

Lantern Books - Excerpt

Radical Vegetarianism: A Dialectic of Diet and Ethic

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"Those who lament over the barbarism that comes out of barbarism are like people who wish to eat their veal without slaughtering the calf. They are willing to eat the calf, but they dislike the sight of blood. They are easily satisfied if the butcher washes his hands before weighing the meat."

—**Bertolt Brecht**

"Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties"

Writing exists at once *for* those who read, and *against* those who do not read. If you have read thus far, the preceding was probably for you; but if you believe you drink your milk "without slaughtering the calf," the following shall be against you. However, mere writing and reading neither postulate nor prove a thing. We must remember that what we read concerning what to eat is written by those who might not hesitate to lie through their keyboard if either themselves or their merchants stand to gain a profit from it. And even where something relatively truthful is told, it is often by those neither old enough nor bold enough to put it into practice.

The West at once possesses the tallest and most durable houses of worship, yet the greatest and most destructive warships and the largest and most efficient slaughterhouses. Bad enough to kill; worse to harm and then kill; worst to harm, to continue harming, and yet not kill. Some suffering can be so great that killing is almost kind: putting the soul out of its body also means putting the body out of its pain. *Killing* implies immediacy; *harming* denotes slow prolonged death. Still, *humane slaughter*, a gross contradiction of adjective with noun, can be expedient if every possible effort first to end the suffering has failed. Factory-farming conditions by which most milk and eggs are produced cause great suffering to cows, to their calves, and to chickens. Domastication [sic] of animals compares to slavery of humans, and in place of the few surviving species of animal predators has evolved a whole new race of human creditors, milking them dry.

Vegetarians who drink milk and eat cheese and eggs have three choices of change: killing animals, thus ending their suffering, and eating the flesh, thus wasting no food (thereby ceasing to be vegetarians); or keeping goats in sheds and chickens in kitchens, thus

assuring their well-being, and eating only their milk and eggs (thereby remaining lacto-ovo-vegetarians); or renouncing milk and eggs altogether (thereby becoming vegans).

Much is heralded about national identity and *ethnic* cuisine; let us unite to form a new vegan nation with an *ethic* cuisine. Abandoning these animal products also means abandoning their animal producers, but since everyone is not becoming a vegetarian, nor would do so overnight, no one need wait up late at night worrying until the cows come home. Meantime, we should worry that the cows *are* home. The inhumane exploitation of cow and chicken has already been eloquently exposed by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*, and thirty years later revisited in his book co-authored with animal rights attorney Jim Mason, *The Way We Eat*. So here we shall forego enlisting in the chorus of complaint. But of the cow's calves and the chicken's chicks, something need be said.

The egg industry calls egg-laying hens *layers*, as opposed to hens and roosters that the flesh industry calls *broilers*. Such egg-laying hens have no husbands to peck, and all their lives count their chickens before they hatch. As long as two-day-old chicks are not considered delicacies from which famous French chefs can carve out their culinary crimes, the chicks do not join the ranks of other animal children such as lambs and calves who pass through the gates of the teeth of time and disappear down the esophagi of eternity. Thus the lack of chicks is one aspect in favor of the egg industry over the milk. Farmers and those they feed argue that factory farming at least brings animals into this world that might otherwise never be snatched from the other. They retort that selfhood is not justifiable at the cost of slavery and suffering is not yet relevant here, for first we must question whether selfhood can be discussed. If we can discuss existence because we exist, we cannot discuss non-existence precisely because we can discuss existence. Words are shadows of objects; where there is neither light nor objects, there are no words. We cannot see a fruit if we are blind, nor taste it if we have torn out our tongues; but even with all our senses intact we cannot see, taste, or ponder upon an unborn chick. It is ill conceived to speak of those not conceived. What if they gave a chicken barbecue and nobody came, not even the chickens?

Because both cow and calf share common stalls, our bovine companions are half as fortunate as our feathered friends. Even in the most loving of circumstances within the small family farm, cows deserve better than what winter's worst brings: barns heated only by their bodies, and walks outside the barn for but an hour a day. The calves for

whom the milk is intended are confined to even less varied and more brutal existences. Humans rob the calves from the cows, and the milk from the calves. Though cows produce enough milk for both humans and calves (humans have bred them to do that), humans are greedy: all male calves and over half the females are kidnapped in the first week of birth, trucked to the veal farm where they are fattened for four months, then shipped to the slaughterhouse, then packaged for the supermarket, then purchased for the dinner table, where the fattened calves further fatten fattened humans. Of every five calves born, four end as meals of veal. Thus veal floats invisibly in everyone's glass of milk. "Got veal?"

