serve the needs of the human species, or even that animals are in various senses inferior to human beings and, therefore, that one can favour human over nonhuman interests according to species status alone. Speciesism presupposes an ethics of anthropocentrism, i.e., an ethics whose core values are those promoting the domination of humans over Nature in general and animals in particular, in exactly the same way as racism presupposes an ethics whose core values are those promoting the domination of whites over coloured people. However, although there have been several racist societies in History, the basic characteristic of such societies being that their core values were consistent with the dominant institutions and what we call the dominant social paradigm (i.e., the system of beliefs, ideas and the corresponding values which are associated with these institutions), the same cannot be said about anthropocentric societies.

A racist society is simply a particular form of heteronomous society<sup>[5]</sup> (which has been the rule in most of human History). Thus, premodern heteronomous societies invented various religious myths and, similarly, modern heteronomous societies elaborated several reason-based universalist principles, in order to justify certain values and discard other values. At the same time, the institutional framework of each society had always made certain (through the socialisation process) that only those particular values that were compatible with the main institutions would constitute the core of the dominant social paradigm. Not accidentally, the same institutions – which in a heteronomous society are controlled by the privileged social groups, classes or castes – also secure the unequal distribution of power among society's members. Therefore, any heteronomous society is characterised by the dominance of heteronomous ethics whose core values are those promoting the domination of certain elites over people. Religious societies are characterised by the dominance of a particular kind of heteronomous ethics based on religious myths; racist societies are characterised by the dominance of ethics based on racist myths and so on.

However, there have never been any societies whose core values were those promoting the domination of all people over animals—although in most human societies the effort to dominate Nature in general and animals in particular was part of a hegemonic culture which culminated in the growth economy and the associated growth ideology, as we have just seen. So, the primary problem with the mainstream Western tradition is not that it promotes anthropocentric ethics (as AL suggests), nor that it promotes bourgeois ethics (as communalism<sup>[6]</sup> stresses), but that it promotes heteronomous ethics, in consistency with the historically dominant heteronomous form of society.

It is, therefore, clear that a liberated society needs an ethics of autonomy, which can only become articulated along with a politics of autonomy. In other words, an ethics of autonomy is impossible without the introduction of certain institutions that favour autonomy, so as to replace the present 'liberal oligarchies'. As one of us attempted to show elsewhere<sup>[7]</sup>, this implies the institution of a democratic society based on a confederal ID

and founded on two fundamental principles of organisation: the principle of autonomy and the principle of community. On the basis of these principles of organisation, a whole series of moral values could be derived which may provide us with an outline of the moral values that are compatible with an autonomous democratic society. Thus, out of the fundamental principle of autonomy one may derive a set of moral values involving equity and democracy, respect for the personality of every citizen (irrespective of gender, race, ethnic identity etc) and of course respect for human life itself which, as Castoriadis puts it, <sup>[8]</sup> 'ought to be posited as an absolute because the injunction of autonomy is categorical, and there is no autonomy without life.' Also, out of the same fundamental principle of autonomy, we may directly derive values involving the protection of the quality of life of each individual citizen and indirectly derive values involving the protection of the environment and animals. This is because the protection of the quality of a citizen's life implies a relationship of harmony with Nature and the need to re-integrate society with Nature and, therefore, the abandoning of any attempt to dominate Nature in general and animals in particular. Similarly, out of the fundamental principle of community, we may derive a set of values involving not only equity but also solidarity and mutual aid, altruism/self-sacrifice (beyond concern for kin and reciprocity), caring and sharing. However, it is only the synthesis of autonomy and community which could avoid both the Scylla of 'objectifying' ethics and/or negating politics and ethical concerns in favour of the coercive harmony of the organic community, and the Charybdis of unbounded moral relativism.

## **Autonomy vs. rights**

The discussion above brings us to the crucial issue that defines a liberatory movement: do we fight for autonomy or rights? As was shown elsewhere <sup>[9]</sup>, the ID project is not compatible with a 'rights'-based ethics since all rights are considered to be derived from institutions of power; they are mostly rights against the state, in the sense that it is only in forms of social organisation where political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of elites that most 'rights' are invested with any meaning. On the other hand, in a non-statist type of society, like an Inclusive Democracy which by definition involves the equal sharing of power, these rights become meaningless. In other words, in principle, the issue of rights should not arise at all in the case of a non-statist society like that of ID. However, autonomy presupposes animals that are capable of being autonomous, i.e. of making conscious choices on the basis of reason and not just instinct, intuition etc – which lead directly to all forms of irrationalism. No known animal has the human potential for an advanced form of conscious choice (e.g. on abstract decisions on democracy and so forth) based on rational argument and evidence. In fact, this is the reason why the AL philosophy can only be based on the discourse of rights.

