

SATYA

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Editorial

Last year, Whole Foods Market made waves by establishing the Animal Compassion Foundation. A handful of animal activists were invited to join meat producers, animal welfare experts and executives to devise the best living conditions possible for farmed animals raised and slaughtered for the display cases of Whole Foods. This move was embraced by many animal rights and protection organizations.

On January 25, 2005, Whole Foods donated five percent of their total sales to jump-start the foundation. In the PR section of their website, Whole Foods has a letter dated January 24, 2005, from Peter Singer on Animal Rights International letterhead signed by 17 different animal rights, animal protection and vegan advocacy groups who "express their appreciation and support for the pioneering initiative being taken by Whole Foods Market in setting Farm Animal Compassionate Standards." [See facing page.]

When we at *Satya* discovered this letter it gave us pause. And made us ask questions and investigate.

Eventually we will see animal products sold in Whole Foods with the Animal Compassion logo on them. What does it mean when body parts of dead animals are emblazoned with some of the words most precious to the animal rights movement? Humane. Compassion. Free.

What does it mean when animal protection organizations publicly endorse and direct resources into supporting such programs?

What does it mean when a major corporation like Whole Foods uses this endorsement and involvement to promote their efforts?

Unintended Consequences?

Walk into any meat or dairy section of your local grocery or natural foods store and you'll notice the labels: "Certified Humane," "Naturally Raised," "Cage-Free," "Organic," "Free-Range" and so on. These give the vague impression that the animals used or killed are given a certain level of consideration, allowed a somewhat natural life. While a handful of these labels adhere to solid guidelines, many of

them are simply marketing ploys designed to help consumers feel good about the products they are buying—animal exploitation with a smiley face.

If the label says it's okay, is that when the critical thinking stops?

More and more we're hearing "What about 'humanely raised' meat?" or "I used to be vegetarian..." or "It's okay, I only buy free-range..." And over the past few months there has been a flurry of books and articles exploring similar sentiments. Part of this indicates our success: people are talking about and examining their food choices. But it's the solutions they seem to be grabbing on to, their conscientious carnivorousism, that makes us take notice.

Are we somehow sending mixed messages to the general public, perhaps even giving them excuses to keep eating meat?

James LaVeck, co-founder of Tribe of Heart, observes, "To make good for the long haul, each of us must consider the possibility that our choices, however well motivated, may have unintended consequences none of us desire. Success in the monumental work we have taken on will only come when our vision of a transformed world is brought into harmony with the means we use to make that vision come to life."

No one is disputing whether animal activists care. Anyone working to reduce the suffering cares. It's the question of strategy and direction that is in debate.

The Debate

This is not about Whole Foods. It's not the over-simplified animal welfare vs. abolition argument. This is about the consistency of our messages and actions and their consequences. It's about the 10 billion animals killed for meat each year in this country—humanely raised or not—and what we're doing to stop that.

In this issue and the next, *Satya* explores what has until now been quiet rumblings. Readers will be exposed to many sides of the debate. We encourage readers to continue the dialogue beyond our pages and invite you to participate in our online discussion forum at www.satyamag.com. The more we discuss the issues, the more likely we are to discover common ground and develop solutions. The animals are counting on us.

The Editors

Animal Rights International

John Mackey
Chief Executive Officer
Whole Foods Market
500 Bowie Street
Austin, TX 78703

January 24, 2005

Dear John,

The undersigned animal welfare, animal protection and animal rights organizations would like to express their appreciation and support for the pioneering initiative being taken by Whole Foods Market in setting Farm Animal Compassionate Standards. We hope and expect that these standards will improve the lives of millions of animals.

Animal Rights International (ARI)
Animal Welfare Institute (AWI)
Animal Place
Animal Protection Institute (API)
Association of Vets for Animal Rights (AVAR)
Bay Area Vegetarians
Christian Vegetarian Association
Compassion Over Killing (COK)
Doris Day Animal League
East Bay Animal Advocates
Farm Sanctuary
Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PeTA)
Mercy for Animals
Northwest In Defense of Animals
Vegan Outreach
Viva!USA

Sincerely,



Peter Singer

President, Animal Rights International

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Email: info@ari-online.org · Website www.ari-online.org · Contributions to ARI are tax-deductible.

Founder: Henry Spira President: Professor Peter Singer Administrative Officer: Sarah Whitman
Campaigns Advisor: Mark Graham Legal Advisor: Elinor Molbegott, J.D.

