

For the abolition of veganism, for the abolition of animal exploitation

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

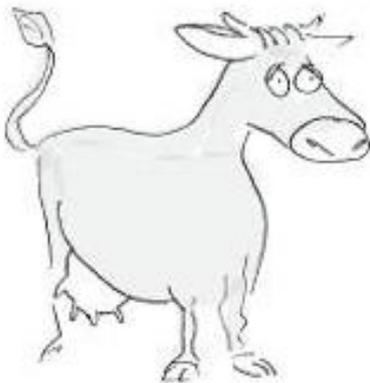
I. Introduction

I am an animal rights activist from Switzerland and after studying sociology of social movements and history of human slavery abolitionists, I decided to write this text. Of course, I boycott animal products and I hope that this text will help our movement to evolve and become more effective.

a. Nonhuman animals are slaves

Ever since Darwin we have clearly known that human beings are not the only animals to have interests and to feel emotions. Nevertheless, nonhuman individuals are legally a property in our speciesist society. Considered as a resource, they are exploited for their milk and eggs ; are killed for their skin and flesh ; are used as a “biological material” for experiments, etc. The definition of slavery is the following: “the condition of being legally owned by someone else”. Therefore, nonhuman animals are slaves.

CURRENTLY, ANIMALS ARE SLAVES



THE FOOD INDUSTRY IS THE LARGEST CONTRIBUTOR OF ANIMAL EXPLOITATION. 99,8% OF ENSLAVED ANIMALS ARE KILLED SO THAT PEOPLE CAN EAT THEM

b. 99.8% of animal slavery = food

The number of terrestrial animals killed for food is numbered at roughly 60 billion individuals every year. Aquatic animals are counted in tons, about 150 million tons every year, which makes at least 1000 billion victims. Overall that makes about 1'060 billion individuals killed every year for food. In comparison, the fur industry kills 60 million individuals (→ **0,0057% of food victims**) and animal experimentation about 300 million victims (→ **0.028% of food victims**).

II. What strategies must be used to abolish animal exploitation?

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

a. Strategy used by social movements

aa. Claim-making machines

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

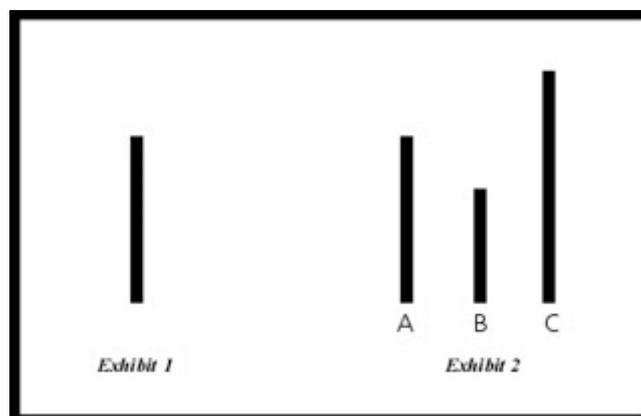
- 1) They express a claim: → “Abolition of apartheid!”, “We demand women’s right to vote!”, “The war must be stopped!”
- 2) Then, they make the claim more visible in the society (demonstrations, petitions, letters, TV debates, etc...)
- 3) This claim-making creates a debate in society, causing the issue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

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

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

bb. Psychological study of Professor Asch

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



In this experiment, Professor Asch showed ten people a line drawn on a paper. These participants were asked to say which of the bars next to it was the same length. In reality, however, only one of the participants was the real subject of the study, as the other nine were this psychologist's accomplices and were instructed to give an incorrect answer. When the

nine accomplices gave a wrong answer, the subject often complied with the majority. But when there was at least one person who broke unanimity by giving the correct answer, it became easier for the subject to question what the majority said and he was more likely to respond correctly. The presence of just one person breaking the unanimity could reduce conformity as much as 80% (see: Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 70(9), 1–70. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0093718>).

After the experiment, the subjects who complied with the majority said generally that they had gone along with the group for fear of being ridiculed or thought "peculiar". And some of them even thought that the majority was right.

