

July 18, 2020

Louise,

I take issue with a number of items in your letter. But first on a positive note: I'm glad to hear your views have shifted towards mine; perhaps I may claim some credit for this. I also appreciate your acknowledgment that you found my arguments convincing; thank you for this.

You made the comment "as you point out, I have no control over what you do." But I made no statement along those lines, and do not know what you are referring to. You may not have any direct control over my actions, but if you have any substantive comments to offer I'm willing to give them due consideration.

1. MISCHARACTERIZATION AS STRAW PERSON

You are most certainly not a straw person. I did not create you, nor put words in your mouth. You are the one who made your blaring assertion of speciesism; you are the one who made the arrogant statements of exceptionalism and privilege I have quoted back at you. You are the one who trotted out your string of woolly-minded arguments, riddled with logical fallacy that a high-school student could see through. I invented none of this; there is no straw here.

You may wish to imply that your previously stated views are now obsolete, but within the context of our interaction this is nowhere documented. Your emphatic declaration of speciesism remains unchanged; you have said nothing to repudiate or moderate this in any way, nor shown the slightest indication of shame about this declaration. Nor have you made any response to the many arguments I have made against your position. On the contrary despite abundant opportunity and my repeated solicitations you have consistently refused to answer my arguments, and continue to do so.

What we have before us is the record of a dialogue in which you presented your views, I answered them, and you made no further reply. This remains the status quo. If you now wish to modify your views, or otherwise extend our debate, then by all means do so. Otherwise we have a concluded exchange that represents your views exactly as you asserted them, with not one single word of misrepresentation.

1.1 Available remedy: present revised views

I can well imagine you being embarrassed by your previous statements. In this case your remedy is to present a revision of your formerly held beliefs. You have the option to do this either within the context of our interaction, or outside it. Within context, you remain free to address my arguments and present your updated thinking. On a point-by-point basis you can indicate which of your various pro-vivisection arguments you continue to maintain are valid, and which you have now come to understand are not. In the first case you can present your defense or counterargument. In the second you can acknowledge forthrightly that your previous argument was colossally wrong and stupid, and make suitable apology.

You are free to do this at any time, and demand that I publish your writing as a continuation of our debate; a demand I would clearly be obligated to fulfil. Alternatively you can accomplish the same result independently and self-publish, and have nothing further to do with me.

Either way, if you are concerned about being misrepresented by your past statements, this is your means to assert your new-found integrity, morality and intelligence.

1.2 Debate remains fully relevant

But in any case, whatever changes may have occurred in your views is really beside the point. Even if you were to become a committed champion of animal rights issues, our debate remains fully relevant today. You may perhaps have achieved some glimmering enlightenment, but there remain many who have not—indeed the great majority, as you have referenced repeatedly.

What I am doing goes beyond our particular debate, and I hope your thinking is now clear enough for you to understand that. I am addressing a much broader human criminality, not just yours. There are seven billion, just like you. All with the same mentality, the same innate speciesism, the same axiomatic sense of exceptionalism, the same expedient, self-serving intellectual incompetence. The result is a vast, horrific holocaust, with victims in the trillions. If you think this is any way an exaggeration, once again, I urge you to educate yourself.

You indicate you've been influenced by our debate; perhaps others may be influenced similarly. In any case I believe this is a worthy cause, acting towards the welfare of all living things, and I'm willing to make the effort. Your preference for me not to post online is duly noted, and I understand your wish to keep this debacle hidden. But I see your expressed views as a bright, shining example of precisely the sort of moral depravity I discuss in general philosophical terms, and I believe this is relevant to publish for all the reasons I've stated.

2. ABANDONMENT OF DEBATE: NO REASON GIVEN

In giving the reason you are now citing for abandoning our debate, you included the clause, "as I believe I may have stated at the time."

This belief is absolutely incorrect; you did nothing of the kind. You abandoned our debate with no explanation whatever, and when I explicitly demanded your reason, you provided none.

The major objective elements of our dispute are in two letters: yours of 11/8/02 setting forth your arguments in favour of vivisection, and mine of 7/13/03 presenting my counterarguments. I gave clear and comprehensive answers to each of your arguments, in my opinion conclusively refuting them all.

At this point clearly the obligation was upon you to respond to this, either conceding that your arguments were false, or providing further support or defense. And indeed you acknowledged as much, stating several times that you would be responding in due course. Furthermore, I specifically asked what your intentions were. Given my demolition of your arguments, I was well aware that you might wish to obstruct further debate. Therefore I concluded my letter with the following explicit request:

That you let me know what your eventual intention is—if you have no intention of making the sort of comprehensive written response I am demanding, I would like to know this right away.

It's right there in plain black and white, and the meaning and purpose of this could hardly be clearer. Yet despite all this you made no reply at all, neither at the time, nor at any time since. Nor did you trouble to advise me that in fact, you had no intention of responding.