Similarly, one may question the argument for moral equivalence between humans and other non-human animals based on sentience, in terms of having cognitive abilities including memory, self-consciousness and the ability to conceive of a future. Self-consciousness, subjectivity and time refer to a subject that can break up time beyond the present into a past and future. Even our closest relatives, the chimpanzees, cannot futurise, as is demonstrated by the fact that the tool (a stick) they fashion to help them get food is thrown away without their realizing that they will need it again at some future time. In other words, the chimp is not separable from the present. Nothingness is for humans. Others do not conceive of nothingness. The chimp does not transcend itself toward a world

or towards death (the ultimate nothingness). Thus, the meaning of their existence is not an issue for them. They do not understand themselves in terms of their own possibility: to be or not to be themselves. Furthermore, questions arise about the treatment of non-sentient animals (e.g. Cnidarians, Arthropods, Porifera, Mollusks etc), not to mention the Plant Kingdom (trees, plants, forests etc) and ecosystems in general which seem to be excluded from AL moral considerations. It is these sorts of questions that prompted communalists/social ecologists to conclude that the issue of animal rights thus degrades, rather than develops, the humanist impulse embodied in liberatory social movements, and its basic philosophical thrust is directly contrary to the project of elaborating an ecological ethics. [\[10\]](#)

Having said this, there still remains the problem of what the appropriate institutions and the corresponding values are which would lead to the reintegration of society with Nature —part of which is the problem of animal liberation. So, for us, the problem is one of ecological democracy, which is a crucial component of an inclusive democracy. An ecological democracy is viewed in this conception as the institutional framework which aims at the elimination of any human attempt to dominate the natural world, in other words, as the system which aims to reintegrate humans with nature. This implies transcending the present ‘instrumentalist’ view of Nature, in which Nature is seen as an instrument for growth, within a process of endless concentration of power. In fact, many of the facts that Best aptly describes in his article are simply the necessary symptoms of a growth economy, seen as the inevitable outcome of the dynamics of the system of the market economy.

However, although we agree that a radical transformation of our attitude towards animals should be a significant part of an antisystemic movement’s programme, we see a fundamental difference between the part of the programme which aims at liberating animals versus that part which aims at liberating humanity. The former is just based on the fact that, at present, many people do not grasp the ethical (intrinsic) worth and value of animals and the ethical, social, and environmental problems stemming from exploiting them, whereas the latter is based on a *deliberate* choice that we, as rational human beings, make, i.e. a choice for autonomy and its political expression —a genuine democracy— which can only come about when a majority of people make this choice. Clearly, the part of the antisystemic movement’s programme which aims at liberating animals cannot be based on any kind of deliberate choice by animals but, at most, on their *instinctive* preference for freedom that *we* can infer. In other words, animals cannot be the *subjects* of an antisystemic movement; they can only be its ‘objects’. This is important because if we agree on it, then we must also agree on the premise that the liberation of humans is a *precondition* for the liberation of animals and not vice versa, as the case is presented by the ALM. It is on the basis of this premise that we argue that the struggle for the liberation of animals can only be part of an antisystemic movement for the liberation of humanity, otherwise it will remain a single-issue movement as at present, attracting anyone from right-wing animal lovers and vegetarians (History is full of such cases, the Nazis being a typical example and their Animal Protection Law of 1933 represents perhaps the strictest legislation for the protection of animals in the world) to reformists of various kinds, with the odd exception of some anticapitalist ‘extremists’.

The reason why (for those who have chosen autonomy/democracy) human interests are privileged over nonhuman ones has, therefore, nothing to do with speciesism and

everything to do with the fact that only human beings can be potentially autonomous. An additional reason why human interests are by necessity privileged over animal interests is that animal liberation is only possible within the context of a liberated society, in which all forms of domination and exploitation among humans have been abolished first, as was argued above. Finally, it is clear that an inclusive democracy cannot be “representative” of all sentient species since democracy is inconceivable if it includes the “representative” element. Democracy is the direct expression of the political will of its participants and in this sense it is obviously impossible for non-human species to qualify as citizens, as they cannot directly express their political will. Furthermore, the problem cannot be by-passed by talking of representation in a metaphorical sense as Best suggests, i.e. that we must in some sense “represent” animals or serve as delegates or ambassadors for their existence on this planet. In a real democracy one human being cannot represent the will of another human being (only delegation is possible) let alone of another species! Animals cannot take part in democratic decision-taking not just because they lack the linguistic capacity to do so but, more importantly, because they lack the capacity to take conscious self-reflective decisions, i.e. the capacity to be autonomous. Therefore, we can only represent their interests, as we understand them through analogy with what human interests are (e.g. concern for the pain and distress of others etc).

