



The Greatest Transformation in Human Civilization

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This essay is excerpted from the forthcoming book, [Carbon Yoga: The Vegan Metamorphosis](#)

We are in the midst of the greatest transformation in human civilization in the life of our species. But this time, it is not about concentrating more and more power in the hands of a few, but devolving power to the local level in the hands of the many. As such, this is like a metamorphosis and just as in Nature, the Caterpillar has no choice but to become a Butterfly.

Historically, every momentous transformation in human civilization has been accompanied by revolutionary changes in three aspects of human lives ¹:

- 1) in the way we harness energy;
- 2) in the way we communicate with each other; and
- 3) in the foods we eat.

About 200,000 years ago, we:

- 1) discovered the controlled use of fire;
- 2) developed spoken language to communicate with each other; and

¹ In 2011, Jeremy Rifkin discussed these three drivers in an interview with Een Vandaag entitled [On Global Issues and Future of the Planet](#).

3) began eating meat from hunted animals because our controlled use of fire allowed us to cook that meat and made it digestible.

Thus began the dominance of patriarchy as male hunters assumed more importance than female gatherers in human societies. The gatherers no longer had to forage over large distances to gather the nutrition needed for human sustenance since the hunters could provide concentrated nutrition in the form of animal flesh. Simultaneously, this transformation strengthened speciesist attitudes within human societies as animals became objects to be killed for human consumption. Thus sexism and speciesism are the core oppressions from which all other oppressions sprung over time. Hierarchy developed within the patriarchy. The victims of sexist oppression, the women, were partly assuaged when they could oppress other species and feel superior to them.

About 10,000 years ago, during the agricultural revolution, we:

- 1) harnessed the energy of animals such as cows, buffaloes and horses to plough our fields;
- 2) developed writing in order to communicate with each other; and
- 3) grew crops of our own liking instead of relying on what Nature provided in the wild.

Instead of humans belonging to Nature, we began acting as if Nature belonged to us. Not only did we enslave work animals to do our bidding, we enslaved the Earth to produce what we desired. In the resulting agricultural revolution, cities were born where the ruling classes did not do the actual work of raising crops but were fed very well. The social hierarchies developed more layers, resulting in other oppressions such as slavery, classism and casteism.

About 200 years ago, we:

- 1) began to harness fossil fuels for energy;
- 2) developed the printing press for communication, to disseminate information far more efficiently than with just hand written documents; and
- 3) re-purposed our domesticated work animals to be raised as just food animals.

We developed machines to plough the fields and didn't need the work animals anymore for that purpose, but we continued to enslave them anyway just to milk them and eat them. We developed further layers of hierarchy in our social structures to expand the scope of our human enterprise until it bestrode the whole globe, conquering and colonizing any indigenous civilizations that came in our way. The fossil fuels were to be found in specific locations on Earth and we had to create refining, processing and distribution systems for them. The food animals were most efficiently raised in giant factories as if they were widgets, and then processed into meat packages, refrigerated and distributed to the consumers up and down the social hierarchies. A dominant financial sector arose that siphoned off increasingly larger shares

of the wealth, simply as a commission for allocating capital efficiently. Oppressions such as colonialism and racism became much more prominent.

And today, we are poised to undergo yet another transformation, the greatest of them all! This time:

- 1) We are harnessing solar energy directly and rather than being concentrated in a few locations, it is actually falling on our heads almost everywhere.
- 2) We are using the internet to communicate with each other and it has put the entire accumulated knowledge of all humanity at each and every fingertip.
- 3) And, we are transitioning out of animal-based foods to plant-based Vegan foods, which can mostly be grown in local farms without having to rely on large animal husbandry operations with giant processing, refrigeration and distribution systems that are currently spread out over half the globe.

Unlike the previous three major transformations that increasingly concentrated power in the hands of a few and strengthened the social hierarchy, what is occurring today is an entirely radical kind of transformation since all three changes devolve power to the local level, where it becomes easier to implement cooperative and consensual decision-making processes.

The devolution of power is already evident in the US. While the US Congress is quite gridlocked and can barely manage to pass continuing resolutions that maintain the status quo, local governments in cities and municipalities, from Detroit to Seattle to Los Angeles to Tempe, have been promoting urban farming, innovative housing solutions, and other such radical changes. Therefore, the transformation that we're undergoing now is towards a loosely connected global network of densely connected local communities. But, of course, such a revolutionary transformation will need to overcome the resistance of the power elites in the current hierarchical system, who naturally fear the loss of their perceived privileges.

But the transformation is inexorable. The Caterpillar has no choice but to become a Butterfly...

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