

A Pig Doesn't Make the Revolution

Valentina Sonzogni

Architecture and Art Historian, Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli, Italy

valentina_sonzogni@yahoo.it

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We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience, and verifying them here. All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history; only biography. Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself, must go over the whole ground. What it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*, 1841)

Writing a review of Leonardo Caffo's book *Il maiale non fa la rivoluzione* (*A Pig Doesn't Make the Revolution*) has a special meaning for me, as the title of the book recalls the eponymous interview that I did with Caffo in 2011, focusing on what I would call "the bases" of antispeciesism.

At that time, after embracing Vegetarianism, I was looking for a theoretical background that would provide intellectual support to my spiritual longing for animal welfare: this is how I came across his research. I would call it a piece of good luck, as Caffo's thinking has been complementing what I consider to be not only a new political position and a major reality check but, in the first place, a personal evolution. Caffo's conceptual system, which I then carried with me in my path as an "amateur" animal rights advocate (I promote this view in a rather small community), revolves around the concepts of compassion and lucidity, civil disobedience and the capacity to talk to ordinary people as well as to finely educated people in order to transmit "the truth" that is hidden behind the clean and anonymous walls of the slaughterhouse. So this is a review of a book, but it also contains my personal opinion on Caffo, who embodies – he will excuse me for using him as a guinea pig – a new genre of activism that may finally manage to get the message outside of the enclave of activists, perhaps finally conquering the attention of indifferent omnivores as well as leather and fur fashionistas.

The book is structured in a rather simple and clear way. After a first chapter in which Caffo presents the thesis of the animal liberation's movement initiators such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, he proceeds to delineate a genealogy of the movement by oppositions calling into cause thinkers such as Matthew Calarco and Jacques Derrida as well as Martin Heidegger to accompany the reader in a series of mental experiments proving the specificity of the struggle for animal rights. The crucial transition of the field of animal cognition into that of animal studies is analyzed by Caffo through a review of the different definitions of speciesism, showing that the intellectual plea today is for a larger perspective that would start from pain and distress, anguish and fear and in which sensiocentrism would be the ethical guide to such (r)evolution.

In the third chapter, Caffo examines his main ideas and achievements, namely what he defines "antispecismo debole" or "terzo antispecismo" ("weak antispeciesism" or "third antispeciesism"). The fourth chapter is the re-publication of a dialogue between Caffo and Marco Maurizi in which they debate in a reciprocal interview on the topic of possible scenarios for animal liberation, among which Maurizi especially supports political antispeciesism, a theory and practise that pairs advocacy for human and non human animals rights. The conclusion of the book tells a lot about its own premises: Caffo acknowledges and incorporates in his method the idea of "negoziato concettuale" ("intellectual negotiation") as it was introduced by Roberto Casati (Casati 2011). The enormous task of achieving animal liberation can progress only through the negotiation of the different souls and minds of the animal rights movement and, I would add, not only in the Italian scenario, but opening up to other countries and their experiences, from Austria to China, learning from their victories and defeats while developing a solid strategic action for animals, as Melanie Joy would put it (Joy 2008).

Something may surprise the reader: Caffo states to have tried to write his book not as an animal rights advocate but as an animal (Caffo 2013, 9): writing as a pig would write can make visible to our eyes the only possible way to his own liberation. Once you get familiar with his thinking, believe me, you will agree that Caffo *is* that pig, that forgotten nameless animal dying unheard, in this very moment, in a filthy slaughterhouse, somewhere on the planet earth. His "weak antispeciesism" is born out of compassion (and, of course, out of a strong philosophical grounding); yet, if this kind of "sentimental" approach to the matter can be regarded as inappropriate or "weak" within Academic circles, his theory is appealing for most audiences, reaching out for non-vegan communities, intersecting with other disciplines and slowly permeating those communities that have no familiar-

ity with such topics. A new definition of activist, also fostered by Joy in her book *Strategic Actions for Animals*, seems to be another important step in the process of helping the pig with his revolution: animal rights advocates should not present themselves as "non-eaters of something" (opposing omnivores in this), but as supporters of a new conception of the world, that is, as an avant-garde movement. Do you remember the Cubists, or Igor Stravinsky, James Joyce or Le Corbusier, The Beatles and Madonna? That's it, we won't make it as vegans (although we must all tend to this kind of diet) but we will make it as antispeciesists in that we bring further a new idea of life and philosophy. But Caffo says more: antispeciesists are not only doing this, but what is more, they are speaking up for those who have no voice, so they *must* become *that* pig.