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

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

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

b. Strategy used by animal rights activists: conversion strategy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the success of this tactic is very limited: After 2,000 years of this strategy being used by Christianity, the majority of humans are still not Christian, and Christianity has even used plenty of very violent conversion tactics.

BUT THE CONVERSION STRATEGY DOES NOT WORK



I CONFIRM... WE'VE BEEN USING THIS STRATEGY FOR 2000 YEARS AND STILL NOT EVERYONE IS CHRISTIAN!

How many thousands of years will we have to wait to abolish animal exploitation if we use this strategy?

III. Consequences of the conversion strategy

a. Inefficiency

aa. Historical look

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

bb. Proportion dominance

Studies have found that courses of action that completely (or almost completely) eradicate some problem are preferred over courses of action that provide incomplete eradication. For example, in a study published in 2006, Professor Bartels found that an intervention saving 102 lives out of 115 at risk was judged more valuable than one saving 105 lives out of 700 at risk, even if the number of lives saved was higher in the second intervention! This psychological effect is called "proportion dominance" and Bartels showed that its impact was

even more important in the context of saving natural resources or animal lives. An intervention preventing 245 of 350 fish deaths due to pollution from Factory A was judged much more important than one preventing 251 of 980 fish deaths due to pollution from Factory B (see: *Bartels, Daniel M., Proportion Dominance: The Generality and Variability of Favoring Relative Savings Over Absolute Savings (2006). Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Vol. 100, pp. 76-95, 2006*).

Let's imagine that being vegan saves the lives of 100 animals each year. Since the total number of animals killed every year is at least 1'060 billion, the saving of those 100 animals is considered as totally insignificant by our human mind because of this "proportion dominance" effect. This is the reason why many people refuse to change their diet, knowing as they do that their tiny individual actions will not even slightly change the enormous number of animals killed for humans each year.

However, if the act of refusing to eat animal products was presented as part of a global boycott from an international movement seeking to eliminate the entire 1'060 billion killings every year, we can assume that people would think much more seriously about the issue. All this without even taking into account that just the expression of the claim "Killing animals for food has to be abolished!" will create a debate in society, will help to spread our arguments in society and therefore make a substantial amount of people think about the problem.

cc. Misuse of time and energy

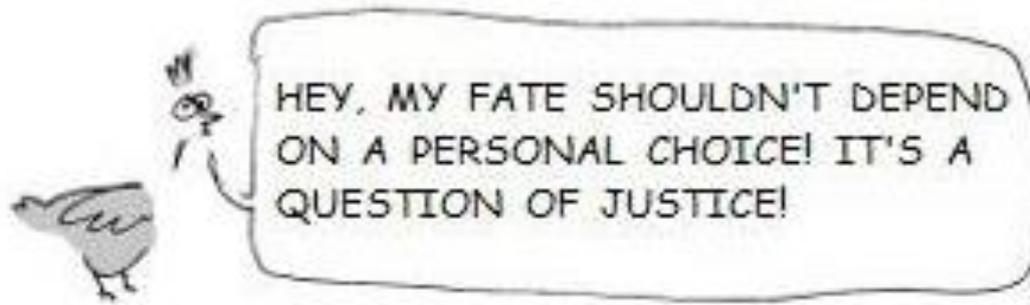
The animal rights movement doesn't have an astronomic number of activists and our resources aren't infinite. Nevertheless, we are using our time and energy to convert 6 billion non-vegans one by one, all without even knowing if our strategy will succeed one day. Instead we could be creating a debate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

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

b. Question of personal choice

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

Of course the decision of killing and eating another individual **isn't a question of personal choice but a question of justice towards the exploited animals.**



However, people will not realize this if there are no people who claim that the killing of animals for food has to be abolished.

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

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

c. Psychological reinforcement of speciesism

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

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

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

GO VEGAN! MEAT IS BAD
FOR YOUR HEALTH



IS LIKE SAYING:

DON'T EAT CHILDREN !
THEIR MEAT IS BAD FOR YOUR
HEALTH!



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

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

a. Example of human slavery abolition

Let's take the example of human slavery abolitionists in the 19th century.

