

## Rhetoric in Italy

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### Morality-related and revolution-related arguments in Facebook discussions concerning veganism

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#### Abstract

The paper claims that in the online discussions on Facebook concerning veganism – a brand new social food habit in Western societies – one can observe the mixture of traditional moral and revolutionary arguments. The presence of almost-religious extremism impacts a veganism-related verbal and visual argumentation, and even violence against the vegans. From the technical point of view, in the discussions concerning the veganism the probability argument, the argument of going-beyond and the *ad sacrificium* argument prevail.

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#### Key words

Argumentation, veganism, moral, sacrifice, food

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### **1. Introduction**

A common argument used by Vegan people online, defying those who accuse them of being *una moda radical chic* “a radical chic fashion” (Vegan Warrior, 2017), is that Vegan School was actually founded in 1944 by Donald Watson in England. Usually a full stop follows.

Indeed, the only-episodic usage of historic authority probably unravels both the obvious lack of historic references not involved with religious movements and, plainly following, an argument of going-beyond, with all its strong revolutionary potential (Capaci 2010, 254). Having no strong historic references makes the vegan movement, unlike the vegetarian one, a quite young social and commercial movement. Likewise other new-born movements, its rhetoric is full of processes of confirmation of the influence and power gradually acquired, and of the stories of success among followers. Its core issue seems both to appear as stable and as growing. So some vegetarian authorities are quoted, but considerably more the vegan contemporary athletes and movie-stars.

Following the New Rhetoric path, we need to focus first on the agreement above the premises and the hierarchy of values that an orator is trying to convey, before marking the most used vegan and anti-vegan arguments in Facebook’s public debates. This may seem a hasty-settled purpose, and we have to deal with the possibility that the social network’s pages used as sample may skew the general conclusion about the Vegan/anti-vegan debate in general. Otherwise, in such a deeply subjective matter, so much intimately related to people’s lifestyle, the chance of the private/public nature of Facebook could not be missed.

This study concerns data crossing from comments, posts, links in a bunch of free and non-commercial pages, which are cited in references below. We considered all the Italian Facebook groups and communities with “Vegan” word or a related word like a compound, occurring in the title or in the description, excluding the commercial ones and the personal promotion profiles (such as vegan athletes

showing their training work-in-progress). An extra feature is the popularity: we only considered the groups made up of at least 500 members, excluding the most violent and crude titles and comments, and the so-called explicit “troll” comments. We define troll according to the Cambridge Dictionary Online as “someone who leaves an intentionally annoying message on the internet, in order to get attention or cause trouble”. The number of members or followers of groups and communities are indicated in the references below.

Occasionally the users’ profiles were consulted, but the sensible data, names and local references are kept hidden here in order to avoid unpleasant personification of the rhetoric specimen, and, above all, copyright-violation issues.

## 2. Some clarification about the sample used

Before the beginning, we need to distinguish three different main trends in vegan ideology. Without getting too specific, they are:

- a) Ethic veganism – which is a vegan choice caused in the first place by social awareness of soil exploitation, pollution, rich societies’ unfair benefits... It encompasses both the social feeling of an alleged non-sustainable lifestyle and a light sense of inhumanity related to abuses in intensive farming.
- b) Moral veganism – this is a definition I created for the veganism derived uniquely from animal-rights activism and speciesism, as the British philosopher Richard Ryder first called the moral relevance of species membership, opposing it to the supposed superiority of manhood (Duignan, 2007). In Italian, the speciesism is called *anti-specismo*, and has been accepted as a philosophical concept by the greatest part of the users. It is “moral” as a spiritually individual choice with personal consequences (the *mores*), instead of ethic as a social contract-related choice.
- c) Healthy veganism – there are social users declaring they chose veganism for health purposes first, and only then they began to justify it with either moral or ethical reasons, or both.

We left out religious/mystic veganism which would have required a broader documentation process and larger cultural implications. Clearly, depending on which vegan is the arguer, he/she will consequently prefer certain arguments and endorse certain allegations instead of some others.

