Billie Eilish Said WHAT?! The Internet Is Not OK Transcript

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Billie Eilish's vegan comment sparks backlash

Everyone, this is Clout on the PVM Podcast. Today, we're going to be looking at what Billie Eilish said to Elle magazine and how this broke the internet. Let's first go to the clip. What's one hill you'd die on? Y'all not going to like me for this one. Eating meat is inherently wrong. And then the other thing is two things cannot coincide.

I love animals. I love all animals so much and I [music] eat meat. You just They're just You can't do both. Sorry. You can eat meat. Go for it. You can love animals, but you can't do both. So, that clip divided a lot of opinion, but then Billie Eilish responded to some of the backlash on her stories on Instagram. Let's look at what she said. Go watch a documentary, too, and some footage of what is done to animals you claim to love and what it does to the planet you pretend to love as well. If that footage was hard for you to watch, I encourage you to please take a look at yourself. Like, I'm so tired of standing up for having empathy for living beings being controversial. Please continue to live in a constant state of cognitive dissonance and denial and try to convince yourself that you're not living a lie. Wow. Wow.

Immediate reactions. I get it and I get what she was trying to say. I think the problem is it's always a sign by, isn't it? It's always just one little clip.

She doesn't have time to explain any of the nuance and a lot of people have come at her and said, you know, there are plenty of cases where people can't go vegan or indigenous cultures where they have to eat animal products and all this kind of stuff, but I don't think that's what she was talking about. I think she was talking about people where you do have access, you're not in a food desert, you're going to the supermarket every single day and you're still choosing to say, "No, it's fine. I can love animals and eat them." And in those cases, I don't think you can, can you? Agree. I agree. Shabnam, I want to I want to lean on you for your perspective. I can't wait. I know you're riled up about this. It's certainly divided opinion, right? On both sides.

PETA have leveraged this to create awareness in Times Square in New York. If you're watching this on YouTube, look at the screen. You can see the ad in the middle of New York, but there have been other reactions.

>> You guys have cognitive dissonance and I'm like, we have got We We do We do. Says the one who's blaming all the people eating the meat and not the people that are abusing animals. Like, why are you mad at us?

Shabnam, what's your take? Cognitive dissonance. That's exactly what we're talking about here. And this term was coined by Festinger in 1957, right? This is the discomfort we feel when our beliefs and our behaviors conflict. And let's be honest, the mass majority of people in the Western world, globally, they love animals and a lot of them eat them, too. So, what I think Billie did here is she didn't just share an opinion, she named a contradiction that millions, maybe billions of people are actively managing every day. And when someone gives dissonance that voice, right? Especially publicly, someone with a platform of over hundreds of millions of followers, the anger isn't really directed to Billie. She's just the voice, right?

Cognitive dissonance and the meat paradox

It's about that internal tension that suddenly got externalized. And I think that's what Billie's talking about, and she is tired of being a mouthpiece, and I can only imagine how exhausting that could be, but she's not wrong, is she? You can eat meat, you can love animals, but you can't do both. Incorrect. I think you can do both.

>> Yeah, you can. I think the notion that humans are anything other than hypocrites is just completely wrong. I think we always live in a state of hypocrisy. Cuz like, everyone's Everyone just sees the whole world as so black and white, I think. Like, you can't love animals Okay, you're eating meat. Okay, maybe that's a direct harm. But let's say like you drive a car to work. Okay, that's going to be pumping out fossil fuels. That's going to be contributing to climate change. That harms ecosystems and animals and potentially future generations. And like, there's there's

harm in everything you do to a certain level. And okay, you can arbitrarily draw a line here and be like, "Oh, if you're doing these things, you do love animals, but if you're doing these things, you don't." But you're just drawing an arbitrary line somewhere. You can love animals, but just love meat more. A lot of vegans say there's no ethical consumption of animal products. In fact, I think I had chickens for a while and they lay eggs and okay, they've evolved by our artificial selection for them to produce way more eggs than they ever would in in nature. And obviously that drains them a lot of a lot of micronutrients and macronutrients and stressful on their body. Like there's there's a degree of suffering there, but we loved our chickens and they, you know, they had free roam, they lived relatively decent lives and stuff. And I I love those chickens, but I loved their eggs as well. But did he eat the chickens?