Did they try to convert people to « *hooganism* » (a way of living that excludes all products of human slavery)?



(*HOOGANISM IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT EXCLUDES ALL PRODUCTS OF HUMAN SLAVERY)

→ NO

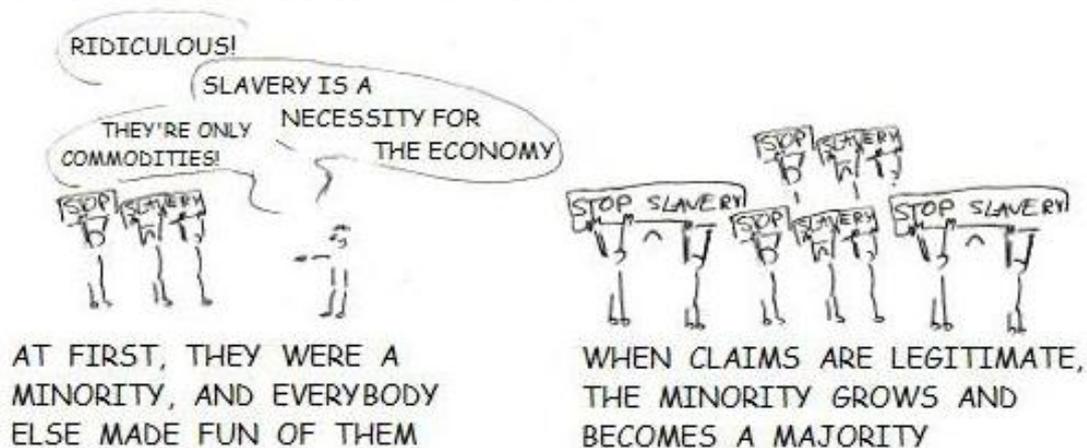


→ YES

No! They made claims that human slavery has to be abolished and created a debate in the society on the question.

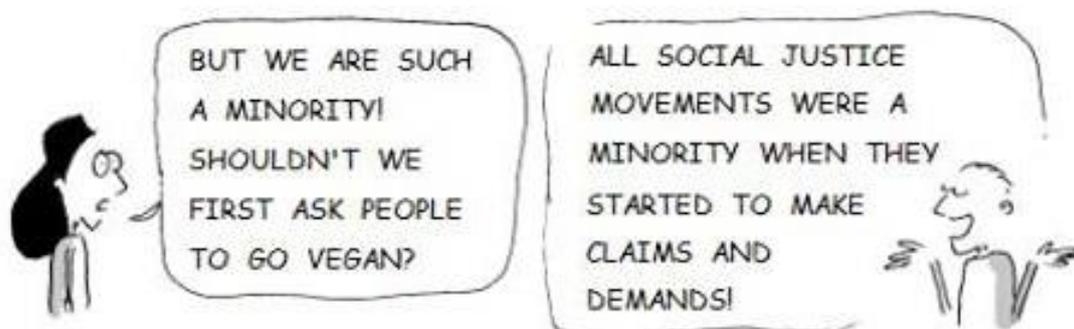
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THEY MADE CLEAR DEMANDS
 THEY CREATED PUBLIC DEBATE, IN ORDER TO MAKE
 HUMAN SLAVERY A SOCIAL ISSUE.



Animal rights activists should do the same.

By the way, the famous american abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, even openly ridiculed the tactic of boycotting all products of slavery, saying it was at best a distraction from the larger abolitionist work and at worst it whitewashed the conscience of the people to the detriment of slaves who did not profit from it. (see: Hinks, Peter and McKivigan, John, editors. Williams, R. Owen, assistant editor. Encyclopedia of antislavery and abolition, Greenwood Press, 2007, p. 268)



b. Morally unacceptable strategy

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

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

c. Social movement strategy

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

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

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

Conversion strategy:

“Go vegan!”

“Veganism is good for the planet.”

“Veganism is good for your health.”

“Going vegan is a rational choice.”

“Vegan food is great!”