However, this does not mean that the quality of life and the happiness of animals are of no importance to the citizens of a democratic society, given that concern for animals is a crucial part of the ethics of autonomy, as was stressed in the last section. In other words, in a democratic society, concern for animal happiness and quality of life is not just the by-product of ‘a cozy welfare view of animals’, but a moral precondition for individual and social autonomy itself. The difference is that, whereas respect for human life is an absolute, as there is no autonomy without life, respect for animal life is subject to exceptions defined by the democratic assemblies on the basis of the moral values drawn from the principles of autonomy and community, and are reversible only by exceptional majorities.

As far as the argument is concerned of those who worry that the decisions of democratic assemblies are reversible, one could counter-argue that, in fact, rights are much more reversible, particularly in practice. Have we really overcome racism, slavery, sexism, homophobia etc. by writing laws and winning rights against them as a result of the struggles of various liberation movements? Even though these prejudices are not state-sponsored policies in countries like the US (as they are in other countries), they still exist in practice. Violence is perpetrated every day in their name. Likewise, since the ecology movement began, the ecological crisis has sharply deteriorated. This is not to say that education has not helped to demystify various hierarchical discriminations, but they have not been completely overturned. Why? Because all these liberation movements were fighting against only one aspect of power and not for the abolition of all forms of power so as to bring about equal distribution of all power –as a result, the system of the market economy and representative democracy have not been overthrown. Likewise, AAM could easily become another reformist lobbyist movement just as the civil rights movements have turned into.

So, talking about autonomy instead of rights does not simply mean that we are imposing our arbitrary will on animals because they cannot meet our unique conditions of social life. It is exactly because we take for granted our higher intelligence that we can make the decision to implement certain highly moral principles with respect to animals in the first place, and not because we are more powerful than them. If this were the case then we

should also expect a bear or a shark not to use us as food despite the fact that they are by nature more powerful than us! We humans are morally autonomous, because we can legislate moral laws for ourselves and for others. Bears are incapable of overriding the laws of nature, which are immoral towards bears feeding on salmon, for example.

## Common causes and dynamics of liberation?

Best writes that “though priding themselves on holistic and systemic critiques of global capitalism, Leftists fail to grasp the profound interconnections among human, animal and earth liberation struggles and the need to conceive and fight for all as one struggle against domination, exploitation, and hierarchy ... the profound connections between animal abuse and human suffering.” However, although animals may not be devoid of some forms of consciousness and social life, they certainly cannot be the subjects of any kind of liberation struggle, as was stressed in the last section. Animals can only be the objects of a liberation movement, whereas a liberation struggle very much requires a subject to be worthy of its name. Therefore, although it is true that there are deep interconnections between animal abuse and human suffering, we should not overlook the important differences between them. Domination, exploitation and hierarchy take on a very different meaning when we refer to subjects vs. objects.

Similarly, the fact that Darwin’s theory of evolution established an evolutionary continuity from nonhuman to human life does not also imply a basic equality among all species. Human beings themselves (let alone different species!) are characterised by various ‘inequalities’ due to age, health or physical differences and it is up to society to secure an equal distribution of all forms of power among all citizens through the institutionalisation of an inclusive democracy.

Also, the causes and dynamics of the oppression of humans on the one hand and animals on the other, are completely different. The domination of animals is not a power relationship,<sup>[11]</sup> properly defined, but a relationship of force or violence. The object of using force against animals has always been not power per se, but to compel animals to be used as instruments in meeting basic human needs initially and, later on, in meeting the growth objectives of the elites. This is why the attempt to dominate Nature in general and animals in particular was greatly enhanced after the establishment of the growth economy –the outcome being the present ecological crisis. On the other hand, the domination of human beings **is** a power relationship arising out of the need of various elites to concentrate political, economic and social power in their hands as against the mass of the population. Power relations, properly speaking, are therefore relevant only to the relations among human beings who are capable of self-determination and autonomy. Needless to add that the way we see these power relations depends on our own political position. This is not the case with animals, as Best admits when he points out that “unlike the issue of class struggle and labour justice, one can advocate compassion for animals from any political position.”