Another lexical clarification: I will use the word “*carnist*” with the meaning of declared omnivore person who pretends to be aggressively proud of his/her meat-eating, and often attacks the vegans. The word is used in the context of this sample

without being recognized as a real word, like "*nazivegan*" (and lots of social network-born idioms, by the way). It clearly fulfills the need of marking some personal lifestyle choices, blaming a not so much nuanced radicalism in them. The analysis will follow strictly the Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's tagging (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, [1958] 2008).

### 3. Probability arguments

These arguments are reality-based ones, and structured on succession relations. A former probability, frequently unspoken, is that the animals and other species in general have consciousness. They are provided with awareness, or better, they are sensitive to pain. This may be considered a commonly shared assumption (despite any occasional extreme refusals). A latter probability is an utopian one: that the rest of the world will follow us (the Vegans) in our radical choice, because we dream of a fairer world, only inhabited by Vegans (*sogniamo un mondo vegan* "we dream of a Vegan world", *TuttoVegan*). The most frequent answer to this allegation from the other part is the laconic but effective "dream on!".

Despite the slight skepticism concerning reactions to utopia in general, let us go back to the argument. We notice that this is the same logical pattern used by Boycott campaigns back to some decades ago in Italy until now, mostly lead by political parties but also by individuals (not only in Italy, but this is our comparison). Here, the not-to-buy-a-good is clearly an ethical choice against the company, or against people involved in the production line, whereas the company manager is charged with accusations of, usually, exploitation of the natural, animal or human resources, or general careless worker rights policy or human rights scandals. It is clear that to promote a cause in a proper way is a core issue for this kind of political action.

"We wonder if we are going to win – seem to say the activists in this case – it is only a matter of time and of making good propaganda". Otherwise, the individuals who make the boycott choice as individuals and not as a political group, in this case the Vegans, ought to be less subject to probability: I mean, the light seems to be shined more above the means than above the end, because the end, a Vegan world, is a huge utopia and not a simple achievement in making a company policy change. This may appear as a controvertible statement, but let us settle on this and focus on what TA said:

In social life, most of the times it's the agreement above a mean which likely actuates lots of not equally – nor universally – approved ends, agreement which leads to detach this end from the value conferring means, and to make it an independent end [...] the opposite procedure, which may transform an end to a mean, is something under-valuable, despising. (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, [1958] 2008, 298)

According to the many comments and sharings of news communicating the decrease of meat and dairy consumption, it seems that in several cases the goal of a Vegan user is to show his Veganism as an end. So, from *il nostro obiettivo è aiutare gli animali* ‘our goal is to help animals’ (*Sei vegano se*) or *obiettivo antispecista* ‘goal anti-species’ (*Associazione Vegani Italiani*), we arrive to circumstantial, lower ends, like the source of tasty vegan recipes, or the tips to stop eating animal-derived products, or the book-to-read advice. In this latest examples, the goal is Veganism itself.

Overlooking the mere personal ethical choice, and according to a deliberative point of view, veganism is only a means to a better world, as we agreed upon. However, the ethical choice cannot be neglected in studying the vegan/carnists debates, even if it creates a much more complex field. It involves moral language, for sure, so philosophy and logic of the moral sentences, and the often unspoken and implicit good that may come from an action, which is typically moral: “act like this, OR” – for example “you will go to hell”, which is moral blackmailing. Or “act like this, to get...” which is to emphasize the end of moral action. It either can be a simple clean-up of the conscience, like in the achievement of heaven, or a pragmatic will to change the facts. The former often leads to moral putting the blame on the enemy, and in extreme cases to *ad metum* arguments, or even to more or less hidden allusions to violence, *ad baculum* and so on.

The appeal to the worldwide web “to understand that you are on the wrong side of history” (per es *capire di stare dalla parte sbagliata della storia* ‘to understand that one stands at the wrong part of the story’; *La vera bestia* – Animal video community) is an illustration of the first case.

We can see the second one in violence of speech. This is a simplification useful for our analysis.

