



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 664, Interview with Marina Balotnikova

Mariann Sullivan: Welcome to Our Hen House, Marina.

Marina Balotnikova: Thank you, Mariann. I'm delighted to be here.

Mariann: I'm seldom as excited for an interview as I am for this one, because the work that you're doing is something that I didn't know people could do. It's a whole new way of approaching animal advocacy that I just was not aware was possible. And I'm super excited about it.

I used to tell people when people would say, “should I become a lawyer if I wanna help animals?” Maybe, but maybe not, like it's not the most profitable way forward, frequently, but maybe you should go into PR because we have to reach people. We have to reach people. But I didn't know you could just be a freelance reporter, reporting just on these issues.

So I really want to start off the interview by talking about that. How does being a freelance reporter with a very specific beat work? Just in general, how do you get assignments on what to write? How does this work?

Marina: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you saying that, that you didn't know that this was possible because I feel like I didn't either until sort of recently. I kind of made it up for myself.

So just to give some background, I have worked in journalism for a while. Ever since I graduated college. I never, for most of that, never really wrote about animal issues, factory farming or veganism. I might have freelanced a little bit here and there, while I had full-time jobs, about veganism.

But the catalyst for me really changing what I work on starting to focus on factory farming, animal ethics and animal rights was that about two years ago, I moved across the country to Madison, Wisconsin. That's where I live now

because my spouse is getting a PhD here. I had to leave a comfortable job and I was like, “Well, I have to figure out what I'm going to do now.” I had always wanted to become more independent, to strike out on my own and have the ability to determine all my own projects. So I decided I was going to be freelance and see where that would take me.

I started out kind of casting around, writing about a lot of different subjects that interest me. I wrote about a dancer that I'm obsessed with. I wrote about bottled water, why bottled water is bad. I think at that point I was still...I was afraid that my interests were too broad and diverse to ever have the kind of specialty that you really need to to distinguish yourself in journalism and have expertise in something.

And I've been interested in animal rights for most of my life but I think that I had been afraid of making it the subject of my work because it can be so traumatizing to be exposed to this stuff. And I remember thinking, “I really don't think that'll be good for my psychic health to be engaging with this all the time.” But then I sort of stumbled into it and I was listening to a podcast on Wayne Hsiung's show, formerly known as The Green Pill, he just renamed it. Wayne Hsiung is the a co-founder of DXE, I think most listeners will know that. So Wayne has this podcast with these really long, sprawling episodes of up to three hours with various people in animal rights and adjacent interests.

And I was listening to an episode he was doing with Matt Johnson, who is a DXE activist, who was facing trial in Iowa and up to eight years in prison for an undercover investigation he did into the horrifying atrocities in the pork industry in 2020. We can talk about specifically what that was a bit later. And he was talking about how he was about to be prosecuted for doing this, for conducting what was one of the most significant undercover investigations at a factory farm in recent history. I was listening to it and getting so drawn into it and I thought, “Wait a second, I live within driving distance of Iowa in Madison. Obviously I should cover this trial. What else am I doing with my life that could be more important than covering people who are being criminalized for drawing attention to these atrocities that no one else would know about?”

And so I pitched a story to *The Intercept* about the case, I was originally supposed to cover it for *The Intercept*, and then the charges against him were dropped at the very last minute so the trial was canceled. Everything suddenly changed really quickly. I ended up writing about it for *The Guardian* instead, and that was, I would say, the story that made me really, really passionate about wanting to continue with this, making it my beat.

And it introduced me to so many different activists, lawyers, and people working in this space that I'm now constantly in touch with and keeping tabs on what's going on. What are the most important stories in animal agriculture, and animal exploitation more broadly? To answer your question about how do you do this, being freelance can be very challenging. You have to send, what's called a pitch to editors. It's kind of a summary of what your story idea is, in a couple hundred words, often you get no reply at all. That's something you have to get used to and not take personally, that this is a hard thing to do.