Compassion for Sale?

Doublethink Meets Doublefeel as Happy Meat Comes of Age

By James LaVeck



In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.—George Orwell

Last fall, an intelligent, socially conscious, and compassionate person told me that after seeing a Tribe of Heart documentary at a local film festival, she had made a commitment not to participate in animal cruelty anymore. From now on she would only purchase “happy meat” at Whole Foods Market.

Something about these words, offered with sincere appreciation for the work I do as an activist filmmaker, was deeply troubling. I knew they were part of a trend I’d been seeing build amongst audiences over the last few months. The same films that had once inspired large numbers of people to completely reconsider their participation in the exploitation of animals were now triggering something new, an enthusiasm for the moral advantages of “humane” meat. I began to think about how this had come to be, and why the implications seemed to loom so large.

Eerily, the first thing that floated into my mind was George Orwell’s book *1984*, with its depiction of a gloomy world in which nameless bureaucrats would daily redefine the meanings of words in the dictionary as a means of controlling the thoughts of the

masses. “Doublethink,” said Orwell, “means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.”

Let’s open the door to increased pollution and call it the “Clear skies initiative.” Let’s eviscerate funding for schools and call it “No child left behind.” And let’s drop bombs on innocent civilians and pitch it as a noble effort to bring those same people “freedom and democracy.” Yes, Orwell saw it coming, a kind of moral retrovirus that was poised to take over our world. The only thing he got wrong was the level of marketing brilliance that would go into disguising the discombobulation of our ability to think critically, and the consequent enthusiasm with which we could be induced to take part in our own undoing.

Environmentalism’s Third Wave: A Cautionary Tale

In the midst of this disquieting interlude, I was lucky enough to share a meal with John Stauber, co-author of *Toxic Sludge is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies, and the Public Relations Industry*. “This has all happened before,” said John, after patiently listening to my tale of woe. “Read *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the 20th Century* by Mark Dowie.”

So I did, and the plot thickened. What was bothering me, I realized, was the devastating consequences of allowing the core language of a social movement to be distorted as a means of accruing short-term gain. Consider, for example, words such as “environmental” and “organic.” In the beginning, these concepts meant little to most people. Then, countless scientists, educators and activists worked for decades to imbue them with meaning and moral value. Wrapped up in these words were hard-won principles of ecological reality, concern for the common good, respect for our planet, and the timeless wisdom of indigenous peoples.

Enter Mark Dowie and the sad story he tells in *Losing Ground*. Some of the very people who had labored to give the concept of environmentalism so much power, unwittingly played a part in its dilution during what has been called the environmental movement’s “third wave.” Massive corporate donations, prestigious seats on corporate boards, lunch with powerful legislators, highly publicized “win-win” collaborations with industry—watch as the budgets and membership rolls of environmental organizations skyrocket. It all feels so good and so right.

But over time, says Dowie, something subtle starts to shift. Non-profit environmental groups begin to compete more vigorously against each other for press coverage, money and members. Cynicism creeps in. Program priorities inexplicably drift toward those activities which will bring in the greatest financial return. Large organizations start taking credit for the work of smaller ones. At the same time, interest in education and grassroots empowerment falls by the wayside, displaced by a fascination with congressional lobbying and partnerships with industry. Reliable access to national publicity and the corridors of power becomes an end in itself. A grassroots movement morphs into something more businesslike and professionalized, and what were once vibrant gatherings characterized by diversity and passionate dialogue come to resemble the meetings of a trade association or cartel. Every organization must learn how to make more money, how to recruit and retain more members, how to build its advocacy brand, and how to dominate the marketplace of meaning. The idealism of millions of caring citizens is shoveled like coal into the furnaces of never ending corporate growth.

Soon enough, a schism opens up between those who enthusiastically collaborate with industry and those who think this way of operating represents an inherent conflict of interest. By and by, a kind of auto-immune disorder sets in, turning people of good will against each other. One camp, filled with righteous indignation, holds faithfully to the “old ways,” and battles daily with disempowerment and isolation. Another camp resolutely does what it must to gain a place at the table where the big decisions of society get made,



WAR IS PEACE FREEDOM IS SLAVERY IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

—From *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell

Calves in wooden 'veal crates.' Photo: Peter Dean ©Stone

and does their best to resist the creeping temptations of complicity.

Before too long, the word “environmental” comes to be applied to the policies of some of the worst polluters, and to a president who has done more to damage the earth than any other in history. In this topsy-turvy scenario, even Monsanto claims to be a green company, presumably run by environmentalists.