We shall see later that value-expressions sometimes acquire – by reason of the constancy of the standards by which they are applied – a certain descriptive force; thus if, in a society whose standards are markedly utilitarian, we say ‘The Health Service has done a lot of good’, everyone knows that we are implying that the Health Service has averted a lot of pain, anxiety, &c. (Hare, 1972)

More often, this alleged *real* end, the Vegan world, is shown as an argument, and the user gives us long digressions about a better and fairer environment in which men and animals live as free creatures. The end might be... Heaven, again, namely salvation from moral inadequacy. But, whether Veganism is an end or a mean, talking in pragmatic terms, persuasion of the omnivore seems to be hard. Veganism is still a difficult habit to acquire for a non-vegan, with its strong changes in ordinary life, and in a so much sensitive part of it, food. Again, all the *argumentum ad sacrificium* comes with the purpose of an only probable end.

“To be evaluated by an end, a mean has evidently to be effective” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca [1958] 2008, 300).

Given the fact that the technical discussion on the better means relies on an agreement above the ends (probable ends), sometimes the audience may be required a precise statement of agreement on these ends, or a diverse end can be assigned – maybe fallaciously, maybe according to something said before – but eventually assigned because required from the argumentation. This means that probability arguments on healthy veganism encompass the pseudo-scientific and sometimes scientific quotes to nutrition studies, assuming that a vegan diet is healthier than an omnivore one. Often, this turns into an appeal to authority, when the quoting involves notable characters of the vegan movement.

Within ethic veganism, we may trace a probability argument in the probability of achieving the end, which often causes the changeability means-end. Within moral veganism, we can find the controverted probability of animals having consciousness, or the probability of having our soul dirty with their exploitation. Assuming these probability arguments as the vegan speech background we can go on with other arguments.

#### 4. Slippery slope argument

A slippery slope is often used to warn the audience against a “step-by-step” argumentation (Walton, 2015). Slippery slope argument, in a broad sense, is frequently used in biomedical ethics and in juridic gender, while a dangerous outcome is shown as a direct result of an apparently harmless decision. The aspect to stress onto, according to Walton, is the fact that in the meantime we are falling onto the slippery slope: we are unaware of the outcome coming, so we have to react as long as we are conscious. Or, in the second case, while we are falling, we became unable to stop the process we began ourselves. In these debates about food the slope is on both sides.

Some of the steps of the slope are the experimentation on animals, and the vivisection for pharmaceutical purpose. Or, if you are eating vegan (on the other side) as an ethic choice, you will not give your son or your carnivore pet the meat he needs, although this is most an appeal to *pathos* and to ignorance of a complete theory of children or pet nutrition. In some cases, vegans answer that they give their kids balanced vegan diets. “They are good and still alive” as the Facebook group *Zerogabbie-Piccoli vegan crescono* testifies.

Other slippery slopes used by vegans has a science-fiction nature. It states that “if everybody eats meat as the occidental countries do, the world will end soon”, or that “if you are morally careless enough to eat meat, you are a nazi”, shifting in an a *fortiori* which leads us back to the strength of *reductio ad Hitlerum*.

There are some other arguments from the side of the “carnists”, as they are called in a pejorative way (i.e. the meat-eaters and proud of it), such as: “if every citizen of the world begins eating soy, the land will not be enough for all and we may need ogm or massive agriculture”. This allegation is clearly weak both in a scientific and in an ethic debate for a reasonable resolution of the matter. However, as stated before, the pseudo-scientific discourse itself is a tempting slippery slope. A similar one is “where will the animals go if we lock them out the farmings?”. A pseudo-scientific idea of reduction of the biodiversity is involved, with a false-cause attribution. This argument is frequently used in the debate.

## 5. Biased tagging and related fallacies

We may talk about an almost absolute domination of the hasty generalization in the analyzed corpus. The data knowledge and the logic coherence showed by the social users differs substantially, sometimes it is truly disappointing. Their scientific knowledge is not sufficient to lead an argumentation in a proper way. Thus, debates frequently turn into the worst fallacious and violent duels. Except for this general statement, the tagging action is one of the most effective ways to encompass diverse knowledges and diverse people, even if in an imprecise scheme.

