

Interview for Revista dos Vegetarianos Magazine
<http://www.europenet.com.br/vegetarianos/index.php?>
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How long have you been vegan? Why did you make that choice?

Matthew: I've been vegan for 3½ years. Before that I was vegetarian for about 12 years. I first went vegetarian after watching a TV programme that explained the inefficiency of meat as a way of feeding people compared to plant foods, so it was a human social justice argument that first made an impact on me. At the time, I was shocked and couldn't believe that this wasn't more widely known – it made eating meat seem like stealing food from hungry people. At that time I lacked the imagination or information to extend the arguments towards dairy and eggs, and I didn't think much about the suffering of nonhuman animals. Looking back I'm sure I was convinced by the prevailing ideology that humans were 'special', and the fact that I didn't have any contact with nonhumans (I didn't live with any other animals from the age of about 7) gave me no direct experience to challenge that orthodoxy. When I look back I think I was waiting for a reason to go vegetarian but just didn't have one – I had felt uncomfortable eating meat for a while but couldn't articulate why.

Since that first change to vegetarianism I began to make sense of the wider issues more, but this was from talking to my vegetarian girlfriend at the time and through thinking about it – I don't remember reading, or knowing about, any of the classic texts like 'Animal Liberation', or having any contact with, or knowledge about, veg/AR organizations. In those days I was barely even aware of the internet and certainly didn't think to use it to try to find information. I first tried to go vegan in 2000, and lasted about a year, but gave up because I was feeling quite unhealthy. I didn't know enough about how to live on a plant based diet at that time, didn't know any other vegans, or of any vegan organizations that might be able to help me. At that stage I felt very isolated as a vegan. Of course looking back I wish I'd persevered, but I simply didn't know how to look after myself outside a typical British diet, I was really quite clueless about cooking plant-based meals so I ate a lot of bread and potatoes and not much else! The reasons for being vegan didn't go away of course, so as I learned more about food and looking after my health, the ethical arguments for veganism became irresistible again, and I made an 'overnight' transition from vegetarian to vegan about 3½ years ago.

By that time I'd heard of The Vegan Society, and joined them straight away. For the first time, this exposed me to the vast amount of vegan/AR literature that exists, and I feel like I've been trying to catch up with it ever since! Since going vegan for the second time, the reasons for my veganism have multiplied (I think this is a common experience for vegans), and being vegan has become ever more important in my personal and professional life, and thankfully I now know many other vegans, so instead of feeling isolated I feel part of a community of like minded people.

Looking back over my vegetarian and experimental vegan days, I think it shows the importance of having prominent organizations that promote and educate about veganism. I grew up in a household that ate a very traditional British diet, which is almost entirely focused on eating meat, and like most people was surrounded by the aggressive promotion of meat & dairy based diets through advertising, the place of food in the education system (I'm old enough to remember getting free cow's milk in school for instance), and through the stereotyping of vegetarians as weak, effeminate or ill (or

all three!). I didn't know any vegetarians while growing up, and I'm pretty sure I didn't even know the word 'vegan' until I was in my 20's.

Even after quite a short time as a vegan, I think it can be easy to forget that so many people have no idea that eating animals might be something to worry about, or that there is a viable alternative way of living. For those reasons, I think we have a perpetual responsibility to inform, to educate and to challenge the immense power of traditions, and of the corporations that profit from animal exploitation. Sadly, they begin their work on us almost as soon as we are born, unless we are very fortunate and raised as a vegan. But it is a source of hope to me that despite these massive obstacles, people can be persuaded to go vegan, and veganism as a way of living seems to be growing all the time. I think this is because people also tend to have a deep sense of justice and compassion for the suffering of others, and exploitation of animals is so full of suffering and injustice that awareness of that can be a powerful stimulus for people towards veganism.

Karen: I became vegan on the 23rd April 2006. I had been vegetarian for the previous 12 years and became increasingly aware of the inconsistencies inherent in being a vegetarian for ethical reasons and yet continuing to consume dairy products and eggs. Unfortunately, whereas I had probably been aware for a few years, at least on some level, of the fact that in the dairy and egg industries, animals were suffering and dying, I managed to persuade myself that I was still doing good by being vegetarian. It was probably really only after my friend, Matthew, began to talk to me about the issues and to give me more and more literature to read, that I could no longer ignore the issues and the fact that animals were suffering and dying so that I could continue to eat cheese soufflé! Like Matthew, since becoming vegan I have continued to read and discuss the issues and to inform myself as much as possible. When I became vegan I was utterly convinced that it was the right thing to do – my only regret was that it took me so long to get there. Since then however I have come to realize that it was the right thing to do not only for the reason I originally thought (to end the suffering of animals) but also for the purely selfish reason which convinces many people, the personal health benefits; the detrimental impacts of meat and dairy production on the environment; the growing global food crisis and the links between human suffering and animal suffering.

What is the meaning of veganism for you?

Matthew: Veganism for me is a way of integrating care for others with care for myself, and of connecting my own daily life with the ambition to change the speciesist and exploitative society that I am a part of. Being vegan is a way of enacting a positive connection with the world, through renouncing my ability to live my life on the basis of the dominance of others, and instead living in a way that demonstrates the possibility of living a non-exploitative life. Veganism also has a special power because of the fact that it is so mundane – what I mean is that every time you eat vegan food, you re-enact your commitment to oppose exploitation. Many moral or ethical issues might involve a process of reflection, followed by the adoption of an attitude or disposition to act in this or that way, but the opportunity to act may be rare, or never happen at all. Veganism is not like this, because we enact our ethics every time we eat and every time we talk about food, so it becomes completely embedded in our sense of who we are, and how we believe the world around us should be, that is, compassionate and non-exploitative, as far as is possible.

Karen: For me, veganism, is about choosing to live a lifestyle that, as far as possible, minimises the suffering and exploitation of nonhuman animals. It encompasses far more than just diet therefore, and involves considering the world in a holistic way, moving away from the notions of species hierarchy with which we have been brought up. As Matthew says, every time we eat, we are reaffirming our ethical positions. But it is not just about what we eat, our ethics become part of everything we do. Every single product we consume is considered in terms of its ethical implications and whether we wish it or not, our lifestyles are scrutinized by our meat-eating friends and family who seek to understand our choices. For many, veganism is seen as a sacrifice. However for me, veganism should be about showing others that it is not only *a* lifestyle choice but that it is *the only* rational lifestyle choice for myriad reasons.