Cows must be milked, but by the calves for whom the milk is intended. It is often argued that cows would die if left not milked. Cows also surely would die if left unfed, yet they are fed not because of humane compassion, but because of human greed. Furthermore, since bulls rarely are allowed to mingle with cows, the species would perish but for artificial insemination; yet they are conceived not because of conservation, but to maintain peak lactation. Farmers' rationalizations for incarcerating cows on the dairy farm compare with those of human hunters for shooting deer in the fall: to save them from starvation in the winter. Convenient explanations for atrocities have long been conjured by humans intent on self-delusion in self-defense of self-interest. Lacto-vegetarians are hardly different in regards to drinking cow milk. "Got milk?" What is milk? It is not animal, yet not vegetable either. Mammal young of both carnivores and herbivores drink it, and its nutritional effect is rather close to both flesh and plants. No adult vegetarian would eat a hamburger made half of flesh just because the other half is of extender made from soy beans, yet many vegetarians drink milk. What comes from an animal comes closer to being an animal than what comes from a plant. For the vegetarian, that is too close for comfort; and for the cow confined in her stall and her many calves in their crates, that also is too close for comfort. Here it should be noted that not only does an egg come from an animal, but it could have become an animal.

Lacto-vegetarians generally eat everything *au lait* and often consume more lacteal liquids than do carnivores meat and milk. Yet milk is but blood modified by mammary glands. Some traditional Masai tribesmen still bleed milk cows at their necks and drink both the blood and the milk. Like masturbating monks, milk-drinking vegetarians are imitating the very thing they wish to avoid. Their lips can be white from milk only because others' hands are red from blood. Jack made no mistake when he traded his cow for a handful of beans (nor when he sought the goose whose eggs were not for eating).

Cows make milk as food upon which small cows can become big cows; calves are small, but not all things small are calves; because humans are small compared to cows means not that they are calves, yet they strangely try to grow into big cows. The belief that cows' milk is made as food for humans is as fallacious as the belief that their blood is for humans, and the trail of blood leads directly to the belief that their flesh is made as food for humans: it is flesh from which flows both blood and milk. Someone might someday market cows' tears, promoting them as a rich source of mineral salts. Inducing cows to shed them should be no problem: they must forever be crying over their spilled milk. "Got tears?"

The three foods nature creates solely for the sake of feeding animals are eggs, milk, and honey. Not even fruits fulfill this sole function since they really envelope seeds of propagation, acting as gift wrap around a birthday present, at once a disguise and a cosmetic. Not coincidentally, these three particular foods are made by the three particular animals for whom they are intended. The foodstuff of eggs is laid by the mother bird for the bird embryo also in the egg; milk is secreted by the mother mammal for the infant mammal also delivered from her; and honey, made by bees, is intended for bees. While animals adapt themselves to what they eat, milk and honey adapt themselves to the animals by whom they are intended to be eaten. Thus human milk is specifically adapted for humans, kangaroo milk for kangaroos, bat milk for bats, rat milk for rats—and cow milk for cows. Most human babies are born with an innate aversion to cow milk; but some infants immediately yearn for it. This should alert mom and dad that perhaps they mistakenly have given birth to a calf.

Cow milk contains three times more calcium than human milk. Cows develop bones first, for which all the calcium is needed; humans develop brains first. Cows may be less intelligent than humans, yet no mother cow is so simple-minded as to substitute human milk for hers. Ever since humans first were humans, their babies have been fed human milk (as is meant to be); adults have included cow milk as a small part of their diets for several centuries, but only as recently as the last two was it included in their infants' and as a large part at that. Whether this development tells more about the way adults feed themselves, or about the way they feed their children, or about the way they feed themselves as though children, is unclear; but we do know that drinking milk provides the infant child a means of growing up, and that among other mammals its consumption is infantile. "Got drool?"