Meanwhile, as some of the people at the center of the environmental movement become indistinguishable from their former adversaries, others walk away utterly demoralized. Many more just have a feeling of confusion and loss. And the

challenges multiply as industry comes up with more and more clever ways to blur the distinction between those who serve the common good and those who serve their own self-interests.

Introducing Happy Meat: 1984 Meets Animal Farm

As I finished reading Dowie's book, I realized that there is nothing new about all of this. It is a story as old as the hills. Any time we want, we humans can sell what is sacred to us, we can convert things of transcendent moral value into money and the things money buys. Lead our sacred cow to the auction ring, and with one whack of the gavel, they'll turn her

right into a cash cow. But the coins weigh heavily in our pockets, and long after they are spent, we're haunted by the last look in our cow's eyes as she was led away by uncaring strangers into the darkness.

So how does this ancient parable apply to the present day? It's all about how the farmed animal issue is being reframed: the only real problem with eating animals, we will tell the public, is the abuse inherent in factory farming. Therefore, the argument runs, the solution is production, distribution and consumption of “happy meat.” In this brave new world, a mechanized

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Compassion for Sale?

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system designed to move animals quickly and efficiently, to take their lives, to drain their blood, and to cut them into pieces on a scale never before imagined, is proudly described as a “stairway to heaven” by a slaughterhouse designer well on the way to attaining celebrity status. And no one blinks, not even those who hold in their

from this pageantry, they will affix new labels emblazoned with terms such as “Certified Humane,” “Animal Compassionate,” “Freedom Food,” “Animal Friendly,” or “Cruelty-Free.”

By extracting from the public a modest conscience tax in the form of higher prices for goods bearing the requisite label, those

that we have the empathy *to act in their best interests.*” (Emphasis added.)

It all sounds so good and so right. But the Orwellian underbelly of Mr. Mackey’s world was revealed when an audience member asked him why his company still sells veal, presumably wondering how taking a calf from his mother and butchering him to be packaged and sold in a Whole Foods market could, under any system of rational thought, be fairly characterized as helping that animal achieve an “optimum state of physical and ecological health” or as acting in that individual’s “best interests.”

“If it’s a crime to kill an adult cow,”

So let us call things by their true names. If Mr. Mackey and his Animal Compassion Foundation are going to march under the banner of compassion, let us be clear that it is, as someone wryly noted, a “cutthroat compassion.”

hearts a dream of a world without violence. Such is the hypnotic effect of distorted language and PR razzle dazzle.

It is happening now, before our eyes. The moral value of the word “compassion,” infused for decades with the altruism and integrity of countless grassroots activists and educators, is in the process of being converted into cash. Compassion will now mean killing more softly, an exciting new brand associated with products delivered with the promise of a precisely regulated and approved amount of suffering. In a time not so long from now, practicing compassion will for many come to mean buying and eating happy meat, a purported win-win-win for the animals, the industry and its customers.

And given their track record of deception and an increasingly skeptical public, how will the animal exploiting industries assure their customers that happy meat is indeed truly happy, and that nothing could be more compassionate than buying it? They will create committees, foundations, and blue ribbon commissions charged with developing detailed standards as to how the deed will be done. They will adorn these cross-disciplinary teams with the credibility of people and organizations that have given decades to the cause of freeing animals from exploitation. And finally, on the fleshy products that result

who make millions trading in animal parts will watch the price of their corporation’s stock rise. And participating animal advocacy organizations will be sorely tempted to publicly declare victory after victory as each new standard is put in place, reaping copious rewards for seeming to reconcile the inherent contradiction between the enjoyment of flesh and the pain we do-gooders feel over exploitation of the animals.

Is this really a breakthrough, or could it be a neo-Orwellian sleight of hand, Doublethink meets Doublefeel?

Doubletrouble: Hogwashed Cruelty and Cutthroat Compassion

Case in point: John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods, and founder of the Whole Foods-sponsored Animal Compassion Foundation, developer and purveyor of new “compassionate standards” for the exploitation of animals. In a 2005 conference speech, Mr. Mackey declared that “our mission and responsibility is to help the whole planet—including people, animals and the environment—to flourish and reach their optimum state of physical and ecological health.” Moments later, he said, “We also now recognize that farm animals are environmental stakeholders...just like the environment as a whole cannot speak for itself, neither can the farm animals speak for themselves. So it’s important

Mr. Mackey offered up as a response, “it’s a crime to kill a baby calf. I mean, the same argument could be made for lamb or anything else. I mean, Whole Foods is a grocery store, and our customers want to—they want to buy dead animals.”

