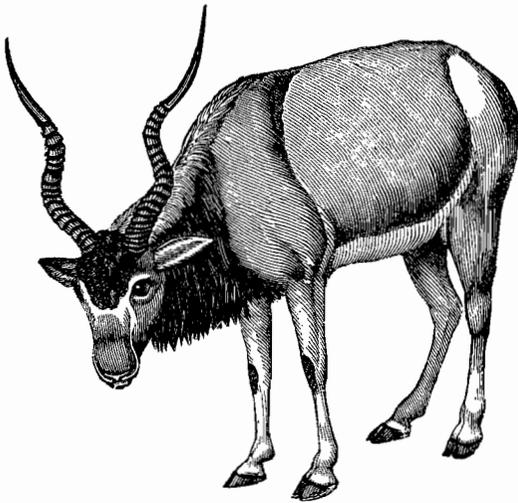


Reflections

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ETICA & ANIMALI
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Animal Liberation, naturally, was the beginning. I read the book on a Spanish shore, in the summer of 1985, and was one of those who, closing it, said: "Yes, of course...". I already was a vegetarian, used to rescue cats and dogs from the street, and had behind me a short period of activism in the left and a remote love for philosophy, Marxistically seen as an instrument for change, as well as to interpret, the world. These scattered fragments of my life suddenly reorganized themselves into a coherent picture.

Great ideas are simple. All animals are equal — what is simpler than this? One feels as she has always known it. And yet, in the course of history, nobody had ever said such a thing. A problem of courage, probably, as well as of intellect and prerequisites. Great ideas are also harmonic. They bring unity into multiplicity, accord where there was discord. The acknowledgement of equality between ourselves and the *other* leads to an equilibrium in which reason and feeling, far from conflicting, combine into a superior synthesis. It is a less divided self that emerges from the meeting. This was the first sense the idea that animal liberation is human liberation took for me.

Still, this generates problems. How can a reorganized self admit a reality which is deformed because it is divided? One has the feeling that it should be easy to re-establish harmony in the world as well. It is an illusion that Peter Singer himself admits he cherished when he finished writing the book, and that none, I believe, can avoid when she finishes reading it. But it is, precisely, an illusion.

So, the daily work starts. Although Franco Salanga and I haven't been in the movement for a long time, we had an advantage: we could profit by the experiences already made in the States. From the first moment, we read, we wrote letters, we contacted philosophers and militants. We discovered and devoured Agenda, Ethics & Animals, Between the Species. And we realized two things. First, how important is the role of the inexhaustibly rich liberationist theory. We believe that nobody can seriously oppose it, and that, consequently, we should never set it aside, not even to comply with the attitudes of the mainstream. The process will thus become much longer, but the change will be much deeper.

The second thing we perceived is the weight of the political challenge our movement makes. Our defense of the sentient beings that are at the very bottom of the exploiting chain gives our demand for justice a worth which is more universal than that of any demand made



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by any exploited human group — or class — in the past: it makes of our struggle for equality *the* struggle for equality (here again, we think, animal liberation is human liberation). Granted, from a social point of view, the challenge is much harder, since animals cannot fight for themselves: but every revolution appears to have depended in the first place on a little group of committed intellectuals and activists, rather than on the contribution of the masses. This group is therefore what we really need, and this is what we are creating.

I.

In the fall of 1987 Franco and I were trying to shape a project we had been fostering for some time — that of publishing a journal which would import into Italy the novelties under way in Anglo-Saxon countries. During a trip to the States we had met Steve Sapontzis, who had given us many pieces of advice and had handsomely granted us permission to freely borrow articles from Between the Species. For a not yet born review, it was an excellent start. There was still no outlining, however, and there was no title. One day, while writing a letter to Harlan B. Miller, Franco suggested: “What if we called it Etica & Animali?” It was what was needed. The nebulous aspects vanished, and the plan began to take shape by itself. The ideal link with an overseas mast-head which had disappeared only two years before gave clear sign of the continuity with what had already happened — Ethics & Animals, in particular, had carried on just the pioneering work we ourselves had in view. The essentiality of the title, moreover, influenced us: we renounced the formerly entertained idea of creating a hybrid journal, both philosophical and militant, and focused on theory.

The first issue of Etica & Animali appeared in April 1988, just in time to be handed to Peter Singer, who was then for the first time visiting Italy officially. One month later Tom Regan, too, whom we had already gone to see in the States, arrived. Fortune smiled on us. An anomalous review, published with meager means and in few copies, could receive an un hoped-for attention from the public and the media thanks to the lectures and meetings we organized both for Peter Singer and for Tom Regan. In the meantime, the Italian edition of Animal Liberation had been published, although by an anti-vivisection league (luckily, the new edition will be issued shortly by a large publishing house), and contacts

had been made for Italian editions of The Case for Animal Rights and for Sapontzis’ Morals, Reason, and Animals (the former appeared this year). We hoped for quick progress. A little later, however, the wave ebbed, and left us to the old mole’s patient work.