These past two centuries have also seen a sharp increase in adult humans' consumption of cow milk and hence an increase in its production. Because we are now so accustomed to milk, cows are enslaved to us. Slaves earn no vacations, no leaves of absence for maternal affairs. Forced to produce milk at least eleven months a year, a cow's own tissues are depleted so that her milk might ostensibly nourish her calves. Her body becomes diseased; but rather than give her a vacation, humans give her a vaccination. Her milk becomes tubercular; but rather than put her out to pasture, humans pasteurize her milk. Many people eat everything at hand, including the hand. Those who drink cow milk, and thereby perpetuate her mistreatment, are biting that hand that feeds them; those who eat her flesh are eating the hand. But if we bite, or eat, the hand that feeds us, eventually it will stop feeding us or will feed us one more time, this last time with poison. Like the chick within the fertile egg, ethical consequences underlie nutritional considerations. No foods as much as those from animals are so controversial concerning what is unsafe and unholy. "Got guilt?"

The venerable law of karmic consequence dictates that those who in early life exploit cows and calves, later in life will be plagued by illness and disability. Raw milk is more nutritious than the sterilized supermarket version, but the stringent sanitation controls necessary for an edible raw milk drastically limit its supply. What is gained in quantity is lost in quality. Modern America guzzles so much on account of pasteurization, a process that not only eliminates the beneficial bacteria along with the bad, but destroys vitamins and renders minerals indigestible. Numerous studies link pasteurization, not milk itself, with arthritis. The factory-bred and conveyor-belt-fed cow today produces more milk during a shorter productive life span than ever before. And Americans drink more milk than ever before, yet are hardly any healthier. Only humans suffer from the cholesterol diet-related diseases of coronary sclerosis in middle life and atherosclerosis in late life, and only humans drink milk past their infancy. Milk is also attributed as a mucus former in the human body. Some vegans contend that mucus is the cause, not the product, of the common cold. No one knows the cure for the common cold, but those who neither eat flesh nor drink milk truly know its prevention. Most lacto-vegetarians suffer more colds and flu, not fewer, compared to when they were carnivores, while most vegans seldom ever catch colds. "Got snot?"

If we were fortunate to have been breastfed, we were nevertheless weaned from our mother at one or two years of age. What of those who have yet to be weaned from the cow mother? Who would believe they matured from childhoods as humans only to

develop into baby cows? Digestion of the mother's lactose, the sugar in milk, depends on secretion of the child's lactase. The majority of the non-Caucasian adult world, notably North and South American Indians, Australian and Pacific Island aborigines, Asians other than in northern India, and black Africans other than eastern, cannot digest and therefore do not drink milk. The Chinese raised cows for the past three centuries, but only for the flesh, and ate it sparingly: Asians have produced both flesh and milk from the simple soybean. Western nutritionists remain unable to explain the predominant "lactose-intolerance" because they explore the answer only in Caucasians. Some propose genetic digestive deficiencies, others acquired inabilities; the confusion is needless. The ancient Epicharmus, who said, "Only the mind can see and hear, everything else is deaf and blind," must have been deaf and blind. In this case we should listen with our stomachs. If lacto-vegetarians and carnivores alike withdraw all milk and milk products from their diets for just one year, they, too, will lose their childish abilities to digest milk, outgrowing it as surely as we all outgrew our mother's breast, and then her placebo pacifier. The thought of bending down on our knees to suck at the tit of a zebra or a donkey, or lifting up to our mouths the nipple of a beaver or a monkey, should elicit a response of either laughter or regurgitation. Why is it any different with a cow, or a goat, or a sheep? Are we to equate ourselves with the leech, but instead of sucking blood from the leg of another human we suck milk from the tit of a cow? Not even the cow mother drinks her own milk. Such a cow would hardly differ from a human father drinking his own blood, which hardly differs from a cow drinking a human mother's milk. Her calf drinks her cow milk, but the cow herself does not. Why do the human father and mother drink the cow's milk? Because they also drink the calf's blood. "Got blood?"

The archetypal story of the UNICEF program during the 1950s that donated truckloads of dry milk to African children attests to the wisdom of the Third World, who used it to whitewash walls, as well as to the cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism of the "First." What one race of people digest, disgusts another. Eskimos have been known to devour so much raw flesh at a single sitting that at the end they could not stand up; Northwest Amerindians traditionally competed against one another in a variation of their potlatch with salmon as the wealth, and each contestant destroyed by digestion as much as fifteen pounds of it cold; Tartar tribesmen relished frozen horse flesh; and to this very day, the French esteem fried frogs' legs and steamed snails. All of this might be regarded by the average American beef eater as loathsome, yet no carnivores witnessing any of the above can experience half as much revulsion as do vegetarians in viewing their peers eating beef and burgers. "Got puke?"