Instead, you simply left me to wait for a reply that would never come. After several months with no reply I sent a follow-up letter on 3/20/04; you ignored that also. After a few more weeks I made a further follow-up enquiry on 5/2/04, and finally you sent a five-word email: "I will not be responding." I immediately sent you an email, explicitly demanding to know why you would not be responding, but you made no reply to this either. Thus not only were you avoiding all objective debate, you were also avoiding any disclosure of the reason for this.

So please Louise, do not try to tell me you stated your reason for disengaging, when I know damn well, and the written record plainly shows, that you did exactly the opposite.

2.1 Hallmark of a cover-up

From my perspective this is an important point.

Given my systematic destruction of your arguments, and the extreme discomfort for you of providing genuine responses, I anticipated that you might try to avoid transparency on some pretext or other. And so in my letter of 3/20/04 I addressed this explicitly:

The typical behaviour of human beings in your position is to attempt to subvert the discussion on some pretext or other. "Look, I really don't have time for this," they might say, or, "There's no point, we're never going to agree." (Though they were quite willing to argue their case before it became hopeless.) Or they might attempt (as you already have) the more blustery, "What right do you have to take me to task?" And of course there is the always popular appeal to legality: "Look, I'm not breaking any laws, OK?"

Or something that I believe you may find tempting as a possible mode of avoidance: "Frankly, I find your attitude quite disagreeable." This can almost always be used by offenders when confronted directly by their plaintiffs, since plaintiffs tend to be disagreeably angry, as I am. No one wants to listen to that, least of all the offender herself. By means of this manoeuvre, the very fact of having caused injury to others, generates the pretext for avoiding responsibility for it.

Again, it's all there in black and white, and the significance of this could not be more clear. I was quite ready to shoot down any one of these pretexts, including the one you are now citing, either by discrediting the pretext as a valid reason for avoiding debate, or by presenting a suitable remedy. In particular, if my bad attitude is indeed the problem, I have an effective solution readily at hand.

But for me to address your reason, I need to hear your reason. By obstructing both the debate, and any examination of the reason for this, all possible paths towards transparency are blocked. This is the hallmark of a cover-up: a complete refusal to permit discussion on any level, including the meta-level of why you are refusing to permit discussion. It may indeed be a valid reason to discontinue engagement with someone because of abusive language. But there appears no good reason at all not to state this reason.

3. MISCHARACTERIZATION OF MY LANGUAGE

I take issue with your characterization of my language and attitude, in particular the words "nasty" and "sneering." These are your words, not mine; neither is accurate.

I have already addressed your complaints about my attitude very thoroughly. Your complaints are based on the supposition that my attitude is somehow inappropriate; this supposition is incorrect. In my letter of 7/13/03 I presented a detailed account of your own forms of personal unpleasantness: the moral criminality and intellectual slovenliness, plainly evident throughout your arguments. The fact is that your position is contemptible in every regard. Your willingness to impose unmeasured suffering upon others for the sake of incremental benefit is morally repugnant, and the string of arguments you have presented to justify this is an inept assemblage of expedient, self-serving non-thought.

My attitude and language in condemning all this is entirely appropriate.

It is true that I have been merciless in my dismantling of you, repeatedly showing how empty and foolish your arguments are. But this is not nasty or sneering; it is a well-founded, cogent exposition of your own personal liabilities. There is no profanity anywhere in my writing, nor is there any overt insult. You may not care for my style of presentation, but everything I am saying is factually correct. And if necessary can be solidly backed up, chapter and verse.

It is the underlying facts that are nasty; your inhumanity that is truly nasty. Let me ask you, who is the nastier: someone who advocates the deliberate poisoning of living creatures, or someone who writes an angry letter of condemnation? I understand that my caustic criticisms may make you squirmingly uncomfortable. But I submit that it is the substance of my criticism, not the phrasing, that is the true cause of your discomfort.

Your use of terms like “nasty” and “sneering” is empty semantic labelling; a shifting of the focus onto form rather than content, while avoiding addressing any of the substantive issues presented. Just like Trump, who uses the same word that you do, calling a reporter’s pointed query a “nasty question,” to avoid dealing with the question at all. This is spin, nothing more. This sort of thing may work within your own disordered mind, but I can tell you it doesn’t work within mine.

3.1 Challenge to cite specific examples

Throughout my writing I have backed up my allegations by quoting your own self-incriminating words back at you. I invite you to do the same to me.

I challenge you to cite some specific examples of what you consider nasty or sneering language, and let us look at them together. I believe in every case we will find that the statement is fundamentally accurate; that in every case I can provide real, objective support for the underlying allegation.

It is true that there is wording of mine, engineered to cause you discomfort. But what you call nasty, I call an accurate skewering of your human iniquity and folly, punishing you because it hits its mark precisely. Certainly there is something nasty here, but it is the target, not the skewer.