Editors are busy. That's kind of how I do it. Whenever I have an idea for something that should be a story, I'll send it to an outlet, an editor, either one I've worked with before, or a new one that would be a good fit for that subject and hopefully it's accepted. If it's not, I'll try some more places.

Mariann: How do you decide what to pitch?

Marina: There's not really a systematic method. It's things that really interest me and, you know, I'm interested in all these DXE trials because I have a particular interest in novel things that activists are doing. Theories of change for how to change animal agriculture that I could think through and report through in a story. I'm interested in anything where I can really highlight the experience of animals themselves, on factory farms or being exploited in other ways.

And you have to be kind of thoughtful about what are ways to do that that mainstream media is going to be interested in. So these high profile trials are one way of doing that. Prop 12, for example, is another one. That's the California law that bans gestation crates and other kinds of extreme confinement and is going to be reviewed by the Supreme Court and likely struck down. That is a really high profile Supreme Court case that is just a natural for a mainstream story. More recently, I have been trying to get a little more into writing about the climate and environmental angles, because editors are really interested in that. Climate change has finally, I think, really become a big news issue and it can often be easier to write about animal agriculture and the problems with the meat industry from a sustainability perspective.

Mariann: Yeah, I was thinking that would be one of the stories that might make a pitch about animal ag appealing. Climate, perhaps corruption also.

When you uncover, I don't know, somebody's been cheating or...that seems like it would play in mainstream media. And how about health hazards?

Health has always been one of the great ways to get people to pay attention to factory farming because they only care about themselves. Don't say I said that. *laughs* So is that a big feature that gets editors interested?

Marina: Yeah. I mean, you're right that human centric angles, I think, always tend to be easier to sell than animal welfare. And animal farming poses a lot of public health problems.

One big story I'm working on right now is kind of about that. It's about a culling of a giant egg factory farm, not far from me, in Wisconsin and how it was totally botched. Basically, they ended up dumping nearly 3 million dead, potentially infected with avian flu hens right in the middle of a residential area in rural Wisconsin and the local community was horrified. They said that the smell has been so horrible that they literally couldn't stand outside and there's the possibility of contaminating groundwater, spreading bird flu to wildlife. There was a confirmation of two baby foxes in Wisconsin, not far from there, who died of bird flu.

It's impossible to know how they got it. Maybe it was from wild birds that they preyed on, or maybe it was from one of these piles of discarded factory farm birds. Because I think it's almost certain that predators were digging around in those piles because of course they would, it's like a feast for them.

Mariann: Yeah, that's horrifying.

So far, you mentioned *The Intercept* and *The Guardian* and from what I've been seeing, and I follow you pretty closely on Twitter, your stories mostly appear in pretty progressive outlets. Is that a choice on your part as to who to pitch, or is just that who's picking them up? These are mainstream outlets, but they're progressive mainstream outlets, is that your sweet spot?

Marina: Yeah, I think so. I love those outlets because they commission and work on really serious reporting, but they're okay with reporters not claiming to be value neutral. And that's just how I naturally work. It would be difficult for me to be otherwise.

I think there are great people who have written about animal rights in more conservative places like *The National Review*. I think that their ideology doesn't really fit me, but I think stuff like that shows that, I think, animal issues are so compelling that they can transcend the culture war and I think that's a great thing.

I think progressive media tends to be more of a natural fit for me.

Mariann: Yeah. I totally agree with you and you don't hear it said that much, so I'm happy to hear you say it, that it is kind of the one issue left that can actually cross lines.

But it does make sense that that you would be in outlets that at least allow you to write from something of a point of view. There's a lot of talk in general these days about what objective journalism is. I don't see anybody who doesn't have a point of view about what we should be doing with animals, because people either eat them or they don't. There's no rising above that reality from some neutral point of view.