Those who prefer their beef rare might be impressed by the Abyssinians who herded a cow to the kitchen door, severed small chunks of flesh from its still living body, and then engorged greedily while the animal watched from outside. A fisherman once caught a fish, cut a morsel from its side, baited his hook with the morsel, threw both the fish and his hook back into the water, and then caught the same fish. Not wishing to waste food, thrifty moms often feed the leftover flesh from the suffer [sic] table to the family dog or cat. Yet they toss it to the wrong animal and would waste far less returning it to the animal from which it came: it needs it most. The twice-caught fish obviously lacked something and did its best to retrieve what once made it whole. Those animals who must eat others' bodies do so because of a deficiency, be it nutritional or spiritual. Eating is a means of seeking companionship with the things we eat. Those who eat many animals probably are very lonely.

We have our weaknesses. When we want to be treated like everyone else, we say we are also human; but when we want special privileges, we say we are *only* human. And we are also only animal. Though we may or may not place animal bodies into our mouths, our mouths are nevertheless placed inside animal bodies. The path out of our bodies is a slow one.

Lacto-ovo-vegetarianism, lacto-vegetarianism, and ovo-vegetarianism are steps in the right direction, and are good compromises for and concessions to those who care not to aspire higher. This is intended only to qualify "lactism" and "ovism," not to mock them, though the defenses that some vegetarians uphold against veganism sometimes sound as pig-headed as those of carnivores'. Literal statements about calf rennet in hard cheese, bone and urine in toothpaste, lard in peanut butter and pie crust, gelatin in candy, and flesh fat in soap are often responded to with disbelief. Metaphors about veal floating invisibly inside glasses of milk and about hearts beating silently inside eggs are met with blank stares of denial and doubt. "Got shame?"

Yet veganism can no more be expected of vegetarians than vegetarianism of carnivores: all that we can hope for is that we know the facts. Once learned, the facts can be gathered into two heaps: the ethical in the mind as theories, the dietetic in the stomach as recipes. More people are qualified speakers on nutrition than on philosophy since nutrition offers more answers with far less questioning. Furthermore, philosophy is of little value to the lamebrain dying of malnutrition. Little wonder that books on vegetable and

vegetarian cooking outnumber those on vegetarianism one-hundred to one, and that those on vegetarianism provide more seasoning than reasoning. The word *vegetarianism* itself is short on clarity and long on syllables, hence the bestselling books on the subject shun the V word in their titles or on their covers. You are what you eat, but you become what you read. So once the facts are learned, then what; or rather, so what? They can be ignored or heeded: if heeded, they can be affirmed or denied; if affirmed, they can be used rightly or wrongly.

More good people than bad are alive but fewer right beliefs than wrong are shared by them: only one shortest line exists between two points, while infinite other longer paths surround it. A wrong belief may be based upon misguided misinformation from poison ivy league professors whose endowed chairs are funded by food industries; if so, then the believer can plead innocence. Despite the daily slaughter of innocent animals, humans who admit apathy or who even confess guilt can live on in a state almost akin to grace. Carnivorism in no way negates goodness; it simply does not let us forget evil. Some places remind us of evil more than others. In Israel, employment of teenagers is forbidden anywhere an undesirable environment might impair their physical, emotional, or moral development. Although the military somehow fails to appear on the list, included among these forbidden places are bars, mines, mental hospitals, and slaughterhouses. Kibbutzim may be small societies nearest to our Western conception of Utopia, but as long as most of them tend to their chicken coops they will remain a long way from approximating Eden. Only in Eden was there no sin and, therefore, no death and, therefore, no killing and, therefore, no flesh. The *therefore's* can easily be reversed. No matter how few animals we might eat and cause to die, we, too, still will die and be eaten. Even confused Prince Hamlet understood that we fatten fish with worms, and ourselves with fish, that we ourselves might fatten worms. The Threefold Godhead of Hinduism—Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma—forms the door that slams shut our small square cell called life. The individual, even in sackcloth and barefoot, allows now one head to raise itself atop the body, and now another, but always the other two remain waiting. Destruction provides the foundation for creation: we are not green, do not contain chlorophyll, cannot produce our own food, and so we do destroy plants. The closest we can come to complete harmlessness is fruitarianism (not necessarily "fruit-fritarianism"), whereby the plant remains alive though we eat its products. Though we may chop down trees for paper on which to write and read instructions and declarations on how and why not to chop down trees, at least we destroy far less than any carnivore. The point here is that we destroy still less if we do not drink milk. Like the active