In any case I stand behind everything I’ve said, both the form and the substance. In terms of substance, I believe I’ve presented a good, well-reasoned analysis of every aspect of our dispute. And in terms of form, I believe my language is appropriate under the circumstances. In condemning acts of ugly atrocity against others, we do not mince words, nor trouble ourselves to spare the sensibilities of the accused. I have done no more than this with you.

4. PROPOSED REMEDY: CONCLUDE DEBATE VIA INTERMEDIARY

You are now telling me that you disengaged, not for the craven reasons I have said, but for a more presentable reason: you don’t like my nasty language and attitude.

I wish you had stated this when I very explicitly asked, but in any case now you have disclosed your reason, and better late than never. If this is truly the reason then I take it that but for this impediment you were, and presumably still are, willing in principle to conclude our debate.

In this case my proposed remedy is that I turn over my side of our debate to an intermediary: a third party who can stand between us and enable the objective component of our dispute, while eliminating the bad language you find objectionable.

4.1 A suitable candidate

I have a number of acquaintances who could play this role. One of these is called Cynthia, whom I believe would be a suitable candidate. She is fully aligned with me philosophically, and so can fulfil my basic requirement of conveying my arguments correctly. But she also has the trick of speaking courteously to people whom she despises, and so can also fulfil yours, of being spoken to pleasantly. Thus she can bridge the divide between my cogent argument and your personal sensibility, successfully accommodating both.

As things stand the burden remains on you to respond to my challenges to your position. I propose that you provide your responses directly to Cynthia, who will then relay them to me. I will answer or follow up as necessary in my usual uncompromising style, and submit my replies back to her. She will then edit or rewrite my text, eliminating any language or phrasing you might consider disagreeable, and finally pass the sanitized version on to you—still with full dialectical strength, but now linguistically benign.

Behind the scenes you will still be dealing with the iron fist of Andrew intellectuality, but now in the velvet glove of Cynthia diplomacy. But most importantly, from your perspective I will disappear completely, and permanently. You will never hear from me again, or be distressed by my nasty language; it will be as if I no longer exist.

Instead Cynthia will take my place, and you will find her a congenial correspondent. The truth is that she is just as disgusted and angry I am, but you will have no awareness of this; like an undercover cop she will hide this reality from you undetectably. You will find her friendly and humourous, able to debate this exceedingly unpleasant subject matter with the same ease as say, a book discussion. She's quick-witted, sharp, articulate—you'll love her.

4.2 An ideal solution

This would appear to address your issue ideally. You are indicating you have more than sufficient integrity and strength of character to answer my arguments; it's me personally you don't want to deal with. It's not my incisive reasoning you have a problem with; it's all that bad language and sneering. By the means I am proposing you get all the good stuff and none of the bad.

I am quite ready and willing to move forward on this basis. If you are agreeable I can make email introductions and we can begin immediately.

So my question to you now is: will this arrangement be acceptable to you? Or will you now manufacture another excuse, hitherto unmentioned?

5. A CLEAR PATH FORWARD

I have violated your injunction against contacting you again. However, please note that I previously advised you as follows:

if your answers are in any way lacking in integrity, I will continue to challenge them.

I will gladly comply with your no-contact order, but not as long as you make statements I object to. As noted there are several items I consider mischaracterizations, or disingenuous, and will not let these go unanswered.

In particular regarding your identification of my bad language as a barrier to dialogue: I consider this nothing more than a conveniently expedient excuse, and your true motive something else entirely. My answer is to strip this pretext away, and leave you to find some other excuse to hide behind.

I have presented a practical remedy to this obstacle: an intermediary to eliminate my attitude completely. With this obstacle removed there is now a clear path forward for you to present your responses and bring our debate to a logical conclusion.

There would seem to be every reason to do this, and no good reason not to. If nothing else we can bring our various points of contention to a clear resolution; the figurative trees as I have put it. This alone will bring a significant measure of clarity and closure to our presently inconclusive dispute. You have presented your points in favour of vivisection; I have presented my counterpoints. For anyone interested in this issue, residing on either side of the debate, I think it will be of great interest to see how you now proceed to defend your points.

Beyond this as I've noted I think the broader, holistic truth will become evident: which of us is truly the nasty one. If we are people of integrity, genuinely interested in such things as truth and accountability, this determination is something I assume we would both welcome.

However despite these worthy goals, I don't see any of this happening. My confident expectation is that one way or another you will continue to avoid transparency, and you will do so for precisely the reasons I've stated: open debate will reveal the essential truth of the matter, and this is something you would much rather keep hidden.

Again, you can prove me wrong very easily: simply provide your answers to my arguments. In the end the fact remains that I am willing to present my arguments for consideration by anyone. You, no matter what the circumstances, are not.

If against expectation you are willing to accept my proposal then I look forward to hearing your answers. On the other hand if you still refuse to make any response then your implied claims of courage and integrity are not to be taken seriously, and our interaction is now surely at an end.

Andrew Hammoude