Precisely.

So let us call things by their true names. If Mr. Mackey and his Animal Compassion Foundation are going to march under the banner of compassion, let us be clear that it is, as someone wryly noted, a “cutthroat compassion.”

Given Mr. Mackey’s professed education in the field of philosophy, it is hard to believe that the logical absurdities he asks us to accept are the naive errors of an untrained mind. Rather, as a relentlessly successful businessman, he seems to have found a new and creative way to sharpen his competitive edge. “Cause-based marketing” is the method in play, and in this case, success is achieved *not* by actually practicing compassion toward animals, *not* by acting in their best interests, but by methodically generating the *appearance* of doing so, as that is what keeps the customers coming, the protesters at bay, and the stock price climbing ever higher.

As another quick-witted observer pointed out, just as the third wave of environmentalism was characterized by “greenwashing,” it seems that animal

advocacy's third wave is destined to bring us "hogwashing"—the practice of generating the public appearance of having compassion for animals while continuing to kill millions of them for profit. As always, buyer beware.

Gandhi and King: Having a Dream Means Holding the Line

All this said, the humbling truth of the matter is that no one can know for sure which path will lead most quickly to the changes in our society we animal advocates hope for. But by standing by and remaining silent as those who have a financial interest in the exploitation of animals first appropriate and then redefine the very language that expresses the deepest principles that inspire and guide our work, we are surely giving away our power and identity in a way that is going to be very hard to regain.

And, as our language loses its integrity, our ability to think critically and to engage in meaningful dialogue is going to decline as well, as will our cohesiveness as a community, our love of the work, and the joy we take from the process of supporting peaceful change.

But we don't have to travel any further down this crooked road. There are other choices more direct. Delving into the lives and work of those such as Gandhi and King, we can see that being practical is not incompatible with being idealistic. Both were constantly faced with pressure to compromise their core principles in return for short-term gains that were desperately needed by those they served. Yet, neither of these brilliant leaders chose to give in to such pressure, nor did remaining true to their principles mean accepting second-class results.

Instead, they got outside the box, synthesizing old school values with radical social creativity. They transformed their societies by openly sharing the deepest truth they knew, in the most direct language possible, without compromise, without dilution. And, notably, they avoided conflicts of interest at all costs. Indeed, their staunch refusal to cooperate with or participate in the mechanisms of exploitation provided the very clarity and strength that propelled them to victory.

In doing so, Gandhi and King inspired millions to keep their eyes on the prize, not

just in their own times, but for all time. Not just for those who shared their causes, but for those who care about any cause. And they did it all with a level of spirited boldness that still takes our breath away.

To make good for the long haul, each of us must consider the possibility that our choices, however well motivated, may have unintended consequences none of us desire. Success in the monumental work we have taken on will only come when our vision of a transformed world is brought into harmony with the means we use to make that vision come to life. This is not easy to achieve, but it has been done before, and it can be done again. To do otherwise is to ignore much of what has been learned in the last century about the true nature of the interdependent, interconnected world in which we live. Whether you talk to a historian, a psychologist, a philosopher, or an indigenous elder sitting on a mountaintop, the message is the same. Whatever methods we use to change the world will, in strong measure, come to define the character of who we become, and the nature of the new society we create. It is, essentially, a law of the universe.

So let us be open minded, let us engage

in spirited debate and dialogue, and together forge strategies of unparalleled creativity and boldness. But at the same time, let us do so in ways that safeguard the integrity of our principles and the language that defines our deepest values. The work of making real change happen is best measured in decades and lifetimes, not in the quarterly cycles of business. Let us not be seduced into believing that the power to mangle language and manipulate perception has anything at all to do with serving the common good. It never has, and it never will.

Compassion is the highest expression of human potential. As such, it can never be bought or sold, only freely given and received. Using this word as a label for the products of suffering and exploitation is nothing short of an act of violence. ■

James LaVeck is cofounder of the nonprofit arts and educational organization *Tribe of Heart* and producer of award-winning documentaries *The Witness* and *Peaceable Kingdom*. A substantial revision of *Peaceable Kingdom*, which will include an examination of the ethics of "humane" meat, is currently in post-production. To learn more, visit www.tribeofheart.org.

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