Having said that, Caffo proceeds to take a distance from what he is known as "political antispeciesism", generally intended as a movement that aims at liberating both human and non-human animals at the same time (and I apologize for not acknowledging the different tendencies of the movement here). Caffo does not deny political antispeciesism but defines the ideological and practical limits of struggling for animals in order to define sharply the timing and the goals of this battle. Caffo has been criticized for his "third antispeciesism" in that it seems to exclude human rights struggles. Yet, although he sets animal suffering as a priority in the agenda, he is not devaluing the equally urgent issue of human slavery or exploitation. Such urge derives from the philosophical difference between action and intention, which is *killing an animal in a car accident* versus *allowing the livestock system* with the consequent death row, from the creation of lives that should never have been born to the slaughterhouse etc. The carefully planned and organized killing of billions of non-human animals for food industry, fashion and science (among other purposes) is enough of a reason to set animal liberation at the top of the agenda. Caffo's antispeciesism is weak in this sense: that is, it suspends the judgment on broader theories and limits its goal to a more "humble" task, i.e. to act immediately for animal liberation in any possible manner.

So far so good. But how to fight for animal rights? That seems to be the question here. Once the conceptual frame is set, Caffo seeks inspiration in the work of the philosopher Henry David Thoreau in indicating the path of civil disobedience as a form of individual struggle against the privileges that the human species has self-granted to its members: "A new antispeciesism must be politically aware of a systemic mistake, while being able to morally deal with individual deviant behaviours on which, if possible, we must immediately take action" (Caffo 2013, 72). These guidelines are summarized in a few points that encourage to give up part of established

and socially accepted privileges, such as for instance the food obsession that is so typical of Western (and especially Italian) people. This different education fosters individual disobedience, for instance accepting to go to jail after freeing operations and rescues, transgressing the law and so forth, as is already done by ALF and other groups worldwide.

From a theoretical point of view, Caffo restates the priority of the non-human animal: “[...] accepting that ours is a struggle not for people and not even *also* for people, but only for non-human animals, and that the face of a weeping pig alone matters more than all the dreams of mankind” (Caffo 2013, 75). Getting involved with animal liberation limits the field to this specific battle, which is remarkably different from a global, larger and more complex battle against exploitation – situating it non before human liberation, but just next to it, although separated. Animal liberation is priority for Caffo and it is a moral imperative based on a commonly accepted truth that is not questionable: non-human animals do suffer, feel and remember, they can think and some of them understand human language (everyone who has a dog or a cat, let alone a monkey can confirm this). They have familiar bonds and memory and a nervous system that makes them feel physical pain and psychological distress. One can have no empathy for non-human animals but these facts are as accepted nowadays as the fact that the planet earth is spherical. And, just as many people today dismiss as unacceptable any act of sex, gender and race discrimination, one day they will find unacceptable the habit of animal corpses consumption in public (once called “meat”) or shoes made with dead skin (once called “leather” or “hide”). It is again Caffo who writes:

Unfortunately, however, it is widely believed that we should not force other to stop eating meat because, in the name of a generic pluralism, we must respect the food choices of other individuals. Those who argue that eating or making clothes out of non-human animals is justifiable rarely try to provide valid arguments for their thesis. [...] However, a value judgment about what is eaten is widespread: the proof can be found in the fact that, virtually, human cultures do not practice cannibalism, because eating humans is considered reprehensible. (Caffo 2013, 93)

Even though he distances himself from the actual debate on political antispeciesism, Caffo *is* a political antispeciesist because antispeciesism *is* political in the first place. What Caffo states is: let’s put non-human animals back at the center of our struggle and let us not only *feel* their pain but *be* them. In any case, there is enough space in one’s mind and heart to embrace more than one cause. Pigs perhaps don’t make the difference (yet), but we (still) do.

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