member of Greenpeace and the devoted worker at the ASPCA who meet each other for lunch of burgers and fries, the vegetarian who drinks milk waits according to an obsolete timetable for the same train of thought that stops at, but goes no farther than, being a humanitarian who eats flesh. Is veganism justified? The question is answered best by the very uneasiness of the lacto-ovo-vegetarian. Is it practical? Can it be practical, can it be practiced, in modern Western society? Truth owes no homage to any society, East or West, nor to any diet, worst or best. Where there is a will, there need be no whey.

Certain books we finish reading and though we never again refer to them, we store them on a shelf. That is important; rather than discard them, we store them on a shelf. Other books we read and finish, and find so worthwhile or so confounding that we read them again. Concerning the grosser pleasures of life such as smoking, drinking, doping, gambling, carousing, and flesh eating, many come to a potential end to these youthful indulgences and indiscretions, and yet begin them again; others reach some closure that warrants no repetition, and leave them behind. This chronology of dissimulation stresses that each be cast aside one by one in its own due time, not collectively in a meaningless group ceremony, and be renounced not out of sacrifice but out of boredom. Indeed, the ascetic, as Tolstoy said, is one who derives more reward renouncing a small pleasure than indulging in it. We need not be sorry to have pursued and perused these volumes: quite the contrary, we can be glad to have opened them, and just as glad to have shut them closed. Though they are not worth rereading, we might store them for future reference in which to research a passage, or to quote from, devoting careful attention to citing our sources. What was the text becomes the epigraph and index.

It amounts to this: development is a product not of renunciation; rather, renunciation is a product of development. A projectile falling to the earth gains velocity only to a point, after which it descends at a steady speed. As great a weight that any book may add to the evidence, its plea for vegetarianism cannot prod carnivores who already are proceeding along their life's way at their own pace; likewise for veganism in relation to lacto-vegetarians. "Why then are you writing?" the reader asks. "Why then are you reading?" the writer answers. No book, not even the Gospels, is the gospel truth, so no book should be taken on the author's word. In regards to books about nutrition, we should judge only by the results: the writers' and readers' pictures of health. While we can't always tell a book by its cover, maybe we can offer prognoses of the health of writers and readers by their looks, and then compare our forecast by their looks to the content of their books. Yet readers do not necessarily put into action what they read, so let's skip their books;

instead let's head to supermarkets and health food stores. We likely will see that the health of shoppers who purchase mostly fresh fruits and raw vegetables appears better than those who buy much white bread and many hot dogs. While waiting in line at checkout counters, as the cashier rings them up, we can check them out.

Beyond the marketplace, flesh is a natural food for predators who stalk and kill their prey, and for scavengers who pick clean the leftovers. And human milk is a natural food for humans, but not all humans, only those who are infants. And cow milk is a natural food for cows, but not all cows, only those who are calves. Cow milk maybe, just maybe, is a natural food for humans who are infants and who are orphans and who drink it warm in a natural manner as do calves: groveling on all fours, suckling under the udder. Cow milk is not a natural food for adult humans who shy away from any intimacy with the cow, but instead drink her milk chilled and from a glass or a bottle. Such humans display their lack of faith in food in its natural state, in which case they do not have faith in (if they are believers) God or (if they are not) Nature.

So much for talk about food; let us eat it, and be done with it. All these pages have been an invitation to dinner. You have arrived at the agreed time, and have sat down. The table is set: wooden bowls, chopsticks, cloth napkins, earthenware mugs, and candlelight. Everything appears to be ready. What is that you ask? You want to know, where is the food? What do you mean? No one told you that you were supposed to bring it? Well, good! As long as you are here, we can talk. And not about the food. For the time has come to turn to the more serious side of our subject, to matters of life and death. But we are not obligated to turn to it too seriously. Because life is a joke, and death its laughter.

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