But I think you've said you have a very different moral baseline on animal exploitation than most of, even of the editors you deal with. Because as we all know, just because somebody is progressive doesn't mean they get it about animals. So how do you deal with those expectations?

Marina: This is something that can definitely be a challenge. Any kind of writing and editing process is going to involve compromises, accepting things that are a little bit different from how I would do them if I were just writing a blog that wasn't being mediated by an editor or something.

I have had situations that were unfortunate, where, for example, an animal who I described in a story with this animal's pronouns, "he," were changed, without my knowledge, by a copy editor right before publication to "it." That was really frustrating for me and I kind of hated even having my name on that.

And, by the way, this was a violation of the publication's own style guide, which was published on its own website. I tried to correct this, but wasn't successful.

Mariann: It really is unbelievable, isn't it? Because style guides outside of the news world are perfectly okay with using he and she if you know the gender of an animal. This is not a widely adopted style that pervades the English language.

It happens all the time that people refer to animals as he and she. Like, if it's a bull, you can call him he, I hope it's pretty obvious. But I've seen that happen in so many press outlets. It's just another indication of how brain dead people are about animals.

Marina: Yeah, this animal I had written about, who's a piglet, his gender was not only known, but it was documented in a veterinary record that I had on my computer. You know what I mean? How much more official can you get than that?

But yeah, the issue of objectivity is something that comes up in conversations I have all the time. This question of objectivity impartiality and how I think about that or balance it with my values.

I think the first thing to say about that is a lot of journalists and editors and publications are evolving beyond the idea that we need to pretend to be value neutral. I think a lot of people know that and it should be said that this isn't a new idea. A lot of times people may think that media becoming more ideological is a contemporary thing, or a consequence of the culture war, the polarization of the country.

I think that's certainly part of it but I don't think this is new. Media used to be quite partisan. I think the idea of objectivity and journalism, as it was conceived in the early 20th century by the journalist Walter Lippmann, who founded *The New Republic*, it was almost the opposite of what people think objectivity means today.

I think it's a very misunderstood concept. It didn't mean that we should act as though we're unbiased and present all sides or all arguments as though they're equally legitimate, but rather that journalists should recognize that we're all human. We're all biased. We have values and that we needed to have a transparent, consistent method, what Lippmann called a common intellectual method, for gathering and verifying what's true.

So when I think about what this means for myself and for reporting on the situation of the billions of animals who live and die in human captivity, I would say I think all journalism has an ideology, you know, a moral baseline. Sometimes it's stated explicitly, sometimes not. And what I see myself as doing is trying to broaden the moral circle, for lack of a better term, that gets to be considered important in mainstream journalism. I'm quite open about that.

I think the vast majority of reporting on animal agriculture takes for granted that farm animals are food and it's uncomfortable thinking about what it means for sentient creatures to live in this system, what it's like for them. I try to push against that tendency to the greatest extent possible and to write about exploited animals as having the same capacities for pain and stress and fear and the same needs that we have instead of glossing over those things. Or just quoting a

university or researcher or something who says, for example, on something like ventilation shutdown, which I can talk about later, “Well, bird flu would be a terrible way to die so this is actually humane and it's the best we can do,” or something, which I have seen some publications do. And I think what's always of utmost importance is to report accurately.

You know, of course, we can talk about who isn't seen as a credible source, but accuracy is always paramount. It provides the best foundation for being able to then make subjective or values based judgements. And another thing is that when you're writing in a kind of investigative journalism style, there's this kind of style of writing accountability or watchdog journalism stories where you are like, “Here is this thing that happened that we uncovered that's been hidden from the public.” I think that kind of way of writing stories, I think it kind of transcends the conversation about whether you're being impartial or not because the facts speak for themselves. And because you've done the digging yourself, you have found what the story is, and you don't have to rely on a corporate or government PR departments to set their narrative that you are responding to or framing around, you know? And you found the narrative and now you're asking the people who are implicated by it what they have to say for themselves.