We published two further issues of E&A (the fourth is in preparation, as always behind time). Our line is fairly rigid. We endeavour to present the major liberationist ethical views, and we publish discussions of especially important topics. Recently, we opened to the feminist approach, too. However, we still haven’t included any discussions with our opponents — we hold that they already have enough means and room to speak. Given the backwardness of the Italian debate, for the most part we translate from English. The material is therefore abundant. The only problem is that of the short story we present in every issue — the danger of “socialist realism” always lies in wait.

In brief, E&A is intended to be two things: a challenge and an instrument. A challenge to the predominant culture, and a tool for the creation of the nucleus of the movement. Has it achieved its end? It is too early to say. On the whole, Italian culture continues to see the animal question not as a basic moral and social problem, but as an optional, or at most minor, concern — those who are occupied with it are and remain “experts”. While the areas which traditionally are the most committed, the left-wing ones, are imbued with a blind human chauvinism of Marxist origin, those who consider themselves liberals launch generic charges of fanaticism to views they do not understand, let alone see as the consistent development of their own. It is true that the argument is now taken more seriously, that in Italy, too, theses on animal rights have begun to appear, and that some (rare) philosophers, although they do not accept thoroughly our views, have started discussing and spreading them — but the break-through is distant, and will require much more work.

The result on the level of the creation of a cadre is possibly more favourable. Compared to the start, the activists who read the review now, because they feel the need to connect theory and praxis, are many more. Another indication of this is the interest aroused by a series of seminars on liberationist ethics that we are holding at present. But perhaps the most revealing sign of change is a remarkable episode that took place during the first conference we organized in Milan, “The Ethical Glance: Differences and Inequalities”. In the course of

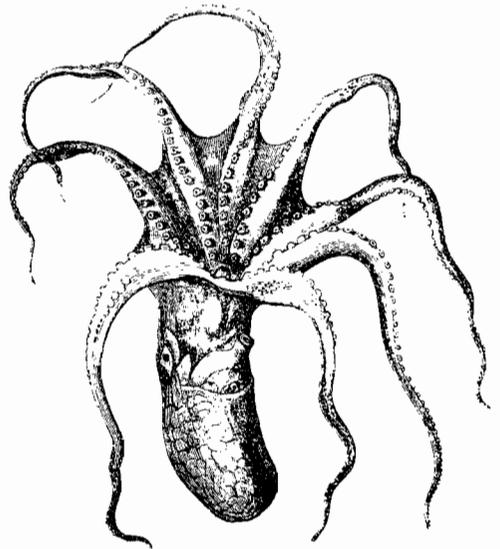
a discussion, an Italian utilitarian philosopher was putting forward the defense of a modified exploitation of animals, based on their painless killing, when, amidst the public, an activist stood up and candidly asked: "But would you treat in the same way a brain-damaged child, in order to eat him?" Introduced by surprise by a non-academic, the formidable weapon of the argument from marginal cases achieved its result and, after a brief escamotage which led to the exclusion of any possible side-effect, answering the challenge, the young philosopher — to avoid the charge of speciesism — answered the question in the affirmative, thus causing a pandemonium in the hall.

II.

As regards the community of sentient beings, the situation of Western democracies recalls that of the classical Spartan society. A restricted oligarchy, composed of humans and relatively egalitarian on its inside, rules in fact tyrannically the mass of the outcasts — the members of other species. On this side, guarantees and rights; on the other side, the most unrestricted discretion. Being astride the boundary, our movement must face uncommon problems. For it is the very social contract that benefits us as humans and as activists that ratifies the unlimited exploitation of nonhumans. The recourse to violence, that in my opinion would be at least in some cases justified from an ethical point of view by any non-speciesist theory, is very problematic from the strategical standpoint. Even supposing that we should be prepared to take the risk, possible retorts could induce public opinion, although wrongly, to put us and our opponents on the same plane — indeed, to support the latter who, after all, protect themselves, while *we defend nobody*, since animals do not exist as "others". Moreover, the social contract itself could be used against us to the point of paralyzing us, as is suggested by the English experience, where emergency laws have already been promulgated against the ALF and the Leagues, although they avoided violence and confined themselves to those sometimes productive acts that damage only property. What to do, then?