Is veganism an utopia? Why's that?

Matthew: Yes, I think so. The idea of utopia is subject to a lot of stigma, just like veganism is, so there's something they have in common straight away! If you look in most dictionaries, you will find utopia described as 'impossible' or 'fanciful', or something similar. But if you look at the history of utopian thought, expressed in literature, social theory, or utopian communities and movements, you tend to find a consistent theme: the attempt to overthrow an existing oppressive order. The German social theorist Karl Mannheim (in his 1930s book *Ideology and Utopia*) described utopias as being concerned with 'bursting the bonds' of the existing social order, and being opposed to the ideologies that maintain an oppressive and exploitative status quo. The oppression and exploitation of other animals by humans is incomprehensible in scale. Veganism implacably opposes the massive violence of speciesism, and also shows us an alternative possible future. Therefore veganism is, in my view, utopian *par excellence*, in the best sense of challenging a prevailing system of domination.

Having said that, I do think that veganism needs to develop a more coherent and plausible vision of a post-speciesist future, and to do that it must avoid retreating into being a matter of personal conscience, and develop a politics appropriate to meeting the needs of humans and nonhumans alike. For example, I think the work of groups like the Vegan Organic Network (www.veganorganic.net) in the UK, and other similar organizations, is crucial. I am sure in time that these kinds of organizations will become widely respected as pioneers. If they don't we are in trouble! It is essential that we have practical solutions to the problems of feeding people in a way that empowers us all, and doesn't leave us dependent on agribusiness and the global commodity trading system. In a general sense, veganism for me must always be about connecting with as many people as possible, and finding practical solutions to the barriers to veganism that exist. In the affluent West, this must include destroying the system of governmental subsidies that support the animal exploitation industries and distort the price of food. Veganism can appear to be elitist in the UK and elsewhere, partly because of this kind of price distortion – without the subsidy and ideological power behind cereal production (as animal feed) and direct 'livestock' production, living on a plant based diet would be by far the cheapest option for anyone in the UK. It still can be now, if you are lucky enough to have access to fresh produce and the knowledge and skills to prepare nutritious vegan food for yourself and your family, but if you are dependent on big business in the form of the dominant food retailers, fast food corporations, etc, and don't have access to information other than the propaganda of the meat and dairy

industries, you have much less chance. As long as profit dominates our system of food production, ‘value added’ foods (i.e. processed foods dependent on industrial systems or production, manufacture, distribution, storage and domestic preparation) will also dominate. Feeding people has become a by-product of the pursuit of the profit, and veganism must have a rational alternative to this insanity. And at least an important part of that alternative for me has to come through vegan-organic systems of local production and exchange that disentangle us from the corporate exploiters. This is why I think that ‘lifestyle veganism’, which is the celebration of consumption of ‘value added’ vegan products, is a mistake. If veganism becomes yet one more ‘aspirational’ lifestyle choice, it is easily commodified and defused of its radical content. It also becomes divisive and a fast way to put people off veganism – especially the people who could benefit most from being liberated from dependence on animal exploiters for cheap food. I don’t pretend to have the answers to these kinds of problems in any detail, but I do think this is the level that we need to be thinking at if veganism is going to grow into a powerful social movement and force for change. And this means that wherever vegans are, they need to be thinking about what barriers to veganism exist for other people in their communities. I’m very familiar with the ideologies, policies and practices that justify and perpetuate animal exploitation in the UK, but I can’t speak with any authority beyond that experience, only in so far as believing veganism embodies ideals of compassion and renunciation of violence that are worth pursuing in any context, although the strategies or techniques may differ.

Karen: Matthew is the utopian scholar so he can answer this question in far more detail than me. However, yes, I think veganism is a utopia in terms of something we should be striving for. A utopian vegan world would require an overthrowing of the dominant social order – which would put an end to the speciesist system in which we live. Removal of this order would render indefensible the various forms of animal abuse and oppression which go on today. Animals could no longer be kept in captivity in zoos, aquaria and farms, they could no longer be forced to perform for human entertainment, they could not be used as objects for medical, psychological or cosmetic testing, they could not be used to provide organs for humans (xenotransplantation), and, of course, they could not be used to provide meat, dairy and other products derived one way or another from the bodies of dead, dying and exploited animals. We are very, very far from achieving a vegan utopia – and as Matthew says in his answer, there are practical considerations we need to take into account in our striving towards such a state. What we should bear in mind perhaps is that while a vegan utopia is some way away, it could be considered that we are currently living in a dystopia – a state in which conditions are characterized by misery, poverty, oppression, violence, disease and pollution. Even for those of us humans lucky enough to have avoided such a state, many more experience these horrors as part of their normal daily lives. And for millions of nonhuman animals living in appalling conditions, these are the conditions in which generation after generation are obliged to live out their lives in order to serve the desires of humans.

Why Vegatopia and why did you decide to start this study?

Matthew: The word ‘vegatopia’ was simply a way of connecting veganism and utopianism. Going vegan for me coincided with lecturing a course on utopian studies over three years. Gradually I made more and more connections between the utopian theory I was teaching and my personal experience of veganism, and also began to detect

a lot of utopian expression in the vegan/AR literature I was reading. I still haven't fully developed these connections in an academic paper, I never have enough time! But one day I will I'm sure. Anyway, making that connection enabled me to begin integrating teaching about veganism into the course on utopian studies. This was very successful - some students even tried veganism as a result of the course. So, this gave us the general idea of thinking about how far we, and other academics, could integrate veganism into their general professional life. We were sure that there must be many vegans teaching and researching all kinds of areas that weren't specifically connected to veganism. And we want to encourage them to make those connections. Encouraging as many vegans as possible to make their work relevant and useful to veganism we thought could provide a powerful resource for veg/AR activists and NGOs. So, the vegatopia project is really about trying to raise the prominence of veganism within academia, and thereby to empower the vegan movement as a whole with whatever resources we can provide from academia. Ultimately, we'd like to see the barriers between academia and activism collapse, and be complementary aspects of the same process of veganisation, as has happened, for instance, in the feminist movement.