We begin with name-tagging, with vegans usually being called “nazivegan” or “taliban vegan”, and, on the other side, the omnivores being called “corpse-eaters” and “careless people” or “carnists”. In some cases of this violent tagging, the user or administrator then apologizes for the injury, as a rule having received before some accusations by the “nazi” on the other side. We also see that the *reductio ad Hitlerum* is always a fruitful start for a highly polemic discussion (given the fact that Adolf Hitler himself was a vegetarian, we can imagine the apocalyptic outcome of this kind of comments). Nevertheless, this is an almost traditional and extremely biased archetype. According to my personal point of view, the lack of knowledge of the precise implication of an argument will lead to the *catachresis* of it and the creation of a *topos*-like argument, of course provided with argumentative value, but not decomposable. It seems to me a case comparable to the repetitive use of an argument of incompatibility in a deliberative environment, which soon becomes a slogan and loses its logic balance and gains in biasing power.

Switching to *reductiones*, the *reductio ad talibanum* is more actual and maybe destined to an even greater fortune than the *ad Hitlerum* one. Also, sometimes the religious sectarianism blame is involved.

There is another type of hasty generalization, based not on the person-group relationship but more selectively on the ideas of the other side. We should say that it assumes the form of a strawman fallacy, but, in fact, the core issue is a biased

classification and a false tagging, based on some ignorant members of both sides. For example, healthy vegans dissociate from non-healthy ones and from nutrition-ignorant ones. Ethical vegans say that they do not care if they have a B-12 vitamin deficiency (the only vitamin not given by vegetables, at present state of nutrition and medical researches), despite the probability arguments given by the other vegans, apparently more sensitive to the power of self-destructive allegations. The different theories besides the vegan-phenomenon and the variety of users make it quite difficult to elaborate an organic vegan scheme of values. But the separation individual/group is more a burden of proof for the co-existence relations than for the succession ones.

The last argument used, encompassing the two relation types, is the anecdotal fallacy, i.e. the presentation of a personal anecdote with the intention of skewing the result of a statistic or scientific analysis. The first type seems more affecting because the personal experience is involved – given as an empirical evidence – in a consequent argumentation. On both sides of healthy nutrition debates it is a common statement: “although I eat so badly, ... I am still alive”.

## 6. Co-existence relations: Division

In the co-existence relations, one of the terms is more structured and important than the other. It refers to the subject being addressed. We can talk about a person or his/her behavior, and stress the authority of the former in order to increase the latter. The argumentation can actually proceed one way or another: in some cases the behavior has to justify the use of the person as an authority. Managing the relation between the two, the orator is given a lot of different choices, including authority argument, as well as various breaking and braking techniques to build a different scheme of associations in the auditorium’s mind. In our case, we surely have a lot more possibilities to verify the real identity of a user, watching his/her profile and related “likes”. This encourages not only the judging attitude towards the orator’s *ethos* (and, consequently, the *ad personam*), but it also provides a written and encyclopedic knowledge of the past of our adversary, i.e. e his/her past choices and tastes.

It may seem obvious to track down, but this helps us in a food habits debate, where the precise action of liking some pages or some others shows the leaning of the subject involved. For example, a user may have liked a Vegan page or have shared vegan recipes, advices and tips, or vice-versa, he/she may have joined an anti-vegan page. Even worse, he/she may have been involved in discussions about issues that the new adversary may use against him/her, such as direct comments, or impressions, or bad taste comments or images, and so on. Also, a vegan user is



often accused to be, on the basis of his posted photos, “anemic” or “pale” or “too skinny”, with the biased pseudo-scientific conception of meat-eating as the only source of healthy color and strength.

Given this simplification and trivialization of the sources of personal data concerning the adversary’s private life and thoughts, we see the wide range of possibilities opening up in front of us: the *ad personam* or *ad hominem* attacks can be lead more reasonably, even the breaking strategies, as well as the generalizations, appear more effective, because of a sort of bandwagon effect created by the immediate feedback of the users to the comment a single user is about to make.

Some useful breaking strategies involve the dissociation between some individuals and the group. “Not all the Vegan people are like that”, or “Not all the omnivore are carnists” which may be seen as an etymology *topos*, too.

