

Answers to Some of Those

Tricky

Questions/Challenges - Part II



Have you ever been asked a tricky question and not been able to respond coherently? Here are some suggested answers to help you out:

The following questions use some speciesist language as they are presented as they would be asked.

We have however, tried to use non-speciesist language in the answers.

Should vegans ride horses?

Vegans oppose the exploitation of all animals. Although some people claim that horses enjoy jumping and being ridden, there is a far more unsavoury back-story to commercial horse breeding and training where horses are 'broken' and want to be ridden or raced because this is their only chance for exercise.

I'm a carnivore!

Being a carnivore means eating only meat. Humans wouldn't survive on this kind of diet for long because it lacks so many key nutrients. You are actually an omnivore, meaning you can eat animal products or not - you do have a choice.

My parents won't let me be vegan, what can I do?

It's up to you to show your parents that you can be just as happy and healthy as a vegan. This means carefully explaining your reasons and sticking to your decision. Explaining to your parents what you need nutritionally and showing them how you are going to get it will reassure them that you're not going to get ill. Offering to cook (vegan) meals for the family, and helping with the shopping will impress them!

Can vegans drink alcohol/smoke cigarettes?

It is possible to get vegan alcohol and tobacco. Some drinks are made using fining agents which are animal derived, such as isinglass or albumin. Most mainstream brands of tobacco contain animal ingredients and have been tested extensively on animals. The Vegan Society provides information on vegan drinks brands.

Don't animals make use of land where crops can't grow?

To insist that every piece of land must be 'made use of' is perhaps missing the point. Vegan diets use on average one third of the land required for meat-based diets, so by becoming vegan you help to free-up land, leaving room for wild spaces. Much land degradation has been caused by deforestation and herding for the meat trade.

Animals kill each other in the wild, why shouldn't I?

Predatory animals do not know of any other way to live. Some of them need to eat meat to survive. Humans are not like this - we know that we can be healthy and happy without needing to eat other animals.

My mum had cancer and animal experiments saved her. You can't think that is wrong can you?

I'm really sorry to hear about your mum and I'm so pleased that she is OK now. However experiments on non-human animals are often poor predictors of outcomes in humans and have also led to tragedies such as Thalidomide. We would like more and proper investment into researching using alternatives (e.g. computer modelling) so that we don't have to choose between humans and other animals.

Aren't leather and wool more environmentally friendly than synthetics?

Tanning (the process by which leather is produced) is energy intensive, highly polluting and uses large volumes of water. Wools may be bleached and dyed with toxic chemicals. The farming of animals like sheep and cattle is a major factor in global climate change. There are many non-synthetic alternatives such as cotton, hemp, flax, bamboo, nettle, and plastics made from recycled materials.

What would happen to farmland currently used for livestock?

The UK has lots of good arable land suitable for growing fruit, vegetables and grains to meet the needs of the UK population. Other land may be suitable for nut and fruit trees. Hill farms may be useful for growing wood, or can return to native woodland.

Would you hurt an animal if your life was threatened?

Self-defence is a perfectly natural reaction to being attacked. Wild animals will normally only attack a human if they are hungry or feel threatened. If we do not encroach on their territory, they are unlikely to attack us.

Would you eat meat if you were starving?

People have done all sorts of normally abhorrent acts when starving, such as eating their friends. Some people do say they would rather let themselves die, but there might be times when principles become compromised - the survival instinct is very powerful, and no one knows what effect starvation might have until they experience it. Veganism should be seen as an aspiration, not dogma.

You would eat meat if you lived in a remote part of the world

Many people struggle to live with what is available to them. This is not a justification for the rest of us to eat meat, fish, eggs and dairy products. We are lucky to be able to choose what we eat.

Don't you need manure to grow fruit and vegetables?

No, vegan-organic farming can maintain and improve soil fertility without any animal fertilisers. The basis of the system is good crop rotations, green manures and wise use of mixed plantings. There are also synthetic fertilisers that can be used.

Without grazing animals, won't we lose moorland habitats, plants and birds?

Grazing animals could still maintain moorland if they were allowed to live naturally. Fallow moorland will return to native woodland, hugely increasing biodiversity.

But don't plants feel pain too?

Plants do not have a nervous system so they can't feel pain. Since they are rooted in the ground and can't run away being able to feel pain wouldn't be of much use to them.