Karen: One of the reasons for starting this work with Vegatopia was as we became disillusioned with the way in which academia dismissed vegans and veganism as a side issue, unworthy of proper academic concern. This academic attitude is reflective of a wider social attitude as illustrated by the media. As we thought about ways in which some academics incorporated other ethical and philosophical positions into their work, we also began to think about ways in which vegan academics could integrate their own ethical beliefs into their work. Vegatopia therefore is intended as a resource for academics who are concerned with conducting rigorous interdisciplinary research into issues relating to ethical vegans, veganism and nonhuman animals. At the same time it is intended to promote links between academia and activists working in the fields of veganism and animal rights so that the sharing of knowledge becomes a powerful tool in moving debates and policy forward.

One of arguments that most vegetarians hear from non-vegetarians is that vegetarianism is not that important because there's lot of people suffering in the world and animals shouldn't be our primary concern. How should we deal with this form of misanthropy?

Matthew: First of all, I think we need to acknowledge that sometimes there is a grain of truth in this idea of misanthropy, or rather a common emotional response that fuels that idea. I know that sometimes I have felt enraged against people who are violent towards animals, or complicit in that violence through eating or wearing them, and there is a temptation to slide into dismissing humanity as despicable beyond redemption when we think closely about the tens of billions of animals tortured and killed without mercy. But I also think that this is common to many non-vegans too, for instance when people contemplate the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the destruction of the planet by corporate greed and many other instances of human violence. So, we can acknowledge that we may sometimes have these kinds of feelings, but an emotional response to horror is not the same thing as a permanent misanthropic disposition.

But the charge of misanthropy does not recognize this, it is usually a way of denying responsibility on the part of the person making the accusation. You rarely meet a person who will say that vegetarianism is a waste of time, but then follows that up with a

coherent plan for what we should be doing instead! I think we need to recognize that it is usually a defensive response from someone who is challenged by vegetarianism, even though they may not be conscious of it. Because of the intimate relationship between being vegan, especially, and our sense of self, I think it is often difficult for non-vegans because they feel that their own sense of self is being called into question when they encounter non-vegans.

In our talk at the IVU (International Vegetarian Union) congress in Dresden, we developed an argument that there is a way of thinking about ethical action as finite that is encouraged by capitalism. What we mean is that caring for others has been reduced, like so much else, to a commodity, something that we can only afford a certain amount of. Given that we can only afford so much care, the argument goes that we must prioritize and humans must therefore come first, because humans are inherently more important. Now, there is obvious speciesism in this point of view, but even worse is the implication that ultimately, care is contracted ever closer around the self and our immediate relationships, and that this is a good thing. There is an implicit hierarchy of caring that implies that caring is effortful. I think there is a real confusion going on here. Vegans, I think, reject this hierarchical and scarcity-based model of caring, and instead have a general disposition to care for others. Caring is not something extra we do after we've cooked dinner, gone to work, or cleaned the house, it is embedded into the routine of our daily life, it is part of who we are, and this in no way conflicts with our capacity to care for self, family, friends, community, the planet, or any social justice movement. Of course there is only a finite amount of time and resources available to any of us, we may have no time whatsoever to spare beyond what we need to do to feed and clothe ourselves, and we do have to make decisions about how we use whatever energies we do have, but the general point is that we do not have to make a choice about only caring about one thing, one person, one 'cause'. As vegans we care, period.

But apart from this theorizing, the practical answer of course is that vegetarianism and veganism already *are* ways of caring about the suffering of humans (and I always like to think that vegetarians are on their way to becoming vegans – it's certainly the most common, though not only, pattern for people who are vegan). My original motivation for vegetarianism was that concern with social justice, with a very simple mathematical calculation about feeding people. And although the solution to hunger is far more complex, because of the political issues tied up with (the lack of) food distribution, the stance of veganism in opposition to taking more than one's fair share is still a powerful ethical statement. Closely connected to this social justice issue are the environmental arguments in favour of vegetarianism, and more so for veganism. Issues like deforestation, desertification, water pollution, climate change and so on, always strike the poorest people first and hardest. Meat and dairy eating, as is now becoming widely known, are key contributors to all of these problems. There is also the increasing evidence that our own health and well-being (physical, psychological and spiritual too for some people) is enhanced by veganism, so by moving towards veganism, and encouraging it in others, you are practicing compassion towards oneself and towards other people. Vegetarianism and veganism are also really simple – because it becomes a part of daily routine, it takes no special effort, and so there's really no reason (assuming the availability of cheap plant foods and adequate knowledge) not to be vegan. So, we are not losing any capacity to help other people, in fact we likely have greater capacity because we may well feel healthier and fitter and have more energy.

In summary, the charge of misanthropy is generally a projection of guilt, a form of denying personal responsibility for the suffering of other animals, and empirically false!

Karen: Matthew has really already answered this for me. To those who say that human suffering should be of more concern than nonhuman animal suffering, we see this as a one-sided and speciesist view of compassion. The perception that we care more about the suffering and exploitation of nonhuman animals than humans or vice versa is completely erroneous. Our concern with oppression does not end where another species begins and in seeking to expose and fight the exploitation and abuse of nonhuman animals, we are also seeking to highlight and oppose the exploitation and abuse of other humans. The two are not mutually exclusive. Caring about others is not an ‘add-on’ to our lives – it is an integral part of our lives. Which is not to try to claim that we are anywhere near perfect! What it does mean is that we try to be aware of the suffering of all species and, where we can, to do something about it. We campaign for veganism and animal rights because we are doing what we can to support the voiceless and because we are able to more effectively use our own experiences and knowledge in this area. Others are more qualified to actively campaigning for oppressed and suffering humans – we should recognise our strengths and work to them in conjunction with each other in order to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Do you think that most vegans are too violent in their attitudes towards non-vegetarians? Why is that?

Matthew: I don’t know that many vegans are actively violent towards non-vegetarians - I certainly never experienced a vegan being hostile towards me before I became vegan. There is a difference, I think, between the occasional slide into misanthropic feelings (which is more like a kind of depression) and personal hostility. But I do know that sometimes I have been verbally aggressive towards non-vegetarians since I became vegan. This has only happened with people I’ve known well, people who I’ve been able to explain the reasons for veganism to, at least in outline, but who still make no sign of changing their own behaviour towards animals. I see it as a failure on my part to remember how far from veganism I once was and to recognize the deep roots of animal-abuse ideologies in our culture, in other words it’s a lack of patience and sign of frustration. It’s also a desire to have that person closer to you, to be able to share with them the pleasures of veganism, and to be able to welcome them as a fellow traveller – there can never be enough vegans! So, I don’t have much experience of this, but if and when it happens, I think it’s most likely this combination of impatience and frustrated attempts to share good things with people we care about.