A presentation of our gastronomic choices can be a good start. If we are in an adverse environment, such a presentation could mean that we want to discuss issues with others, that we are open to changing, or that we want to understand the other’s position. For example, “I am an individualist but I wish to discuss the vegan reasons” or “I am not a vegan but I would like to get along with you and your cause” or even “I am not a vegan but I wish I became so”. On the other side, the vegan rarely post on a carnist page, because such pages are evidently created in order to insult and laugh at them (e.g. *questi sono peggio dei talebani* “these people are worse than talibans”, from the site *Vegano stammi lontano*). Of course there are some vegan pages like that, but clearly less followed.

The related *a fortiori* argument is abused and leads sometimes to comic sentences like: “you say this nonsense because of your B-12 deficiency” or “[...] because you don’t eat enough vegetables”. An Italian idiomatic expression “I don’t take lessons from [...]”, frequently used in these contexts, is also an instance of *a fortiori*, as well as an example of poisoning the source.

It is somewhat surprising to me to assist to the rise of such an ethical debate on Vegan way of living at the social networks. People personally attached to the vegan cause confront their views with the omnivore users who rarely answer reasonably to the vegans’ arguments. I guess that the power of personal choices provokes the most violent *ad personam* and the most convinced accuses of contradiction and incompatibility. Such arguments are often biased by the fallacies and/or wrong collection of data, as showed above.

## 7. Contradiction and incompatibility

These are two quasi-logic arguments, used to stress the distance between what a person is saying and what he/she said before (contradiction) or what he/she did before (incompatibility).

The incompatibility stressed, for example, in the *ad hominem*, in the circumstantial or in the *tu quoque*, may not be a fallacy if a person's claim involves his/her personal life, career, interest and so on (Woods 2013). Let us take an example of the argument saying that a scientific study commissioned by a pharmaceutical company is not reliable because it is biased by its primary purpose (making money). It may be both a fair statement and a fallacy (since data collection is fundamental to conduct a study, and pharmaceutical companies are the only ones possessing these data).

In the debates being analyzed, incompatibility is used more frequently in vegan arguments. The omnivores are expected to be convinced by the following line of argumentation:

- It is untrue that habits are neither devised nor changeable (1)
- You rationally have come to agree with my life vision, i.e. to change your convictions (2)
- You can acknowledge that your new convictions do not match with your previous habits (3)
- You have to change your habits (4).

The unspoken premise of (3) – and the core of the incompatibility claim – is that your habits have to match with your personal convictions. If they do not, you are a bad person. It is an ancient argument, which should remind us of a *vir bonus* more than a sophistic rhetoric environment.

We can also observe how contradiction works in bigger rhetoric systems. The unspoken premise can remain unspoken, but automatically the orator – making an incompatibility allegation – appears as a moral figure, except for (2). From this point on, in the debate, his statements and behavior will be morally judged. The model/anti-model/illustration argumentation is expected to be presented by the Vegan himself. Indeed, the activist, the vegan or whoever can ask for (4): thus, the orator has to show his personal path to the conclusion. Sometimes the personal path then biases (2).

The logical contradiction is one of the most powerful arms in the public debate. The essential is to make the contradiction appear as true, according to the public's taste, values and knowledge of the facts. If the incoherence stressed by the orator appears to be true, the opponent is deeply weakened in his ethic reliability. The common sense is indeed rhetorically biased to suppose that his intentions are bad ones.

In another sense, the bias makes the opponent appear as an ignorant and consequently not reliable. This happens, according to Aristotle, when the contradiction affects notions. It is thus a purely dialectic argument. Of course, the burden of proof relies on changeable and rarely non-controversial facts. Therefore, the goal of breaking a contradiction claim is to point out other facts. The research of

factual truth is however more difficult and arduous than a construction of a simple fallacy argument.

