



# THE VEGAN PARADIGM SHIFT: REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Lee Hall

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**Point to veganism as the way to a better society, and people might ask, ‘How can we think - with 211,000 new humans born each day, wars everywhere, polar bears drowning, an extinction crisis, kids in the global south living in the streets - that this vegan stuff is going to work?’**

But vegans know these problems are connected with human decisions. We can decide in new ways, and help others to do likewise.

Thomas Kuhn, in the 1960s, spoke of the ‘paradigm shifts’ that change our entire worldview. An example is the Copernican revolution. Before Copernicus, people assumed that The Earth was central in the cosmos; everything revolved around us. But Copernicus showed that The Earth circles around the sun. Relatively quickly in the course of history, our perspective was radically changed.

In much the same way, veganism challenges an old view that everyone and everything revolves around us. Environmentalists have discovered how incorrect that view is. Earthworms, bees and other supposedly insignificant beings are now understood as enormously influential in the biocommunity. Meanwhile, vegan advocates, starting with Donald Watson, have shown that we cannot give animals some kind of moral rank; all are entitled to live on their own terms, bees and earthworms included.

The Copernican revolution wasn’t the result of people accepting change in increments. Although some communities understood the news sooner than others, no one was asked to accept that the sun was a little closer to the central point over time. Astronomy charts didn’t show the Earth moving gradually outward as new editions were printed.

Compare veganism: everyone has the wonderful potential to commit to vegan values right now. To try to do this in increments - say, by switching to egg companies without battery cages or supporting other free-range concepts - is to forget the reality that Earth’s space is finite. The spread of pasture-based animal agribusiness uproots free-living beings and snuffs out their lives. The argument for incremental steps within industry fails to notice the communities of animals being displaced every day by industrial landscapes and buildings.

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A paradigm shift is radical by definition. Of course, it will meet resistance (Galileo’s books were banned because the great scientist accepted the position of Copernicus, which was deemed contrary to biblical authority). But the cultural shift, once the new paradigm is presented and acknowledged, is unstoppable.

When the idea of human supremacy is understood as an old, destructive myth, it will be replaced by a new paradigm. By learning to cook vegan dishes or to cultivate vegan-organic gardens, many people are preparing for that shift today. The social change could become apparent relatively quickly, and that’s good because by most predictions we have little time to spare.

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