Karen: I have a slightly different approach to this than Matthew. It seems to me, generally speaking, that vegetarians can tend to be very defensive about their food choices when talking to vegans. When I was vegetarian, I never remember any vegans being ‘violent’ towards me or overly enthusiastic perhaps in their support of veganism. Since becoming vegan, however, on at least two or three occasions I have had either vegetarians or ‘vegetarian-friendly meat-eaters’ try to remonstrate with me about my choices, telling me for example that I am ‘taking things too far’. On each occasion the subject was raised by the other person – my mere vegan presence was enough to arouse anger. However, I do think that many vegans are frustrated at the hypocrisy of vegetarians who refuse to acknowledge that they, like those who eat meat, are complicit in the suffering, exploitation and slaughter of nonhuman animals. As most vegans were vegetarians themselves before becoming vegan, there is often a desire to enlighten

vegetarians (and meat-eaters) and to share with them the reasons why they should become vegan. After all, if you are utterly convinced that veganism is the right way to live, not only for the sake of the animals but also for the sake of humans both generally and individually, then why would you not seek to persuade those you care about? However, I imagine at times this desire to educate can become, or at least appear, patronising and annoying and as vegans we probably need to bear this in mind! Doubtlessly there are times when either side can become over-enthusiastic in their bid to convince the other that they are right – but I do not believe that this is restricted to vegans being ‘violent’ towards vegetarians – and in my experience the situation is reversed.

Is it possible that this negative image about vegans is something created by meat and dairy industries? Do you believe in a conspiracy theory as once you said that this image helps to reassure the dominant culture that eating animals is normal.

Matthew: It is clear that the meat and dairy industries do use negative images of vegans (and vegetarians). I don’t know if there is a conscious strategy at work here though – it’s true that if you search on the internet you can find people who seem to have a real hatred for vegans – but I think in general it’s more likely that advertisers will use whatever they think will increase sales and profit. People who work in the animal exploitation industries are inculcated with all the same symbolism about meat as the rest of us, they therefore feel the truth of certain stereotypes and can easily imagine that they will resonate with their audience (and doubtless they test their imagination in focus groups and surveys with potential consumers), most of whom of course already eat meat and dairy. So no, I don’t think there is a conspiracy, or that we are intentionally victimized, but that we are always a threat to the sense of self of meat eaters, and that we can expect defensive responses to that in the form of anti-vegan stereotyping, jokes, or hostility.

Karen: I think that the meat and dairy industries do contribute towards a negative image relating to vegans. However, I think it is simplistic to blame the antipathy shown to vegans just on these industries, and I certainly do not think that there is a conscious conspiracy. There is, of course, a profit-motivated impetus which makes it imperative to those industries that they continue to successfully promote themselves (which may include, incidentally, providing a negative impression of alternatives to meat and dairy consumption). The normalization of meat-eating in most cultures means that overcoming the prejudices associated with veganism is a major battle. Not only that, but we have to overcome the speciesist attitudes which mean that we can exploit and consume nonhuman animals in the first place. Health services, school education, environmentalists, sociologists, philosophers - all have a part to play in opposing and tackling the current inequalities which permit meat and dairy consumption, however as yet, comparatively few have the courage to stand up for their convictions.

What is the role of the media in that?

Matthew: The media is crucial in this process. The ideology of meat eating is the ideology of might-makes-right, and we can see that reflected across every aspect of the media, from films like *The Lion King*, to adverts for fast food that still equate

masculinity and heterosexual potency with meat eating. By implication, veganism in particular has to be dismissed, because it's simply not compatible with these beliefs. As Carol Adams put it, being vegan as a man is a symbolic way of opposing patriarchy, or renouncing the connection between eating meat and virility, and opponents must be ridiculed! For women, as the dominant food providers in our, still, patriarchal culture, their own potential veganism is also a challenge to patriarchy as it undermines their role as those who feed the potency and dominance of men. For that reason, in the UK at least, adverts still often portray women as taking pleasure in feeding animal foods to men in their family, especially husbands and sons. Women vegans are traitors to a patriarchal view of the 'correct' way for women to behave. There are countless examples of this across the media, and the disparagement of vegans and veganism, as we have documented in UK newspapers for instance, is the necessary complement to sustaining these fictions about the 'correct' way for us to be meat-eating and meat-cooking men and women.

Karen: The media has a major part to play in reflecting and disseminating negative perceptions about vegans. The power of the media lies in the fact that, as many would argue, they often seem to support dominant power structures by creating a consensus which draws on everyday reality and commonsense. Audiences of course may disagree with the media – we do not automatically accept everything we are told. However the fact that many of the arguments for meat-eating are so deeply engrained and rooted in societal structures, that unless people are explicitly exposed to the counter-arguments (or are interested enough to seek them out), the popular media, certainly in the UK, appears to be a barrier to sensible debate about vegan issues. Currently, the vast majority of the UK print media seems more engaged in ridiculing and dismissing vegans and veganism. Even where they suggest the beneficial aspects of veganism (for example in terms of health benefits), this is generally posited in terms of the 'sacrifice' made by vegans rather than in the positive choices made. Veganism is generally presented as an extreme stance, a position of last resort. Individuals may be prepared to consider avoiding making plane journeys, in order to cut down on carbon emissions. However choosing to not eat meat and dairy products for the same reason is presented (when mentioned at all) as excessive. The good news is that the media does not have to be like this. Whereas it does play a major part in promoting negative perceptions, it could play an equally large part in the promotion of positive images about veganism. The vegan movement is making slow but steady progress worldwide and individuals are becoming more informed. It is becoming more difficult for the mainstream media to ignore the fact that there are serious considerations in relation to veganism and that it is time for sensible debate which openly confronts some of the more difficult issues.

You said that veganism only tends to be accepted if it is presented as another consumer choice, as another way of purchasing morality. Is this idea wrong? Why?