Some examples of contradiction arguments concern the wrong interpretation of phenomena relevance. For example, the lack of some nutrients in some diets, if deprived of meat, are balanced by some people with imported products, such as the soy surrogates, or tropical fruits, or super food, natural or “chemical”. If a person claims to be an ethical vegan, but has some other taste or health necessities, the importation of food products – treated as a waste of resources – is stressed by his/her opponents. If we have a moral vegan, some users accuse him/her of exploiting the animals. The illustrations of polluted towns, major infrastructures, overpopulation of the planet, and other abuses due to mankind – although not related with consumed meat and dairy products – are also invoked as arguments. In some cases, the moral vegans are even accused of killing mosquitos and other bugs (e.g. on the site *Odio i vegani*).

The healthy vegans are accused of eating junk food, basically. This skews their efforts to defeat meat as an unhealthy, fattening, too-many-chemicals choice.

In many cases, the accusations against vegans by omnivores do not concern the three main issues, i.e. health, ethics or morality. Faced with random accusations, the vegans can easily answer using with the division arguments.

## 8. Comic sources within *elocutio*

The last type of argument, according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s scheme, consists in example, illustration and model. Such argumentative options are the best source of verbal and situational ridicule and satire, including the fallacious means. Coming out from the serious and uptight debate, they reveal to be a rich source of other *loci communes* or unspoken premises, conveyed as strengthening factors of the main argument.

Let us take a well-known commercial advertisement of a famous Italian *panettone*, released before Christmas 2016. The spot said:

Per il nostro panettone \*\* avremmo potuto usare: tofu tritato, papaya, seitan, alga essiccata, e cuocerlo per 30 secondi in microonde. E invece no. Lo abbiamo preparato seguendo la nostra ricetta. Originale dal 1919. Panettone \*\*. Da sempre quello di sempre. (Da oggi con bacche di Goji! Scherzo).

(Source: “Lo spot del panettone Motta indigna i vegani, 2016”)

[For our panettone \*\* we could have used: chopped tofu, papaya fruit, seitan, dried alga, and we could have cooked it for 30 seconds in a microwave oven. Instead... We prepared it following our recipe. Traditional from 1919. Panettone \*\*. Always the same, as it has always been. (From today on, with Gojiberries! I’m joking)].

It is not a very offensive message, nevertheless a large amount of vegans online conceived it as a hint of an insult. First of all, the *panettone* is a non-vegan food. The commercial, furthermore, includes irony against non-traditional food whose at least partial acceptance on the Italian tables has required a substantial rhetorical effort on the part of its partisans. The protests by vegans have been due probably to the fact that tofu and seitan are some non-healthy vegan substitutes for meat. Alga and Gojiberries are considered by health-enthusiasts (in a broad sense of the word) as precious sources of nutrients, as other exotic and rare foods. Papaya is simply an exotic fruit whose presence is not certainly new, and whose popularity is increasing in Italy according to a worldwide tendency concerning tropical fruits (Dall'Olio 2015). Microwave cooking is regarded simply as quicker and more comfortable than other means of preparing food. Thus, it should not be associated only to the vegan way of eating. The example shows that the tradition may be used to construct a quite fallacious, ironic argument against vegan way of eating: the exotic foods, tagged as “non-traditional” – thus derived from “fashion” and “not good” – are erroneously associated with the veganism.

In this sense, also the “my grandmother’s cooking” an abused source to create comic arguments. The grandmother is by antonomasia an authority in as far as the traditional food is concerned, thus the comic effect of the affirmations such as: *L’Isis minaccia: faremo diventare vegana anche vostra nonna* (“Isis threatens: we gonna turn vegan even your grandmother”). The grandmother figure is used to construct arguments by people which are diffident towards proposals of the – maybe unmotivated – changes in their lifestyle, presented as improvements.

*La mia cena caga sulla tua cena* “My dinner is shitting over your dinner” (example taken from Vegan Warrior) is a far less educated argument, mostly used as tagline for a carnist-side picture with a cow having a physiological moment in a field of grass. Other affirm: “you eat corpses” (“*mangi i cadaveri*”) and “you have a graveyard in your stomach” (“*hai un cimitero nello stomaco*”).

A more superficial and ironic statement is “if a vegan plays chess... can he take the horse?” (in Italian the “taking” may also mean “eating”, which gives a funny play of words: “*Se un vegano gioca a scacchi, può mangiarlo il cavallo?*”; source: Umoreismo Vegano).