Social movement strategy:

“**Slaughterhouses must be closed now.**” (copied from the official website of international marches to close down all slaughterhouses: <https://stopabattoirs.org/>)

“**Killing animals for simple food habits should be forbidden.**”

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

“**We ask for the abolition of fishing and fish farming**” (copied from the official website of the World Day for the End of Fishing: <https://www.end-of-fishing.org/en/why/>)

“**Animals should have a legal right to life.**”

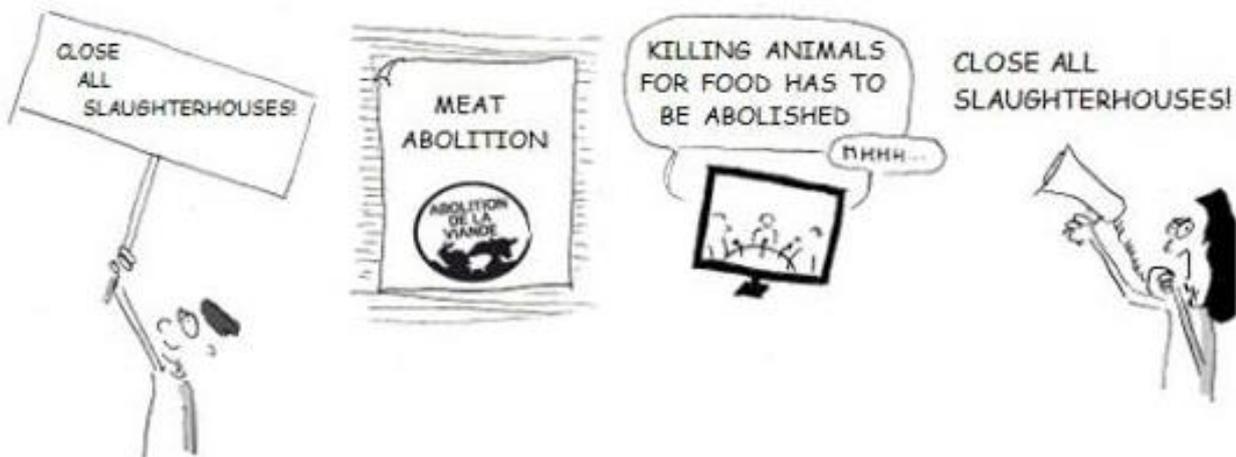
“Farming, fishing and hunting, as well as selling and eating animal products, must be abolished.” (copied from meat abolition movement website: <http://meat-abolition.org/en/wwam>)

“Society should condemn and fight speciesism just as it fights racism and sexism.” (copied from the official website of the World Day for the End of Speciesism: <https://www.end-of-speciesism.org/en/our-demands/>)

Conclusion

LET'S USE THE SAME STRATEGIES AS SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS:

- EXPRESS OUR DEMANDS
- MAKE THEM VISIBLE (DEMOS, LETTERS, ADS, ETC...)
- CREATE A PUBLIC DEBATE



THIS WAY, WE WILL ABOLISH ANIMAL SLAVERY!

When we take part in activism or just speak in defense of non-humans, we need to be sure that our message is understood as a **request for change that concerns the whole society** so that citizens after hearing and reading our arguments change their political opinion regarding the practice of killing animals for food.

But we must also explain that there are millions of vegans in this world who boycott animal products and that every time that they can choose to buy a vegan product instead of a non-vegan one they can easily choose compassion and make an act for the animals, like they can also make other kind of acts like donations to animal rights organizations or voting for animal-friendly politicians and laws.

Instead of being afraid of the public, we must **have the courage to speak for the animals** involved and begin to **express what we really want**:

“We demand the abolition of animal exploitation!”

(Please read the following article to know how to make effective claims:

<https://fortheabolitionofveganism.blogspot.com/2017/>)

Edit: since this article was first published (november 2012), many thousands of animal rights activists and organizations are now using this social movement strategy to highlight the injustice of the practice of killing animals for simple food habits.

Source of the text: (Abolitionist strategy) <http://abolitioniststrategy.com/index.php/for-the-abolition-of-veganism-for-the-abolition-of-animal-exploitation/>