In this sense, and quite apart from the historical validity of the relevant claim by some anthropologists, it does not stand to rational analysis to assume that the cruel forms of domesticating animals at the dawn of agricultural society ten thousand years ago created the conceptual model for hierarchy, statism, and the exploitation of other human beings and that, therefore, slavery and the sexual subjugation of women is but the extension of

animal domestication by humans. This is because, on the basis of the above problematic about the nature of power relations, hierarchical relations between human beings are qualitatively very different from those between humans and animals. The practical implication of this is that the differences between human beings and animals bear no comparison to the differences among human beings themselves on the grounds of race, gender etc –as the AL philosophy suggests when it compares racism, sexism etc to speciesism and the corresponding movements. People of different colour or gender, unlike animals, are capable of liberating themselves. But liberation, like freedom, cannot be granted. It can only be taken, through struggle. Even though it was whites who eventually granted freedom to slaves, following their struggle, it was, nevertheless, the ex-slaves themselves who were able to maintain and expand their freedom through their continuous struggle (e.g. the civil rights movement), or else their freedom would have been reversible at any moment –exactly as would be the case if animal liberation were granted by humans.

In the same problematic one could doubt the validity of the argument that animal liberation, though not a sufficient condition for democracy and ecology, is, as Best iterates, “a necessary condition of economic, social, cultural, and psychological change” on the grounds that “moral progress occurs in the process of demystifying and deconstructing all myths –from ancient patriarchy and the divine right of kings to Social Darwinism and speciesism– that attempt to legitimate the domination of one group over another. Moral progress advances through the dynamic of replacing hierarchical visions with egalitarian visions and developing a broader and more inclusive ethical community”.

However, first, one could challenge the argument that moral progress advances through replacing one set of visions with another and argue instead that moral change takes place through the interplay of institutional changes and the corresponding changes of values, as the ID project suggests. Second, one may question the hypothesis of an evolutionary moral progress itself. The alleged improvements in gender, race, ethnic relations and human rights in general hardly justify the hypothesis of directionality towards a free or autonomous society, in the sense of an inclusive democracy. The improvements in social relations and structures have not been matched by a corresponding progress in political and economic relations and structures towards political and economic democracy. Thus, the widening and deepening of women's rights, minorities' rights, etc., may have improved the social position of the members of the respective communities, but from the democratic viewpoint, this process has simply led to the expansion of the ruling political and economic elites to include representatives of these communities. Furthermore, these improvements do not imply any significant changes with respect to democracy in the workplace, the place of education etc. Even as regards the human rights record one may raise serious doubts about the Progress achieved. Torture, for instance, after tapering off with the Enlightenment in Europe in the seventeenth century to the extent that it had almost disappeared, came back with a vengeance in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Finally, as regards ethical Progress, i.e., the evolution towards moral 'improvement' (in terms of mutuality, solidarity, etc.), it is indicative that even social democrats like Habermas and Bobbio, who have an obvious vested political interest in the idea of Progress and social evolution, do admit that it is not possible to assert the existence of ethical Progress, despite the acknowledged rapid technological progress of the last hundred years or so. So, one may argue that the unmistakable trend, at least in the past two to three centuries, has been one of growing selfishness and growing competition, rather than of enhanced mutuality and solidarity.



An additional important point that has to be made here in comparing the dynamics of liberation is that if race and gender relations have improved in the last hundred years or so, this has not only been due to the fact that the elites have been persuaded by the struggles of blacks and women respectively to institutionalise non-discrimination between races and sexes. In fact, this has been due to the interplay of changes in institutional conditions (as a result of the expansion of the growth economy which required the participation of women and people of different colour in production) and the corresponding changes of values (as a result of the struggle of the corresponding movements). In other words, what persuaded the elites controlling the capitalist market economy to grant equality of rights was the expansion of capitalist production which needed everybody to be involved in the production process – something that, as the civil rights and feminist movements had made clear, could not be achieved unless some sort of equality in production relations was to be introduced. As regards animals, however, their cooperation is hardly needed for their exploitation – as mentioned above, where we distinguished between power relations and force or violence. Therefore, the elites will never accept the abolitionist demands of the ALM and will attempt instead – as they are already doing with significant success – to divide the AL supporters into two groups: radical activists on the one hand, who will be characterised as terrorists and crushed, and law-abiding animal lovers on the other, who will be allowed to continue lobbying as long as they do not pose any significant political or economic threat to the elites. This is another reason why the ALM could only stand a chance of bringing about most of the changes it demands if it were to become an integral part of an antisystemic movement.

