

Why I'm vegan

“As people’s incomes increase, their diet tends to shift from plant protein to animal protein [...] a global transition to eating animals means snatching food from the mouths of the poor. It also means the ecological cleansing of almost every corner of the planet.”

(Monbiot, 2017)

Veganism is a plant-based diet, lifestyle and belief system which, in the words of the Vegan Society, “seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” (Vegan Society, 2018a). For me, it is also a counter to the rampant speciesism and normalized violence that have been sanctioned by capitalism. Animals have become the victims of ownership, and the normalizing of their enslavement is something that, I believe, has seen violent attitudes towards the planet’s ecosystems become more acceptable too. Thus, in light of the global ecological degradation that we witness today, I see veganism as a form of protest and an increasingly relevant philosophy too.

In a more practical sense, veganism also provides a way of responding to some of the most pressing issues of our time: the scarcity of water and land that humanity faces (e.g. Vegan Society, 2018b); the pollution and defaunation of the Earth’s land, freshwater and seas (e.g. Roberts, 2017); and anthropogenic climate change (e.g. Carus, 2010). Veganism is a means of withdrawing my participation in, and financial support for, companies that exploit animals and exert overwhelming pressure on the available land and water. I am prioritizing the welfare of

domesticated animals and the flourishing of other species and ecosystems over a system of agriculture that leaves much of the population, as well as the land, starved.

Yet much of what I read and hear on veganism is how it is all about what ‘you’, the individual, can get from adopting a vegan diet, with health reasons being the primary benefit that is promoted. This is an obvious manifestation of individualism – promoted by a capitalist socio-economic system – where the collective health of other human and non-human life is classed as being of secondary importance at best. For me, the primary reason for abstaining from, and making a stand against, factory farming, should be that it is a highly polluting form of legalized mass slaughter de-connecting us from other species and the planet, not that it might help my digestion.

Another manifestation of individualism can be seen in the rhetoric that food choice is centred on convenience to consumers (and producers). This is because capitalism is a hierarchical system of alienation, which in most cases dehumanizes the individual worker, and in turn relegates non-human animals to an even lower status: that of a commodity. Veganism offers the chance to lift ourselves from this hierarchical chain of production, and lift the status of animals and land (cf. New Zealand’s *Te Urewera Act* [<https://is.gd/teurewera>]). Free ourselves from this chain and we would be better equipped to place compassion before capital, and ecology before economy.

From an early age there should be a focus in educational systems on food production (an example of this is Belgium’s new food pyramid, which groups animal products with junk food [Brown, 2017]) so that everyone can learn the true cost of

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industrial exploitation. One example would be the inflation of staple crops (e.g. quinoa) to the detriment of local communities.

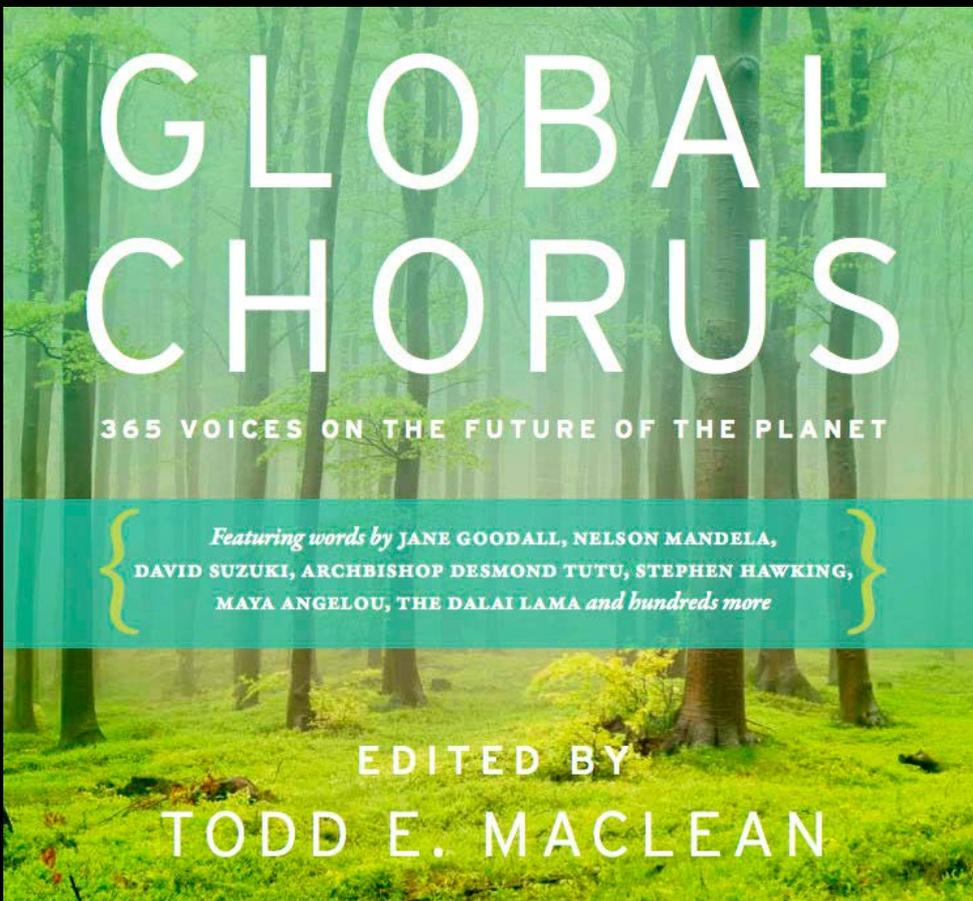
At present, though, an important strategy for changing our food systems is to greatly improve the regulation of livestock and fishing industries and, in parallel, to better enable the local production of plant-based foods in harmony with the seasons. There are already options at our disposal for effecting the latter, including permaculture and forest gardening, but they have not yet been widely popularized.

I am not claiming that veganism, as currently practised, has achieved perfection. To cite just one example of where there is room for improvement, the transportation of food for a vegan diet across oceans contributes to pollution (hence the need to re-localize the production of food). But it certainly offers a way for humans to sustain themselves without the devastating

ecological implications of a civilization fed by intensive livestock farming. ■

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