Matthew: This is what we have found in our review of UK newspapers. What we mean is that the only positive stories about veganism (except for very occasional letters to the editor from prominent vegan activists and organizations) are 'lifestyle' features, such as restaurant or hotel reviews, vegan product reviews, or vegan recipes. There would be something much less wrong with this if it was accompanied with open debate in the media about the reasons for veganism: animal rights, social justice, environmental

protection, human health, etc. But this is absent from the discussion. Therefore, veganism is made to seem as though it is a lifestyle choice, and nothing more than that. For vegan readers, this may offer some consolation – at least our consumer choices are being acknowledged to some extent. But for non-vegan readers, it offers no challenge at all to their continued consumption of animals. At most, it might invite them to try a vegan experience or product, and thereby feel good about themselves for having made a momentary ‘sacrifice’, like a purification ritual, but this is essentially no different from going to a sauna, spending time in a retreat, or trying out some handicraft for a weekend – in other words it’s a holiday, an imitation of what it means to be and live as a vegan. I think we therefore need to be very careful about being too celebratory about the marginal increase in recognition of veganism as a ‘lifestyle’ in the sense of another aspect of consumer culture, as opposed to the utopian challenge to the exploitative speciesist order. This does not mean that we shouldn’t celebrate our own culture and experiences through the media, but that we always need to make sure, wherever possible, that the *reasons* for veganism are the most prominent, that the suffering of animals are not obscured, and that the alternative we are offering is not an optional extra, but the only consistent solution to a culture dependent on violence.

Karen: As I said in my answer to the previous question, in even the most positive media coverage, veganism is still generally presented as a sacrifice. It may be a ‘noble cause’ – but it is an extreme one. There is nothing in the mainstream media to persuade wavering meat-eaters that veganism is a viable lifestyle. It may be something they can dip in and out of now and then – perhaps cooking the odd vegan meal to ‘prove’ that meat and dairy free food can be tasty. However it is not seen as a feasible long-term option. On the contrary, for those who wish to appease their consciences as regards eating meat and dairy, the current emphasis in the UK media is on ‘happy’ meat and dairy products. This way individuals can get the best of both worlds; pretend that they are making compassionate choices by paying a little more but not have to make any inconvenient ‘sacrifices’ by actually avoiding these products or seeking out vegan alternatives.

Does this idea have to do with your criticism against the capitalist culture of consumerism?

Matthew: Yes, capitalism is extraordinarily skillful at corrupting and destroying radical movements, and its chief weapon is to steal, repackage, and sell them back to us, only this time devoid of any challenging aspects they might have contained. This is why, for instance, I think we need to be focused on empowering communities to feed themselves through developing things like local vegan-organic growing, rather than increasing the numbers of vegan products on supermarket shelves. There is a place for vegan consumerism, in so far as it can attract new people towards veganism, but it mustn’t stop there. We could envisage a capitalist vegan future, which may well contain less animal suffering, but could also still depend on industrial systems of production that devastate the environment and exploit and divide their workers. Vegan companies that have respectful policies towards the environment and their workers will have trouble surviving if the corporate giants recognize a profit to be made from vegan products – that is, not unless that ethical basis of veganism comes first. If people have a changed ideology towards the world, one that is compassionate, non-violent, non-exploitative – then they are less likely to be sucked in by the corporate version of veganism. This is to

say, the first task we always have is to challenge that ideology and its concrete manifestation of the industrial exploitation of animals, but also to consistently point out the connections between veganism and other social justice movements, such as feminism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism. Where the connections aren't obvious, we need to make them so, and that means engaging with activists in these other movements.

Karen: The culture of consumerism in which we now live emphasises speed and 'convenience' over other considerations. We are encouraged to become dependent on packaged, prepared goods even when alternatives might be freely available and we are gradually losing the ability to make other decisions. As a minor example, August/September is the time of year when we have lots of wild fruit (blackberries) growing in fields and hedgerows throughout the UK. These berries are particularly prolific, they grow wherever there is space, even in the centre of towns and urban areas. As a child I remember my family, and just about every family I knew, would pick kilos of these berries – and yet now, while they are just as prolific, they are left to rot on the bushes as no-one 'has time' to pick them. Supermarkets have, of course, reacted to this – so you can pay extortionate prices in the shops for this fruit which should be easily and freely available. Veganism should incorporate a challenge to this corporate culture, enabling people to feed themselves and moving away from a dependence on the false convenience of supermarkets and other large producers. The culture of consumerism persuades us that we don't have time to consider alternatives. This is nonsense, we do have time – however it requires a fundamental shift in the way we structure our lives and in how we set our priorities. If compassion towards other animals is always our first priority then taking those first steps away from the self-imposed constraints of consumerism becomes comparatively easy.

How is the denial of responsibility a technique for non-vegetarians to continue their consumption of meat and dairy products?

Matthew: Most people don't want to think that their actions have bad consequences, or cause suffering. There are many different ways to deny responsibility for the suffering that meat-based diets cause, but vegans are living proof that there is a solution to denial, and that if we face up to the suffering that we are responsible for, we can change ourselves in order to make a positive difference. The problem is that, apart from the relatively small number of people raised as vegans or vegetarians since birth, by the time we are able to think and feel about animals and their suffering, we are already used to the habit of eating them, and often enjoying that experience, as well as believing that it is healthy, natural, ordained by God, or whatever. All of these types of arguments are really ways of denying personal responsibility. When people argue that it is 'natural' to eat meat, what they are really saying is that eating meat is a fundamental aspect of human nature, like breathing or sleeping, and that to change it is therefore to challenge human nature – in other words impossible. This is a way of closing down rational thought, and stifling compassionate feelings about other animals, and thereby maintaining the habit of eating meat and dairy products. As sociologists we are always keen to stress the idea that all human practices (except perhaps breathing and sleeping!) are really social constructs, that is most of what we take for granted about the world and our place in it is made up of a collection of thoughts, beliefs, feelings, ways of doing things, etc. that are passed on to us and reproduced throughout our cultures. That means

they are very powerful, but it also means that they can be changed. Almost nothing in human behaviour is inevitable or permanent.

Karen: For those who consume meat and dairy products, denial of responsibility comes about through the ideological separation of the nonhuman animal from the final product. Many consumers fail (or refuse) to recognize and acknowledge that in continuing to demand and consume meat and dairy products, they are *directly* involved in ensuring that nonhuman animals are exploited, constrained, made to suffer and slaughtered. In focusing on the sausage or the pint of milk for example, they are ignoring the fact that an animal has to die – or in the case of the milk, being made to give birth year after year, having their calves removed shortly after birth (and slaughtered if male calves). Even where individual consumers do explicitly recognise the connection between the living animal and the piece of meat on their plates, they often use the argument that one person will not make a difference. In other words that given the millions of animals slaughtered every year, for one person to stop eating meat, there would be no difference to overall demand. This is of course a nonsensical argument. The only way for the exploitation and suffering of animals to end is for one individual, then another, then another to acknowledge their *individual* part in the chain of demand and to remove themselves from the chain. To recognise the suffering and yet to refuse to act is a kind of ethical laziness for which there can really be no excuse.