## **Animal liberation, science and rationalism**

It was pointed out above that, whereas respect for human life is an absolute, respect for animal life is subject to exceptions defined by the democratic assemblies, on the basis of the moral values drawn from the principles of autonomy and community and reversible only by exceptional majorities. Therefore, all we can do here is to try to make some suggestions as to how the democratic assemblies of the future could determine their stand with respect to the two major exceptions referring to animal life, i.e. animal-based testing and the killing of animals for food. In the process, we will also have to discuss briefly some aspects of the relationship of AL to science and rationalism.

There is no doubt that in the present society, animal life and welfare have marginal value – if any at all! The requirements of the growth economy and, in particular, those of the food industry involved in intensive factory farming on the one hand and those of the pharmaceutical industry on the other, leave very little scope for respect for animal life and welfare. Furthermore, it seems that the military complex plays an equally bad – if not worse – role in this context. In Britain, for instance, it was recently revealed that military lab tests on live animals have doubled in the last five years with 85,072 mice, 251 primates – including macaques – and 555 pigs being involved. Many of these animals have been exposed to anthrax, poison gas and lethal nerve agents, while others have been drained of blood and injected with 'E coli'.<sup>[12]</sup> The cruelty of these experiments was made clear by a spokesman who said, apparently with no qualms, “we're talking about chemical agent-induced burns left for days, poison gas experiments, applying fatal doses of nerve agent to animals' skins and monkeys given sarin and anthrax.” No wonder that young ALM activists are ready to risk their freedom for many years – and the establishment is more than ready to oblige by classifying these activists as ‘terrorists’, despite the fact that they are committed

to non-violence as far as human life is concerned!

Scientists who take part in such experiments just for the purpose of promoting their careers are justifiably condemned for their insensitivity, although financial considerations may also play an important role. But what about medical, animal-based tests which supposedly may save thousands of human lives? Could we take a stand as critical to this as to military testing, which is clearly utterly unjustifiable? Best concludes that there is no good ethical or empirical case for killing animals even for vivisection, “the strongest and possibly only argument for using animals for human purposes in a way that exploits them and violates their lives.” Furthermore, he raised the question “why the same violent procedures used on animals are not equally legitimate if used on human beings”, and the answer to this question, in terms of the standard criterion of advanced intelligence, gives rise to the further question “why we should not experiment on 4-5 year old children rather than chimpanzees, as such primates are more intelligent than young children?” The answers to these questions are not difficult to determine in the framework of the problematic developed above. First, if the choice is to sacrifice the welfare of an animal for the sake of saving the lives of many more human beings and no alternative method is scientifically available, then the lives of human beings should be preferred, not because they are more intelligent than animals but because, unlike animals, they are potentially autonomous beings. Second, the burden of proof about the availability of alternative methods clearly belongs to AL scientists – particularly so when, according to an extensive investigation in 2002 into animal experiments by the House of Lords, all reputable scientific and medical organisations in every country of the world confirmed that animal research has been crucial in the understanding of health and disease<sup>[13]</sup>. So, if AL scientists can **prove** that alternative methods of medical testing, equally efficient (from the medical – not the financial– viewpoint) to those using animals, are available, then a democratic society would have a moral duty to adopt them and rule out any methods using animals. Third, even if our criterion were higher intelligence (which it is not), what matters is clearly the **potential** intelligence of a 4-5 year old child, rather than its present intelligence compared to that of a chimpanzee.

As regards the role of science in general on the matter, we think that it would be catastrophic to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Science (as well as technology) is neither neutral nor autonomous with respect to the prevailing socio-economic system, as it is conditioned by the power relations implied by the specific set of social, political and economic institutions characterising the growth economy and the dominant social paradigm. Furthermore, scientists depend on the elites which, directly or indirectly, finance the scientific research projects they are involved with, while their careers themselves depend on their success in achieving the goals of research set by the same elites.  
[14]