That's an important part of reporting too and what distinguishes it from writing an op-ed. That you have to ask anyone who is being accused of wrongdoing for a comment, and often they won't want to comment and that becomes part of the story that's interesting in itself. But it's your responsibility to try to understand their perspective, how they're thinking about what they're doing and to try to convey that to readers.

Mariann: I could not agree with you more. I think one of the most frustrating things about paying attention to animal issues is seeing when things do end up in the press and we're all excited that some story got traction that they just both sides. I mean, like what about investigative reporting?

I don't just go to reporters to find out what other people think. I go to reporters to find out information and so often with animal stories, you just get, “Well, the animal advocates say this and the industry says that.” And that's the end of the story. Tell me what really happened, factual things, and that's so much what your stories do. I think it changes the way these stories are being reported.

Marina: That's really nice. Thank you.

I think that kind of writing, it's more resource intensive. And the way that I see a lot of issues in animal agriculture covered, like bird flu, I can tell that the reporter doesn't necessarily know a lot about it.

Maybe they were rushed on a deadline and had a day or two to research it and getting any mention of how millions of animals are being killed due to bird flu is kind of an afterthought. They're like, "let me just add a quote from someone with a perspective on this." Who knows whether it's true or not, or misleading or not.

I like to give myself the luxury of time to understand what I am working.

Mariann: It certainly does have to do with the fact that journalism is under the gun, in so many ways, nowadays. But, as long as I've been doing this, and that's a while, it has always been the case that there's a reluctance to look into one of these stories.

And of course, one of the major stories is, that you've mentioned a couple of times, that you've covered is bird flu. And certainly I can understand why there's a reluctance to look into it. Because it's...particularly having to do with the use of ventilation shutdown during bird flu...and our listeners probably know to some extent what happened and what ventilation shutdown is, so we don't have to dwell on that.

But what I really do want to dwell on is the coverage. How did you find out about this? How did you get coverage for it? How did the story end up getting traction?

Marina: So bird flu, I think maybe listeners will kind of have some familiarity of it, but there was a major and still is a major bird flu epidemic this year.

It started really picking up, I would say, last winter. And I had been in touch with some people at the organization Animal Outlook, they do incredible work, about public records that they had obtained, including videos of experiments that were performed on chickens at the North Carolina State University Poultry Science Department, on hens.

So they were testing a method called ventilation shutdown for basically mass exterminating birds for disease control purposes. And maybe I should back up a bit because there are so many pieces to this, but maybe it would make sense to talk a bit about ventilation shutdown. The first kind of major story and

revelation that we have had about ventilation shutdown was in 2020, not in the poultry industry, but in the pork industry.

So, this was in the spring of 2020, very beginning of the pandemic. Slaughter houses were shutting down so there was reduced capacity to slaughter animals and process them into food because the disease was tearing through slaughter houses. So it was what was referred to as a supply chain crisis a lot. And across the meat industry, meat producers found the cheapest thing for them to do was to mass kill animals that couldn't be processed into food because of reduced meat packing capacity.

So in the pork industry, DXE found out about a method that a pork producer called Iowa Select Farms was using to mass exterminate pigs that was called ventilation shutdown. It literally amounted to packing pigs into sealed barns, sealing off the barns to shut off ventilation and pumping in heat and steam to turn up temperature to lethal levels and basically roast them to death. We don't know exactly how high the temperatures got, but I think that research into ventilation shutdown on pigs suggests that it was probably extremely high, like in the mid one hundreds, maybe 140 or so degrees Fahrenheit. And so DXE found out about this through a whistleblower who was working for Iowa Select Farms...

Mariann: I should, let me interrupt you for a second, Marina, because I should mention to people that we had Matt Johnson on, we actually had him on before his case was dismissed, but he also talked in detail about this horrendous, horrendous incident.

Marina: Yeah. It, I use this phrase a lot, defies belief...because so much in this industry is like that. It almost defies belief.

