

Thoughts on avoidable harm and being veganish

From [There's an Elephant in the Room blog](#)

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Our audience deserves the truth no less than our victims. Yet when someone who harms other animals or promotes harm to other animals, says 'I'm vegan and this is what veganism is all about,' their listeners are being DENIED the information that they need to live true to the values that they hold.



Image by [Andrew Skowron](#) of 4-week-old hens destined for an existence as egg machines.

I can't count how often I've seen declarations from people who claim to be vegan despite indulging in some form of avoidable use of members of other animal species. However before I go any further I must stress the word 'AVOIDABLE'.

Living in a nonvegan world, completely surrounded by a regime of oppression that runs almost entirely on the exploitation of other individuals, I sincerely can't imagine how anyone can claim that they have absolutely no involvement in exploitation either directly or indirectly. For the avoidance of doubt, this is not some controversial claim that veganism is impossible – far from it. I'm only mentioning this because I've seen so many vegans attacking or sniping at others as if they, themselves, were completely free of the taint of corruption that nonveganism brings. Examples of this sniping are when people are condemned for shopping in supermarkets, or taking life-supporting medication, or any one of a number of other activities that personal circumstances mean they are unable to avoid.

Even if every actual vegan had been born and raised vegan – which only a miniscule percentage were – let's take as an example, buying goods in a vegan shop. I refuse to believe that every single human involved in the growing, harvesting, production, importing, package design, manufacture etc of the stock goods was vegan. The premises to sell these items – designed, built, owned, maintained by, leased from vegans? The transport of goods, including vehicle design, manufacture, maintenance, oil extraction/fuel refinement, petrol station employment etc? The creation of adverts? The ownership of the media where the adverts appear? No way – not even close. Examine all the associations in ANY situation and we will ALWAYS find nonvegan connections, and hence links to exploitation. We are ALL tainted to some degree.

BUT.

The word '*avoidable*' is the critical one. Defined more precisely, it's even covered in the actual definition of veganism.

'Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment.'

When we are not vegan, we use members of other species for our own interests at the expense of their right to own their bodies and live their lives. Vegan is who we are, not a lengthy checklist of do's and don'ts. However if we *knowingly* carry out non vegan actions and activities **which we are able to avoid**, *even* just occasionally, then we have simply NOT grasped what veganism actually is.

Accusations of purity or 'gatekeeping'?

Now at this point, while some will no doubt be still maintaining that they are utterly free of any taint of corruption, many will be readying the 'purist' card to try to shut down what is increasingly viewed as heresy – the promotion of the animal rights ethic that drives veganism. Believe me, I've seen and heard that one times without number and it's *always* from people who are seeking to excuse some level of violence and needless harm, either in their own actions or those of someone else. It puzzles me that accusations of 'purity' are even a thing – I've already stated openly that we are all tainted to some degree. If veganism was a difficult, complicated concept that took years to learn about and master, I could maybe see the point. But it's nothing like that at all.

If we do our absolute best not to harm members of other species, we call ourselves vegan. If we *do* avoidably harm members of other species or promote harm to them, we are *not* vegan no matter what we call ourselves. That's it. End of. How hard is that to grasp? It's black and white, with no middle ground to get lost in, no complexities to study and learn, no grey area.

Yet for some unfathomable reason, many people seem desperate to call themselves 'vegan' despite the fact that they clearly aren't. Why is that? Why is it that some like to adopt the word but fail to grasp the breathtakingly simple principle behind it? How could it be any clearer? But the question is – are they doing anyone any harm?

'Vegan' but *not* vegan – what's the problem?

If we are *not* vegan but *we represent ourselves* as vegan to others who don't know any better, this is where problems start. Some of the most harmful reinventions of 'veganism' involve [celebrities hungry for](#)

[publicity](#). While some turn ‘veganism’ on and off like a switch with as much sensationalist coverage as they can drum up, others are mouthy in the press about ‘cruelty to animals’, covering topics like fur and dog exploitation, but suspiciously silent when asked outright if they’re vegan. Because they’re not, which by definition means that they are perpetrators of the most sickening atrocities imaginable.

I’ve seen too much sensationalist press and social media where any calling out of misinformation or false ‘vegan’ claims by much-adulated ‘celebrities’ invites hostility like ‘How dare you criticise’, ‘They’re famous and doing more good than you’, ‘They’re raising awareness’, ‘We can’t all be perfect’, and that absolute gobsmacker of anthropocentric complacency, ‘Everybody’s journey to compassion is different’. As I said earlier, it’s nearly always from people seeking to justify their own lack of consistency by comparing themselves with said celebrities.

The first problem

So there’s the first problem; Someone who harms other animals or promotes harm to other animals, is saying ‘I’m vegan and this is what veganism is all about.’ And people look at them, listen to them, observe their actions and think, ‘Oh right. I wondered what veganism was about. Well I’m not doing much that’s different from them, and they say they’re vegan or anti-cruelty. So probably I’m sort of veganish too.’

And then, reassured that what they’re doing is ethical, they carry on doing whatever they do, carving a bloodbath through the innocent and defenceless with their choices as consumers with a quiet conscience. They most likely won’t feel the need to find out the real facts about animal use. Why should they? They think they’re ‘nearly’ vegan already. I’ve run across so many people like that and it breaks my heart every time. So many wasted opportunities!

Pretending to be vegan (or thinking you are when you’re not) is a betrayal of the most heart wrenching and tragic kind. Let’s be clear, it’s not betraying me and it’s not betraying other vegans as if there’s some exclusive club as per the ‘purist’ accusations. What it is, is an utter betrayal of the only ones who really matter in all of this blood-soaked debacle. Our [victims](#); the uncounted millions whose lives are being wiped out every second, the persecuted, the unwanted and lost, the broken and alone; each individual misery, each individual terror and each individual agony, all caused by our violent, vicious and predatory species.

The second problem

And the second problem? I have to believe there are genuine people out there, sincere people who don’t realise the harm that they’re doing each time they spend cash to keep the machines of death turning for the defenceless ones of this world. They’re people like I used to be, maybe people like you were before you found out about veganism. They’re the people that I reach out to every day, hoping that they can see in my words that I’ve nothing personal to gain, to money to make, no glory to seek. Like so many advocates, all we have is a deep commitment to truth and honesty, sharing facts on behalf of the innocent and persecuted creatures whose planet we share.

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In fact, it’s a lifelong regret that *I* was one of these people; falling for the sensationalist issues and horrific imagery of an ‘animal welfare’ organisation that claimed to represent the interests of other animals while

not even promoting veganism as the essential starting point for our concern. In the end it became clear to me that they were a profiteering business using the misery of our species' victims to pull at the heartstrings and the wallets of a *nonveganaudience* that included *me*.

I've long believed that the dearest wish of anyone working in an animal rights capacity, should be to find themselves out of a job. It's hard to be sincere about that as a 'career activist' with a family and a mortgage. By typing into a search engine any welfare organisation, followed by the word 'salaries' you'll quickly realise that there's plenty money to be made off the backs of the suffering billions of innocents who are being thrown under the bus for 'welfare business' profit every year.

Being true to those who need us so desperately

It's sadly true that even when we do our absolute best, we are still tainted by the regime of oppression that pervades our society and our planet. However as long as we avoid every aspect of nonhuman exploitation that we possibly can, then we are fulfilling the letter and the spirit of veganism. If we continue to indulge ourselves in avoidable harm, then it doesn't matter what we call ourselves, not only are we NOT vegan, but the harm we are causing is immeasurable.

Veganism is the absolute least we can do for our uncounted innocent victims; anything less is a betrayal.