However, this does not mean that we should distrust science itself, or even worse, rationalism in general, as some currents within the AAM do. It is obvious that the irrational trends in ecology and postmodernism in general have their origin in the collapse of the myth of progress. But the collapse of this myth does not mean that we have to go back to forms of irrationalism in order to criticise modern techno-science, or that, alternatively, we have to fall into the trap of positivism. The alternative to objective rationalism, ‘certainty’ and ‘objectivity’, as well as to irrationalism, is not, as one of us attempted to show elsewhere<sup>[15]</sup>, a ‘postmodern’ relativism which equates all traditions, whether they are based on

philosophy, (which, to be true to itself, has to be based not on ‘given’ truths but on constant questioning), or on some form of closed system. The real alternative to positivism and irrationalism is the development of a democratic rationalism<sup>[16]</sup> that transcends both –namely, a rationalism founded on democracy as a structure and a process of social self-institution, which implies the democratic adoption of those traditions and body of knowledge which have, as their source (and are processed by), reason, rather than religious or other intuitions. This means that the only admissible ‘truths’, including values and ethical codes conditioning individual behaviour, are those rationally derived (i.e., through reason and open discussion rather than through Revelation, intuition, myth, or a closed system of ideas or ‘scientific’ truths) and democratically decided upon.

Finally, as regards the second exception, killing animals for food, Best argues “If everyone decides they wish to be carnivores, this decision by millions of people in any nation almost requires the conditions of factory farming to meet such high levels of consumer demand”. However, this is not necessarily so. Given that, as far as we know, there is no conclusive evidence that human beings have always been, by nature, anything else but omnivores (as many other animal species have been –let alone the exclusively carnivore animals), we cannot see how the decision to stop being omnivorous can be taken at any level other than the individual level, as at present. The rationale behind this stand is the fact that most human beings, in many societies, have historically had a mixed diet. We did not evolve from ungulates in which we would all be vegans by necessity, but we are omnivores with not exclusively vegetarian appetites. So, whoever wishes to be a vegan can do so, and a democratic society and *Paedeia* could even encourage vegetarianism. But it cannot go further –if a decent towards totalitarianism is to be avoided– than prescribing strict conditions about animal rearing which would have to be carried out, not on the basis of intensive farming and similar forms of exploitation, but on a community basis. This is why we suggest that this matter, being a moral issue which may take many generations to be settled, should perhaps better be left to individual consciousness. Still, even in this case, the rules of rearing animals in accordance with the new autonomous ethics should be decided by simple majority rule and it is hoped that *paedeia* would play a crucial role in creating a new ecological ethics, which would be consistent with an inclusive democracy.

## **The Animal Liberation Movement as an Antisystemic Force**

AL supporters like Steve Best see the ALM not only as a new liberation movement, as a contemporary anti-slavery and abolitionist movement in the sense that it pursues the complete emancipation of animals from all forms of human exploitation, subjugation, and domination, but also, as Best stresses, as a leading antisystemic force:

“the ALM attacks not only the ideologies of capitalism that promote growth, profit, and commodification, but the property system itself with hammers and Molotov cocktails. Fully aware of the realities of the corporate-state complex, the ALM breaks with the fictions of representative democracy to undertake illegal direct action.... It is a leading global, anti-capitalist force.”

However, as we pointed out in the Introduction, the ALM, as a single-issue movement with no universal project behind it, is not, and cannot be, an anti-capitalist or anti-systemic

movement, even if the direct action targets of its activists are significant systemic institutions (although it should be noted that even when capitalist property is attacked by ALM activists it is attacked as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself). Furthermore, one may question the validity of comparing movements referring to social relations to a movement referring to inter-species relations. Even more important are the unconscious –and sometimes conscious– connections between currents within the broader AL movement and semi-fascist ideology and organisations. We do not simply refer to the growing number of neofascist parties and movements all over the world which have adopted the animal rights campaigns.<sup>[17]</sup> Far more pernicious is the fact that revered thinkers within the movement like Ronnie Lee, founder of the Animal Liberation Front, adopt an explicitly eco-fascist ideology (similar to that of deep ecology) which states that only an enforced massive reduction in the world population, e.g. through vasectomy, would lead to a world fair to animals. Thus, in a BBC interview, Ronnie Lee declared that “to create a world that is fair to the other creatures on it we have to have some policy of reducing the human population, so that would mean we would have to breed less.” And when asked “how much less?”, his reply was “a reduction in the British population from the current level of 60 million to just 6 million would be better for the animals.”<sup>[18]</sup>