We believe that the fundamental problem is to appear as a real political movement, which constantly brings pressure to bear on the boundary of moral concern; to make clear not only that we aren't a more or less welfare or corporative lobby but also that, as a liberation

movement, we are the realization of the principles which the very society that is now being defended against us is based on. This way, which we think is essentially the one pointed out by the American experience, should make our opponents' ground more slippery and facilitate the emergence of committed intellectuals and alliances with other movements, in particular the feminist movement. It is from such "strong" ideology that a *no-strategy* can ensue, which can avoid compromising its principles, even though taking reality into account. A far-reaching design could in fact include both the *no* to whole sectors of animal exploitation — the weak links of the chain — and the *no* to single aspects of areas more difficult to assail. Again, it is in the States that one can find examples of this. Although in our opinion the movement is at present too little concerned with the backbone of animal abuse, namely, their rearing for food, we believe that some choices, as well as the tactics connected with them, have been fundamental. We are in particular thinking of the Campaign for a Fur-Free America which Transpecies devised and ran by an aggressive and constant grassroots mobilization and of PETA's Compassion Campaigns, aiming at an immediate abolition of cosmetic tests on animals through means that range from civil disobedience to attending shareholders meetings. This latter case is for us of special interest, as it involved us directly.



In Italy, a real movement has still to arise. There are anti-vivisection leagues, anti-hunting associations, groups dealing with zoos and circuses, but the idea of a global challenge to animal exploitation has trouble gaining ground. There is, moreover, the problem of the Greens who, being a party, try to hegemonize the area — which results in an adulteration of its claims, because of the risk of losing votes, and in bewilderment, given the expedient divergence from its goals. It was against this background of obstacles that our first attempt at creating a group began and floundered in 1987, a year when even vegetarianism wasn't universally accepted among the *animalisti* (animal people). We had no choice but to wait, and we focused on the journal and on the diffusion of ideas. About a year later, however, an unforeseen event occurred: we received a call from the director of PETA's Compassion Campaigns, Susan Rich, who asked us to support the Benetton Campaign in Italy.

It was something quite new for us. The attack had been prepared with meticulous care, thanks to undercover work in the lab from which the company had ordered the tests for its cosmetic products. The choice of the target was especially apt, and the goal was challenging — the total elimination of animal experimentation. But, above all, a political element of capital importance appeared for the first time, almost naturally: the internationalization of the encounter.

Even if actually there were then three of us (Franco, I, and a close collaborator of the review, Antonio Pillon) we had to make a unified decision. We accepted. Then, mindful of the first experiences of struggle in the cosmetics field, we created a *Coalition against the Use of Cosmetics Tests on Animals*. We contacted dozens of groups and associations and very soon we were able to work and take part in the international mobilization together with organizations from the United States, Great Britain, Germany and Canada. The press was curious, and we had good media coverage. One could also say that we contributed to the final result, since what troubled the company's tranquil waters shortly before the conclusion was the previous announcement of a demonstration in Treviso or, as we then said in our overseas calls, in the backyard of Mr. Luciano. The victory was an exciting experience, which nearly dazed us — victories are so badly needed! However, problems were just around the corner. Many of the associations that had joined the coalition had done it just formally — but this is, after all, taken for granted. More serious was

the fact that some groups, which appeared to have cooperated, eventually proved to be hostile and in some cases ready to boycott. We realized that, although small questions of power mixed with a generic aversion for novelty plagued us, the fundamental problem was ideological: the local anti-vivisectionists, bound to the positions (and, sad to say, to the "methods") of Hans Ruesch, questioned as *unimportant* the sectorial attack on the cosmetics branch of the animal industry and as *non-abolitionist* the approach based on ethical rather than "scientific" arguments. Much time seems to have elapsed since then. We discussed and argued; there have been the Avon and Revlon campaigns; we broke off some relations, and established some new ones. Yet, the experience left its mark, and we increased our efforts: today we have a nucleus from which, as soon as the time is ripe, our liberationist organization will arise.

Thus, the Benetton Campaign constituted a shift in our experience. Yet, we believe, because of the budding idea of an international movement, it constituted a shift also at a more general level. Thanks to Susan Rich's far-sightedness, this idea not only didn't vanish but grew during the campaigns, so as to reach its height in the one now pending against L'Oréal. It isn't easy to describe the feeling of solidarity and strength we experienced when, in January, 1990, we held in Paris (in the backyard of L'Oréal) the first combined, international press conference. We believe it was an historic moment: for this choice is not only dictated by the reality of the issues — our enemies *are* international — but it also heralds great developments. To spread experiences, to settle strategies, to identify common targets: who can say where an international co-operation could lead? The first move has been made: it is just a question of going on.

III.

To devise a political strategy is one thing. To live everyday life is another. To live everyday life means to reckon with one's own inconsistencies and weaknesses. It means to walk in the streets and see butcher shops, pharmacies, furrier shops, perfumeries, or to sit in restaurants not far from people who are eating animal flesh. Or to love and cherish persons who help to perpetuate the exploitation. Or to enjoy the beauty of spots and the enchantment of towns that conceal the exploitation behind serene façades. Sometimes I think