So he found out about this method through a whistleblower who worked for the company and secretly planted recording devices in a shed where they were going to do ventilation shutdown and it worked, and he successfully obtained hours of audio of what it sounded like when you roast pigs to death. I have listened to it and it's really something. You know, I think heat stroke is understood to be one of the most terrible and painful ways to die.

So that happened in 2020, it was a groundbreaking investigation. It was covered in *The Intercept* by Glenn Greenwald. And it was a PR crisis for the pork industry. So now in 2022, the poultry industry is using that method to mass kill tens of millions of birds, mostly chickens, also turkeys, at factory farms that had a positive case of bird flu.

Because the way it works is that if there's one positive case at any of these facilities, all of the animals at the farm, even if they live in different sheds, have to be quickly (killed). That can be hundreds of thousands, or millions at the biggest poultry farms. Early this year I had been in touch with people at Animal Outlook, which they do excellent work, and they had an attorney there Will Lowrey...

Mariann: Will has also been on the show...

Marina: So you've had everyone on the show! *laughs*

Mariann: I just like to remind people.

He was on the Animal Law Podcast, but not about this particular incident.

Marina: Yeah, he's no longer an Animal Outlook, as of last month. But he had spent a year and a half working on public records requests to the state of North Carolina. Trying to get all of the records that they had from experiments that were performed at North Carolina State University on birds to try to test and validate the ventilation shutdown method. And he successfully got so much from them.

A lot of universities try to fight or refuse releasing records, especially photo and video footage of animal tests, under public records requests. But he successfully got these. He got more than 10 hours of footage that were taken directly by the researchers at North Carolina State, not undercover activists. These were taken by the researchers as part of the experiment. And you can see very clearly in these videos, they focus on an individual hen in a cage. She's hooked up to electrodes and subjected to ventilation shutdown and you can watch as she dies. I think the suffering is undeniable.

So those experiments took place in 2016 and this year, sure enough, that method has become industry industry standard in the poultry industry. I was surprised by how easily it took over.

The last time there was a major bird flu in 2015, by far, the most common methods for exterminating on farms were carbon dioxide gassing and foam. Those are not humane either. It's never, even if a method might seem relatively less cruel on paper or something, it's always going to be botched on the ground when you are scrambling to try to kill hundreds of thousands, or millions, of animals in a short amount of time.

But in any case, CO2 gassing and foam were the predominant methods until this year where ventilation shutdown really became the default. And I don't think any of these methods are humane, but killing animals via heat stroke, as every veterinarian I've talked to said, is considered the most inhumane and cruel way to die.

Mariann: Yeah, I think anybody could just assume that, just from hearing about. It's a horrible thing to do to a living creature.

Marina: And it takes a very long time too. You know, poultry farms had to subject chickens to high heat for upwards of eight hours. I looked at email correspondence between Tyson and the state veterinarian and state agriculture department in Kentucky, where they were laying out exactly what they were doing and said that, "We're turning on the heat for eight and a half hours and we expect that there will be some survivors on the margins." So even after eight plus hours, they knew that some would survive.

Mariann: So you mentioned that this has become standard in the industry and it very quickly just seems to become, "this is the way we do it. It's all fine."

So you were able to get some coverage on it. Can you tell us a little bit about the coverage and also tell us whether you feel it had any impact?

Marina: So all of this that I learned about the North Carolina State research and the rapid proliferation of ventilation shutdown on the ground, I covered that in a pretty long story for *The Intercept*.

They also made a video for it, which included some of the footage from North Carolina State, that Animal Outlook obtained. So I think they did a really good job with it. And the video, I think, makes the story. I'm personally a writing and text person, not a video person, but for so much of this stuff, images are so important.