Given, however, that the AAM is a very divided and fragmented movement, a kind of ‘popular front’ for the promotion of animal rights, it is not surprising that it attracts people of various political persuasions. But it is exactly this composition of the AAM that on the one hand makes it massive (like the World Social Forum) and at the same time (again like the WSF!) renders it not really threatening to the elites and to the system as a whole. Although the direct action of some of its activists is a nuisance to some elites (particularly the UK and US elites where the movement is stronger), it is a nuisance not because it really threatens, materially or ideologically, the system itself but simply because it threatens parts of local elites. The UK and US governments react the way they do because, obviously, they would prefer the corresponding sections of capital under attack by the ALM to stay in these countries and create local jobs, rather than move to other countries. In fact, all these elites have to do, in case the divide and rule tactics mentioned above (which aim to isolate and crush the radical elements within the movement) fail, is to move their investments to countries like China or India where the ALM would either never expand massively or, alternatively, would easily be crushed. Furthermore, the backlash that has already been created against the ALM shows that it is not only the system that is against the ALM itself or its organs only, but also a significant sector of public opinion. This means that the moral appeal of AL would become increasingly weaker, the stronger this backlash becomes in the future.

Primarily, then, the very composition of AAM, enhanced by the fact that there is no clear political project of an antisystemic nature to back this movement, means that it is bound to be a single-issue reformist movement. This is because, as is the case with every popular front and every ‘forum-type’ movement, any common political platform that could possibly emerge from it would have to represent the lowest common denominator of its varied components. And this is exactly the fundamental weakness which could make the development of an antisystemic consciousness out of a philosophy of ‘rights’ almost impossible. On the other hand, any attempt to radicalise AAM by changing its nature from a popular front, single-issue, type of movement to a clearly antisystemic movement, would simply lead to the decimation of the entire movement.

As regards the ALM in particular, the fact that its rhetoric and direct-action tactics show an understanding that the state is a political extension of the capitalist economy and that, therefore, “representative democracy” is a myth, does not, by itself, mean the development of an antisystemic consciousness. Particularly so, if one takes into account the existence of neo-fascist currents within the broader AAM movement. Neither does the fact that the ALM uses libertarian organisation procedures like the affinity groups make it antisystemic in nature. The antisystemic character of a movement is not determined by its organisational or tactical procedures but by the content of its political project, especially if, as was shown above, it is at least questionable that the project to emancipate animals is integrally related to the struggle to emancipate humans—unless the former is an integral part of an antisystemic movement aiming to achieve the latter. Finally, even the fact that the ALM is in favour of supporting and often forming alliances with human and environmental movements does not change its single-issue character. An alliance of single-issue movements does not make a universal movement but simply creates a forum of single-issue movements. The point is not to attack the system from different viewpoints, which will then supposedly collapse out of the cumulative force of these blows. As long as the system can rely on the uneven level of consciousness of populations at large, it can use the highly effective and historically proven ‘divide and rule’ tactics to perpetuate its existence. Unless movements like the ALM and the radical currents within the feminist movement, the ecological movement etc become part of a universal project and of a corresponding antisystemic movement aiming at an autonomous democratic society, they will inevitably be just part-and-parcel of the present fractionalised post-modern society, incapable not only of really threatening the system, but even of creating an antisystemic consciousness. Finally, the very nature of an ecological movement, and even more so of ALM, whose objective is the protection of a particular aspect of Nature, makes it a one-issue movement. The attempts by social ecologists, Marxists and radical greens to turn ecological movements into universalist movements failed, precisely because those movements emphasised the need to reintegrate society with just one aspect of its environment (Nature) and not with all aspects of it –particularly with economy and polity which are exclusively man-made, in contrast to Nature which is only partially affected by man’s activities.

On the basis of this problematic, our view is that the only way in which the ALM could become an important element of the struggle for a new society would be for it to become part of a broader struggle for overall, anti-capitalist change. We believe, therefore, that unless an antisystemic AL current, aiming to become an integral part of an antisystemic movement with a clear antisystemic project and strategy, develops out of the present broad movement soon, the entire movement could easily end up as a kind of ‘painless’ lobby (to the elites) that could even condemn direct action in the future, so that it could gain some ‘respectability’ among the middle classes. The middle classes, liberals et al, a significant number of whom might today support the values of the broader animal liberation movement, are much more likely to abandon the movement altogether rather than be radicalised further –as AL radicals like Steve Best hope– when the state inevitably resorts to totalitarian methods and escalates the dialectics of violence and counter-violence, as it has already begun to do in the UK and USA. Meanwhile, the transnational corporations which are the targets of the more radical sections of the movement, might simply emigrate to corporate-friendly ‘paradises’ in the South, until the radical currents within the movement in the West are crushed and the entire movement becomes, in effect, a peaceful lobby like the present Green parties in Europe, appealing to the same middle class electoral clientele.