What is wrong with concepts like “happy meat” and “happy milk”?

Matthew: Well, for a start they are lies! These ideas are particular examples of techniques for the denial of responsibility. If we raise nonhuman animals in order to eat their bodies or steal their milk, eggs, etc., then we are treating them as means to our ends, not as ends in themselves, not as sentient beings with purposes, needs and desires of their own which are independent from whatever we might think or believe about them. This is a non-negotiable principle of veganism (which is why I also oppose the (ab)use of animals for entertainment, experimentation, etc.). This is perhaps a philosophical point, though an important one. But the reality is that while the animals that we are told are ‘happy’ may receive more shelter, better quality food, more room to move and so on, their ‘happiness’ is entirely dependent on a human assessment of what it means for those animals to be ‘happy’. It is, or ought to be, up to those animals to determine what makes them ‘happy’, not us. The day I see a wild animal walk into a cage or fenced compound, lock the door behind herself, forego the opportunity to socialize freely with her own kind, and wait to be fed and watered by a human being, before ‘enjoying’ a premature death, I will believe that we were right to claim to know what made other animals happy. And in practice of course, the animals that produce ‘happy meat’ or ‘happy milk’ live severely shortened and constrained lives, suffer deprivation and pain, and are exploited by humans for selfish and entirely unnecessary ends. What makes it worse, is that ‘happy’ meat and milk are further means to purchase a commodified form of morality, and therefore ways to castigate people who cannot afford these luxury high welfare products for their consumption of ‘unhappy’ meat or milk when their choices are constrained by lack of access (and lack of knowledge) to cheap, good quality plant foods. This is where dietary elitism really lies, not with veganism, because the farming practices used to produce ‘happy’ meat and milk cannot be replicated widely enough to feed everyone on a meat/dairy based diet – there simply

is not enough land in the world for such animals to live on. 'Happy' meat and milk will therefore always, inevitably, be elite foods. Veganism, with the distortions of commodity trading, government subsidy and consumerist ideology removed, is the only real path to both food equity and animal liberation on a global scale.

Karen: Concepts such as 'happy meat' and 'happy milk' are total fallacies. In much the same way as mentioned above, these ideas enable consumers to continue to avoid taking responsibility for the suffering and exploitation of nonhuman animals. While individual animals may lead slightly better lives than those in more intensive farming, the end result is the same – the animal still dies. On dairy and chicken farms, male calves and male chicks are still slaughtered soon after birth (although this is rarely mentioned if you look at the literature provided by those who run 'happy farms'). The focus on these farms is on the farmer – often depicted as 'bonding' with a 'happy pig' or a 'happy' cow. How 'happy' would these animals truly be if they knew what was to happen to them. Both the animals and the consumers are being deceived. Consumers are able to convince themselves that they are doing the animals a favour and ignore the fact that the animals are being bred, raised, used and slaughtered purely for human ends. Furthermore, both 'happy meat' and 'happy milk' contribute to the ongoing speciesist perception that nonhuman animals are there for us to use as we will. Furthermore, such products can be seen as appealing to a consumer base who wish to pay off their consciences. In this way, what some might claim to be a form of moral behaviour – paying a higher premium for 'happy' meat – reduces such morals to a purchasable commodity.

You say that there are studies that link gendered violence and racism to the violence suffered by animals. How is that?

Karen: There are several studies linking violence against women and racism to violence against nonhuman animals. Those who are violent towards women may often also exhibit violence against nonhuman animals, in some cases abusing or killing companion animals partly as a warning or threat or means of control of their human victims. Conversely, Gail Eisnitz¹ and others have suggested that those engaged in working in slaughterhouses often become desensitised to the violence they are obliged to commit on a daily basis and become physically violent towards other humans, including their own families. Carol Adams in her books *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and *The Pornography of Meat*² discusses the interconnections between violence against animals and gendered violence, looking at the connections between patriarchy and meat-eating and at the conflation of women and meat (particularly with reference to sexual connotations). She examines a variety of advertisements, and demonstrates that those with African American women depict them as more likely than Caucasians to be linked with animals and nature, more likely to be shown as available to white men, and presented as sexually insatiable. On the other hand, African American men are more likely to be linked with beasts and portrayed as savage, consequently of less worth than Caucasian men. This conflation of people of colour and nonhuman animals has

¹ Eisnitz, G.A. (1997, 2007) *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry*, New York, USA: Prometheus Books.

² Adams, C. J. (2006) *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York: Continuum and Adams C. J. (2004) *The Pornography of Meat*, New York: Continuum

historical roots of oppression which Marjorie Spiegel traces in her book *The Dreaded Comparison*.³ Spiegel draws on numerous similarities between the transportation of nonhuman animals crammed into trucks and slaves shipped from Africa, both tightly packed and dying of hunger, thirst and disease. Charles Patterson, also, in *Eternal Treblinka*, notes the similarities between the mass transportation of cattle and of Jews on their way to being killed.⁴ Even the instruments used to control, punish and mark nonhuman animals and slaves bore striking similarities. Slaves and cattle were branded, collars were put on both, babies were, and in the case of nonhuman animals still are, often removed soon after birth or in the first few years. Furthermore, as we discussed in our paper in Dresden, even until comparatively recently, medical experiments were carried out on both people of colour and on nonhuman animals – and of course for nonhuman animals these experiments are still ongoing.

As vegans, we contend that all these (and other) forms of oppression should be of concern to us not least because they are interlinked. As white vegans, we (Matthew and I) try to ensure that we are as aware as possible of the comparatively privileged positions in which our whiteness has placed us. Amie Breeze Harper,⁵ an American academic, contends that failing to acknowledge the impact of colonial history on issues such as vegetarianism and animal rights means that certain human inequalities are always ignored while the focus is placed on the rights of nonhuman animals. For example, one example of this approach, which she refers to as ‘colour-blind’ as it fails to acknowledge the privileges enjoyed by whites and denied to others, relates to the way, as vegans, we consciously practice ‘cruelty-free’ consumption of products by avoiding those which involve the exploitation and/or slaughter of nonhuman animals. Whilst congratulating ourselves on avoiding these products, however, we often fail to recognise that many products, including vegan products, may involve the exploitation of humans. Chocolate, in particular, has a strong association with child labour in West Africa. Here, slave labour still exists, in order to meet the demands of American or European consumers. As ethical vegans, it ought to be automatic that we take care to make sure that our actions do not support the oppression of other humans, just as it is automatic to us to oppose nonhuman animal exploitation through our choices.