I was glad that that story, I think it did quite well. I saw it being shared in a lot of places. I was looking at a thread about it on Reddit, I think the Reddit environment subreddit or something like that and saw people talking about, they were like, "oh my God, this is horrifying! I'm giving up meat and eggs!" And it's great to feel like what you're doing is making an impact, you know?

Mariann: Another type of story that you covered, which you mentioned before, is the work being done by DXE, and perhaps some others it's not exclusively DXE, I think it was really kind of upping the activism game in this country, but

mostly DXE. Why do you feel that...I mean, I agree with you that these are really important stories, but I'm wondering why do you consider these stories to be ones that you can also get some traction on and you can get some eyes on?

Marina: First of all, DXE is one of the, I think that they're the like main, radical expression of animal rights advocacy in the US. And I think seeing people who are willing to go to extraordinary lengths, you know, risk their freedom to expose these places, that most people will never see in their lives, I think that is something that is really moving to a lot of people, even if they're not vegan.

I think that level of sacrifice is very profound and moving. I also think that DXE has attracted the attention of the national security apparatus in this really profound way. And I think that has made them interesting to people who have a general interest in national security and activist repression and civil rights violations of national security agencies.

A case that DXE was involved in that they're going to trial for next month, that I'll be writing about was, they did what they call an open rescue at a pork factory farm in Utah. It was a massive, massive facility in Utah, they have called it the largest single pork factory farm in the country. I'm not certain that that's true, I'd have to look into it. But DXE went into one of these places, they removed two little piglets who, they have argued, were sick and dying and would have died soon if they didn't take them out and give them veterinary care. And I think that's certainly plausible because factory farms have very high mortality.

They have animals dying all the time and thrown straight in the trash. So DXE, in 2017, took two piglets out of the Smithfield facility in Southwest Utah and brought them to a farm sanctuary in Colorado that resulted in an absolutely just mind blowing FBI raid at the Colorado farm sanctuary. It's been called a multi-state hunt for two piglets because the FBI went around to farm sanctuaries across the region just in search of these two piglets, who even if they had survived on the farm and had been slaughtered for meat, they were worth so little compared to how many resources national security was putting into it.

And that FBI raid was covered in *The Intercept*, also by Glenn Greenwald. And I think it was one of their most read stories ever because the image of FBI agents going after piglets is so shocking and ridiculous and compelling,

Mariann: I think, in general, one of the reasons for me that these stories, or I think that these stories do get more attention, and one of the reasons DXE's and other activist work is important is because people like stories about people. You

know, there's only so much, unless you have actual compassion for animals, which people manage to shut off. People like to hear about people and all of these are about incredibly courageous actions by people.

I've actually found that in addition to your coverage, which of course is excellent, some of the press on these stories is really not that bad. I feel like 10 years ago, any story about vegan activists would've been a satirical puff piece, just totally making fun. Do you think there's a chance that things are shifting because of, well I'm not sure why, but maybe you can offer some ideas, but do you think that things are shifting in a more positive direction?

Marina: I think, first to what you said about people liking stories about people. I think that's definitely true. And the characters in DXE and kind of the courage that they show and tenacity and the way that they take on these extraordinarily powerful corporations and the US government and are basically daring law enforcement to come after them... That's such an incredible human story, right?

And Matt, it sounds like you know Matt Johnson, he is such a kind of funny, but also very serious and compelling character that makes it great material for features and through these characters, you can empathize with and start to understand why they do what they do for factory farmed animals.

About whether things are shifting. I think we're definitely, hopefully, finally starting to see more willingness to be honest about the fact that meat and dairy consumption is simply going to have to be scaled down if we're going to have a habitable planet. That's not optional, it's necessary.

And I think that, uh, you know, as climate becomes a more salient issue in media and as Americans are really experiencing the consequences of climate change in recent years, and we're have extreme drought in the west because of animal agriculture. I think that we're seeing the beginnings of being honest about that.

And I think that's great. I think we're a little bit behind some other countries where environmentalists are less defensive about animal agriculture.