The development of an alternative consciousness towards animals has to be part of the development of an antisystemic consciousness, and this has to become hegemonic (at the local/ regional/ national/ transnational level) before new institutions implementing an ecological democracy – as part of an ID– begin to be built. In other words, the strategy for an ecological democracy should be part of the transitional ID strategy in which direct action, though playing a more significant role than the traditional tactics of the Left (demonstrations etc), would still only be a defensive tactics, whereas, most of all, we would need an aggressive tactics consisting of building alternative institutions within the present system (which would include institutions of ecological democracy) that would make the antisystemic consciousness hegemonic.

Therefore, although the AAM is indeed a major global social and political force, we think that it is wrong to argue that it is a potentially important force for social change, supposedly because its struggle against animal exploitation and the capitalist industries involved with it could function as an element of, and a catalyst for, human and earthly liberation. In fact, this argument reverses the priorities. Although there could be a movement for an ecological democracy as part of a universal project like ID, and although it is true that an important part of the demand for the reintegration of society with nature should be the recognition of animal rights, the opposite is not true. Even if parts of the AAM, like the ALM, refer to the systemic causes of animal exploitation, as part of the exploitative nature of capitalism, this does not change the fundamental character of this movement as a single-issue, ‘popular front’ type of movement, which can only maintain its image of a massive movement as long as its main political platform remains reformist.

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[1] As a social ecologist/communalist put it recently, “the point of reviewing these facts is not to suggest a necessary or inevitable connection between animal rights and fascism. But the historical pattern is unmistakable and demands explanation. What helps to account for this consistent intersection of apparently contrary worldviews is a common preoccupation with *purity*”. See Peter Staudenmaier, ‘[Ambiguities of Animal Rights](#)’, *COMMUNALISM: International Journal for a Rational Society*, issue 5 (March 2003).

[2] An antisystemic movement is characterized by the fact that it explicitly or implicitly challenges the legitimacy of a socio-economic ‘system’, both in the sense of its institutions, which create and reproduce the unequal distribution of power (considered here as the ultimate cause of antisystemic social divisions), and also in the sense of its values, which legitimize the domination of a human being over human being, or of Society over Nature (see T. Fotopoulos, ‘[The End of Traditional Antisystemic Movements and the Need for A New Type of Antisystemic Movement Today](#)’, *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (November 2001).

[3] see T. Fotopoulos, ‘[Globalisation, the reformist Left and the Anti-Globalisation ‘Movement](#)’, *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (July 2001).

[4] see T. Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy* (London/N.Y.: Cassell/Continuum, 1997) [ch. 2](#) and also *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy*, [ch. 7](#).

[5] A heteronomous society is a society not capable of explicitly self-instituting itself, in other words, not capable of putting into question its already given institutions and the *dominant social paradigm*. In this sense, a tribal society which is not capable of questioning tradition, a religious society not questioning divine law, and, finally, a capitalist society which is incapable of questioning the dominant social paradigm are all examples of heteronomous societies, irrespective of the degree of political and economic equality they may have achieved.

- [6] Peter Staudenmaier, 'Ambiguities of Animal Rights'.
- [7] see T. Fotopoulos, '[Towards a Democratic Liberatory Ethics](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (November 2002).
- [8] *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. By David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell 1997), p. 400.
- [9] T. Fotopoulos, *Towards a Democratic Liberatory Ethics*.
- [10] Peter Staudenmaier, 'Ambiguities of Animal Rights'.
- [11] We may define power, following Castoriadis (*Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, Oxford: OUP, 1991, p. 149) as the capacity for a personal or impersonal instance to bring someone to do (or abstain from doing) that which, left to him/herself, s/he would not necessarily have done (or would possibly have done).
- [12] Marie Woolf, 'Military lab tests on live animals double in five years', *The Independent* (14 May 2006).
- [13] Steve Connor, 'A mouse could save your life', *The Independent* (06 March 2006).
- [14] T. Fotopoulos, '[Towards a Democratic Conception of Science and Technology](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1999).
- [15] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, Ch. 8, pp. 340-349.
- [16] See T. Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, Ch. 8, pp. 350-351.
- [17] see for evidence Peter Staudenmaier, 'Ambiguities of Animal Rights'.
- [18] "How animal rights took on the world", by Simon Cox and Richard Vadon, *BBC Radio 4* (Thursday, 18 November 2004).