Can a vegan reproduce exploitative tactics? How?

Matthew: I think it can happen in light of what I’ve said about consumerism and capitalism. It’s entirely possible to promote a form of lifestyle veganism that depends on exploitative labour practices, for instance eating ‘luxury’ vegan foods that depend on exploitative (and environmentally destructive) global, unfair, trade in cash crops like cocoa, coffee, sugar, etc. The work of Amie Breeze Harper really woke me up to some of these issues, and especially how people of colour in the global South may suffer to produce luxury vegan foods enjoyed by us in affluent nations. She provides a compelling argument about how the vegan movement, at least in the USA, presents itself to the world with a white face, and sometimes insensitively co-opts the suffering of people of colour to draw comparisons with nonhuman animal suffering. These tactics can be wounding, and a hindrance to the vegan movement as they inhibit our opportunities for understanding the place that animal liberation might have among

³ Spiegel, M. (1988) *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, London: Heretic Books.

⁴ Patterson, C. (2002) *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, New York:

Lantern Books

⁵ <http://breezeharper.tripod.com/research/index.html>

diverse communities. One way to address this problem is to emphasize that if and when we make comparisons, we are comparing systems of exploitation, not experiences of suffering. In other words we turn attention onto the common material practices and ideological justifications of domination, and don't try to attack people's consciences by saying 'if you care about this person, you must care about this animal'.

Karen: Yes definitely vegans can reproduce exploitative tactics. As I said in my previous answer, we should try to be aware of *all* forms of exploitation when making our consumption choices. It is far too easy to be complacent about what we *are* doing in terms of trying to minimise the suffering of nonhuman animals and to forget about what else we could do in order to minimise all suffering. Vegans are as capable as any other group of becoming single-minded in approach and ignoring other issues. In addition, the tactics used in campaigning may themselves be exploitative (for example using sexualized images of women's bodies). Although such campaigns may well achieve the desired end of getting attention and disseminating information to the public, we also have to consider the damage that may be caused to other causes and issues.

You also says that vegans are not sentimentalists when care for others – “we are pragmatists, using the most effective tool at our disposal to oppose exploitation”. How can this be bad for the vegan movement?

Matthew: By this I mean that feeling compassionate is not the same thing as feeling sentimental. There is a risk of fetishizing the victim status of nonhuman animals – this also applies to the suffering of humans and is one reason why a white man like myself using the suffering of people of colour to make a point about the suffering of other animals would be especially problematic – it is patronizing at the very least, and would situate me as kind of omni-solicitous, which is a form of arrogance I think. Ultimately, it can lead to a pose of concern that leads nowhere in terms of practical action. This kind of problem besets many animal welfare charities, which attempt to stimulate guilt for the suffering of 'the weak', and make us feel good as benefactors or philanthropists but don't make demands that we tackle the reasons behind the suffering of those animals in the first place, i.e. speciesist systems of oppression and exploitation that make it possible for us to feel superior in the first place.

In contrast, the feeling of compassion is a powerful motivation to action, instead of feeling sorry for an Other who by definition is diminished in relation to us by their victim status, compassion connects us to the plight of others through the practice of empathy, and the capacity to recognize what we share with that Other, specifically the capacity to suffer in similar circumstances, and to desire release from that suffering. If we can feel a tiny portion of that suffering and desire for relief and release, we have all the understanding we need to justify and inspire action. This is something that we can all feel - we don't need complex philosophies or debates about what is natural or religiously sanctioned, or anything else, we just need to be able to recognize and feel suffering and injustice.

Karen: I agree with Matthew here in that an over-emphasis on the victim-status of nonhuman animals is as counter-productive as it is in relation to humans. The use of such tactics by certain charities serves only to emphasise a speciesist notion of hierarchy, placing animals in a position of subordination and humans in a position of superiority. Such an attitude encourages an emphasis on palliative policies such as

minimal improvements in animal ‘welfare’ rather than forcing us to confront the larger issues – such as the fact that we have absolutely no right to be exploiting other animals for our own ends. The appeals to sentimentality engendered by the ‘dying kitten’ or the cute puppy images used by many charities are transient and fail to make any real difference on the important issues. A wider appeal to a compassionate ethos, a deeper appeal if you like, to tackle our fundamental attitude to nonhuman animals and to all suffering beings and to discuss ways in which such suffering can be alleviated would have a far more wide-reaching effect. The current emphasis on sentimentality is, again, giving individuals an opportunity to appease their consciences by buying their way out of practical steps. Rather than thinking about what they are doing and their own role in the suffering of others, they can make a small donation to a charity, feel good about themselves for a day and then continue on exactly as before. A more pragmatic approach, a recognition that buying your way out is unnecessary and that there are practical, effective steps that we all can take is the key to moving the vegan movement forward.

You say that vegans have stereotypes. Which are they?

Matthew: If you mean stereotypes *about* vegans, then I would say the dominant one in the UK is that vegans are ascetic, that is self-sacrificing, miserable, friendless, unhealthy and unhappy people who eat terrible food and are always secretly envious of meat-eaters! If you mean that vegans have stereotypes about non-vegans, I don’t think we do, seriously. We might share jokes about meat-eaters and the ridiculous things they sometimes say to us like ‘what do you eat?’, but most of us remember what it was like to be a meat-eater, and to have very little idea that there was anything wrong with it.

Karen: I agree. Vegans in the UK are depicted as cheerless, overly serious extremists. We are constantly denying ourselves and would really like nothing better than to eat a huge steak or a large chunk of cheese. The more we try to insist that the opposite is true, that vegan food does taste good and that meat and dairy products are utterly unnecessary, the more we are depicted as being in denial about what we really want. Perhaps the fact that eating out, unless you live in a big city or are lucky enough to find a good vegetarian restaurant, is undeniably more difficult for vegans, adds to this stereotype. Going to a ‘normal’ restaurant with meat-eating friends and being forced to eat an uninspiring meal thrown together by a reluctant chef is not a good advertisement for veganism and adds to the false perception that veganism is a difficult way of life. As regards vegan stereotypes about meat-eaters, no I don’t really think they exist. As Matthew says, many of us were meat-eaters at one time. We do get frustrated by the standard questions: ‘how do you cope without cheese?’, ‘what do you eat at Christmas?’ ‘if you were starving on a desert island would you eat a cow?’ but other than that I don’t think there is any idea of a kind of generic meat-eater.