Mariann: Though I think it does go on everywhere, it really is evidence of a huge block that people have talking about these issues.

And before we move on, I just wanted to mention two other stories and I mentioned that it's not just DXE, of course it's mostly DXE, but two other stories I've noticed of late that also were about people. There's a sanctuary, you

probably heard this story, in upstate New York, not too far from where I live, called Asha Sanctuary and this woman who runs it, she had two cattle from the beef farm next door wander onto her property. And then kind of took a stand that they had sought sanctuary with her and she wasn't going to return them. And then there's another 4H story where some folks from a county fair sent Sheriff's deputies like 500 miles to go kill some poor girl's goat who she had withdrawn from a 4H exhibition at the county fair or the state fair. And both of these stories, I think got a lot of traction. And I read the stories about them in just, you know, local press. They were very favorable and I think it was because there was in addition to an animal, there was a person at the center, a relatively sympathetic person.

So I just think that DXE is doing a magnificent job of taking that and turning it into action for animals because people are interested in them. Because as you said, Matt Johnson is a quite charming guy, you know, he's great. Totally unpretentious and I'm sure he does well dealing with the press.

So, I think that's a really exciting development, maybe it's not a development, but I think it's an exciting way to think about these stories. That they are getting much more favorable coverage than they used to and I've been doing this for a long time, so I can talk about that.

I actually saw in an interview recently that, this is more going to a theoretical point of view, and I hope I got this right...a more theoretical point of view than talking about the hard facts, but I either saw it on Twitter or something...that you felt more resonance describing what happens to animals as akin to fascism, rather than going into philosophical theory, like utilitarianism, which is usually the go-to explanation for animal rights activists.

And I found that extremely intriguing. Did I get it right? And if I did, can you expand on it?

Marina: Yeah, I don't have a problem with people who have a utilitarian approach. I think that many of them, it has led many of them to care about what happens to farm animals. And I think that's great.

Do you know John Sanbonmatsu?

Mariann: I know of him. I don't know him personally.

Marina: I met him when I was living in Boston a few years ago and we just really hit it off and he's a friend of mine and I really connected with him. But, I

had read his book *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, which is an essay collection with writing by him and Karen Davis and others. It was really wonderful and gave me so much to think about and resonated with me so much in this idea of fascism, you know, the human dominance over animals being a kind of fascism, it's something he wrote about in the introduction.

It resonated with me so much because I think it's absolutely true, right? It is domination that doesn't need to have any kind of real moral or intellectual justification. You know, I think that our ability and willingness to cage and torture animals becomes the basis for its own justification. Vegans have already won the moral argument, right? And in the book, John wrote about this idea of fascism displaying that there's no limit to the kind of like brutality and domination that can be inflicted on individuals.

And I think that that's exactly what you see in so many forms of animal exploitation, obviously animal agriculture, and also vivisection, we hear all these kind of high minded justifications for using animals in scientific research. But if you look at what's actually happening in this research, in a lot of this research, it's laughable and far from essential or important to human wellbeing.

Anyone who spent any time in a lab research setting knows that little animal research actually meets the level of being quote/unquote "absolute necessity" or whatever. And yet it persists! And there's nothing that we can do about it. And the people who question it are painted as insane and misanthropic.

Mariann: It is such an interesting insight. And I still don't remember where I saw that you said that, but it really struck me and I'm really glad I asked you about it. Because obviously humans have a taste for fascism, whatever we exactly mean by that, whether it's might makes right or just this kind of demonstration, as you said. And I hope I don't put words in your mouth, that keep demonstrating that you can do whatever you want. You can keep taking it to another level of cruelty and violence and power and humans do have a taste for it and that results in what's happened to animals.

I think it's a really compelling insight and I think it's a great place to end this fascinating conversation, though I could continue it for hours. It's just been a pleasure, Marina. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Marina: Yeah! Thank you so much. This was great.