Another example – the slogan “*Lotta dura senza verdura*” – is a calque of the a revolutionary famous slogan “*Lotta dura senza paura*”, whose literally meaning is “hard struggle without fear”, changed into the assonant “without vegetables”.

A lot of verbal and rhetorical features are involved in such arguments. “*Il vegano talebano*” (the taliban-vegan) contains a rhyme. It is also the case of ironic sentence “*vegano infame per te solo salame*” (“infamous vegan, for you only salami”). Another funny title of a Facebook anti-vegan group is “*vegani depressi che*

*affermano: ‘mai una soia’*” (‘depressed vegans affirm: ‘never a grain of soy’). The original sentence is the idiomatic *mai una gioia* ‘never a moment of joy’, a manifestation of despair after a misfortune expressed in everyday conversation. It is one of many proofs of transformation of the revolutionary moralistic debate into a generic humorous instance.

The apparent violence of both comic and serious argumentation in these debates seems normal in a social network environment. We can see curses and wishes of death for both adults and children, as well as accusations of “ignorance”, “incoherence”, “incompetence”, naïveté, cruelty, and so on.

The virtual space is also full of visual means of argumentation. Carnists place gorgeous photos of steaks, fat-dropping barbecue, ham and other meat products. Vegans show realistic photos of butcheries and breeding farms, with animals shown in disease, or evident violations of hygiene and normative standards of farming. Pictures of animals dealing with men, children in sunny and happy environments, self-photos with personal pets are contrasted with sunny and happy photos of hunters with their prey, either a fish or a deer. Both sides of the discussion appeal to *pathos*, showing different conceptions of harmony.

## 9. Conclusions

The analysis has shown that the online discussions and position statements on Facebook concerning veganism offer a curious mixture of traditional moral and revolutionary arguments. Carnists reveal to be more aggressive towards their opponents. In constructing their arguments, they use also the fallacious means and often apply derision techniques. From the technical point of view, in the discussions concerning the veganism the probability argument, the argument of going-beyond and the *ad sacrificium* argument reveal dominant. The sporadic use of scientific or pseudo-scientific authorities, especially from the vegan side, is an interesting point to be developed, as well as the use of scientific terms and quotes abused in ordinary debate. The spreading of veganism invites to explore the new strategies of persuasion concerning eating choices. This may be a century-issue.

## Corpus

### A. Vegan groups or communities, and likes/followers (all have been last accessed on January 9, 2017).

V per Veg – 3480 p.

Associazione vegani italiani – 11386 p.

Zerogabbie, piccoli vegan crescono – 1634 p.

Vegan Warrior – 21424 p.  
Humor vegano – 8616 p.  
Sei vegano se – 34230 p.  
La vera Bestia – animal video community – 154416 p.  
Chi è la vera bestia, l'uomo o l'animale? – 1251 p.  
Progresso Etico Vegano – 23153 p.  
Etico vegano – 21086 p.  
Io veg magazine etico-vegano – 5823 p.  
Vegani non necessariamente salutisti – 3132 p.  
Il moralizzatore vegano – 16473 p.  
Veganismo (interesse) – 7285 p.  
L'olocausto animale – 47719 p.  
TuttoVegan – 3035 p.

### **B. Anti-vegan groups or communities (all have been last accessed on January 9, 2017)**

Vegani che respirano il tuo stesso ossigeno – 5286 p.  
Basta vegani – 7079 p.  
Odio i vegani – 744 p.  
Salva una pianta, mangia un vegano –  
Vegano stammi lontano – 122921 p.  
Vegani che mangiano cibo simile all'hamburger – 3117 p.  
Vegani? No grazie – 6743 p.  
Vaffanculo vegani – 3183 p.  
Il veganista ipotetico – 4947 p.  
Vegani che augurano la morte per differenza di opinione – 2975 p.  
Anche i vegani muoiono – 29740 p.  
Vegani ritardati – 1517 p.  
Roba da VEGani – 3525 p.  
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