Do you believe that these stereotypes can be valid in other countries, like Brazil?

Matthew: From one of the talks given in Dresden, it’s clear that similar stereotypes have been common in Europe ever since at least the start of the modern vegetarian movement 200 or so years ago. Sadly I don’t have enough experience of life in Brazil to know, but it wouldn’t surprise me if there were strong similarities. I think it’s very

valuable to study these stereotypes, because they tell us a lot about what the dominant culture is afraid of in us, about what it is that we are challenging. In the UK stereotypes we can certainly see defences of a version of heterosexual masculinity, of conventional patriarchal gender relations, and of course of the domination of nonhuman animals as normal and natural. Understanding what is at stake in vegan stereotypes is a powerful tool for us in thinking about how we can more effectively challenge meat and dairy cultures and reach out to people behind those defences. We would love to hear from people in Brazil about how vegans are discussed or represented in the media.

Karen: Yes, in Dresden we saw a talk about cartoons about vegans and vegetarians in Europe and there were strong similarities with many of the comments and perceptions that still exist today. Like Matthew, I don't have enough experience of Brazil to be able to really comment on attitudes there. However I suspect that Brazil is much like the UK and the USA where there are strong link between patriarchy and meat-eating and the idea that, especially for men, meat is essential in order to be truly masculine. I would absolutely love to be wrong about this however and would be delighted to hear more about how vegans and veganism are perceived in Brazil and other parts of South America.

What is the major difficulty facing the movement to promote veganism at the moment? And how this problem can be solved?

Matthew: First of all I think there is reason for optimism. Given that the word 'vegan' is only 64 years old, I think we have come a long way in a short time, and so many vegans devote so much time and energy to promoting veganism. It's exciting and fulfilling to live as a vegan and to be around people with such enthusiasm and passion. But of course there is so much to do, especially given the accelerating global consumption of animal products, notably in China at the moment. I think it's fortunate though that at the same time we are accumulating powerful evidence about the environmental devastation wrought by animal exploitation for human food, and about the health benefits of vegetarianism and veganism, and the negative consequences of an animal-based diet. I think these two factors give us an opportunity to connect compassion for the suffering of nonhumans with the suffering of humans in ways that can be more and more persuasive to people who might otherwise be hard to reach on the basis of compassion for animal suffering alone, given the immense power of traditional and corporate interest in maintaining denial.

But to get that message across, we need a much stronger and more coherent voice, and one that is sensitive to the diverse cultural traditions that support meat-eating, or that are being distorted to allow meat-eating to flourish. We are currently represented by disparate voluntary organizations and often isolated academics, who, despite the good work of umbrella bodies like the IVU, do not speak loudly enough and act coherently enough to present veganism as a unified social movement. I think we need to create strategies to pool our material and intellectual resources better. As vegans we need to work hard to make sure that the animals movement (whether we think of it as animal rights, animal protection, or whatever we want to call it) is also a vegan movement so that we are not internally inconsistent. We need to influence the course of academic research, for instance trying to find ways to feed people with vegan-organic methods, not more technological 'fixes' like genetic modification or a new generation of chemical pesticides. We need to influence governments, establishing ourselves as an authoritative

body for consultation on issues of nonhuman animal well-being, food security, public health, environmental sustainability, etc. We need to build strong grassroots vegan communities within urban environments so that isolated vegans can find mutual support and the resources to further veganism through local education, food growing and sharing, etc. Of course particular organizations do great work on some or all of these issues, but not on sufficient scale to get us to that critical mass of world changing influence. This is not to say that all the good work done by NGOs and individuals at the moment is wasted, far from it. I think there is great value in the individual work of educating family and friends through cooking them good vegan food, and all the campaigning efforts that promote veganism. One of our hopes for the vegatopia project is that, in a modest way, it can contribute to the pooling of our efforts as a vegan movement, although we are very limited in what we can do at the moment by lack of time and resources. We very much hope in the future to be able to facilitate better co-ordination of vegan activism and academic activity, at least in the UK. If what we do can be a model for other countries, then that would be great, if other countries can do it better and we can learn from them, that would be even better, and if we can co-ordinate our efforts on an international scale, that would be best of all!

Karen: Perhaps I'm a little more ambivalent here than Matthew. I agree that there are grounds for great optimism and that in the last 64 years 'veganism' has made great strides. Just in the last couple of years in the UK, despite the negative media coverage we talked about before, veganism is not *quite* such an unknown concept – and although in many ways it is a problematic trend (in terms of increasing consumerism), it is simultaneously encouraging that vegan products are far more readily available. I think that there are also, however, particularly worrying trends. The recent events in Austria, in which ten animal rights activists were arrested and imprisoned for over three months, despite the apparent lack of any concrete evidence, is indicative of the sensitivity of the animal rights/vegan movements. In today's terror-conscious climate, any form of 'extremism' or 'radical' behaviour is seen as threatening and in turn provokes extreme reactions. At the same time, the dominance of certain industries, particularly associated with the meat and dairy industries, appears to be growing, making it increasingly difficult for alternative voices to be heard. In some circumstances, it is more or less impossible to put forward an alternative argument without automatically being labelled extremist. The animal testing industry, for example, is protected by pseudo-scientific arguments, by powerful pharmaceutical industries, scientists, those providing nonhuman animals and equipment for testing – all of whom are concerned, as you might expect, to protect their own interests and to discredit those who argue against them. At the same time, the consumption of animal-based products is increasing world-wide, even in those countries which have traditionally not used them. As we take steps forward in one part of the world therefore, we are losing ground in another.

Matthew is right in saying that we need a more coherent voice. At the moment we have hundreds of organisations all working with the same aim, to end animal suffering in all its forms. If only we could coordinate our approaches more, we would be much more powerful. In addition, there seems to be a fear of upsetting people by bluntly setting out the facts. Governments are reluctant to openly support veganism as they are afraid it would alienate the majority meat-eating public. It is time to face the facts, to confront the uncomfortable truths (which Al Gore neglected to do in his film!) and make people truly aware of the harm to they are directly causing to nonhuman animals, themselves, the rest of the world and the environment.