That's a fascinating thing about thinking people that actually reared chickens for the use of a product versus the product themselves of the body of the chicken. And the fascinating thing is people are horrified. My god, I would never eat my chicken. What are you talking about? I love my chicken. Just eat their eggs. Even the chickens eat their own eggs. This element of displacement. There are bigger problems in the world or moral disengagement, right? Like it's natural. Humans have always done this. Animals eat each other in the wild. These are just coping strategies, the mental gymnastics that people play to acquiesce the cognitive dissonance that they are feeling.

>> Cuz he says it's an arbitrary line that you draw to say you're not going to eat animals. I don't think that is an arbitrary line. It's an obvious place where you can personally make a difference and not take a life each time you eat a meal. I don't think that is arbitrary. It's like it's tangible. It's something that you can actively take control of yourself, right? Whereas like, you know, if you have to drive a car to work, you have to drive a car to work. I think it's weird to like compare both and say like, well, if you're not going to do absolutely everything in every single category, then you may as well not be a vegan. I disagree. So Billie Eilish went on an interview and said that their hot take is that you can't love animals and eat meat at the same time. They said this as a famous vegan superstar. And vegans, please stop typing the hate comment. I promise it's not the veganism that is the problem. I love veganism for the way that it is practicing divesting from a cruel and inhumane industry. Veganism is great for the planet. It's great for your body, but there are also structural inequalities that impede people's ability to engage in veganism and eat animal-free diets that make it extremely problematic to connect an animal-free diet to some sort of moral superiority.

Cuz think about it like this. First of all, the majority of people that work in slaughterhouses are people of color. Do we think that the majority of the people working in these slaughterhouses are people of color because people of color love animals less than white people? Or do we think that's the case because it is a job that is really inhumane that a lot of people wouldn't enjoy. Therefore, people that are likely the most desperate and have the most limited options in their economy work that job. Like, hello, when we make statements like this, blanket ones attached to moral superiority like loving animals, you ignore all of the structural inequalities at play that create people's realities. And on top of those, the closest in proximity to the inhumaneness of the animal industry being people of color, the people most heavily impacted by food inequality in this country, again, are people of color. Scientists that study public health have created the term food desert because access to food in this country is so inequitable and so ass. What a food desert is is a place in the country where people don't even have access to nutritious produce and diverse food options. When public health researchers accounted for class, right? So, comparing white people that are extremely poor and people of color that are extremely poor, they found that people of color that are just as poor as white people were still less likely to have equitable food access and more likely to live in a food desert. On top of that, people of color are more likely to struggle with food insecurity where you don't even know where your next meal is coming from, let alone if that next meal is going to contain meat or not.

Food deserts, privilege, and structural inequality

If you have to get things like WIC, government-sponsored food, they get to control what food you have access to, sometimes only giving you certain items, which will include things like eggs and milk. Are you just going to not eat them despite not having an option because you love animals? There is absolutely nothing wrong with being vegan. If you have the resources to do so, I think it is fantastic. But when you make a statement like, "I am better than you. I love animals more than you because I don't eat meat. And you don't say anything about the fact that there is people in this country who have significantly harder capabilities of achieving that goal of having an animal-free diet, then you're putting wider and richer people in closer proximity to superiority than people of color and poor people.

And that's just pretty [__] up.

>> Being vegan doesn't make anyone better than anyone else. And that is especially the case when your activism towards animals and veganism ignores the ways that those industries also heavily impact living human beings. I think Angela from the block makes so many great points. There's real validity here, right? We're talking about food accessibility, food deserts, cultural identity, economic restraints. These are real, genuine factors that impact people's health, their community health, their public health, their individual health. And often times they're not predicated on dietary choices. If we're dependent upon government resources like WIC, we are dependent upon how they frame what foods individuals can purchase on those programs. But again, that's not the source of privilege that we're talking about. And I think we need to focus again on the privilege problem itself. It's we're arguing that wealth and lifestyle, having access to certain types of properties, international tours, this gives access to resources that most people don't have. And I think we need to acknowledge that some of the most indigenous BIPOC communities and cultures depend on vegan and vegetarian-based protein sources as part of their cultural identity. I have to be honest, I've gone to 7-Elevens in places that are food deserts and I have seen rice and beans on a shelf. It's not cheap, but it's there and it's accessible in places where people often will choose the hot dog on the turn versus advocating for making food after you've probably worked very long hours taking care of people or taking public transportation, have so many variables that are making life difficult and challenging then and go have to go home and cook and provide is probably not idyllic. So, I think it's loaded with a lot of problems that we're facing in society, but that's not the issue. What we're talking about is beans, legumes, pulses are cheap, affordable, and accessible in most places where we don't often think that we can find them. So, if we shift to having a few more meals a week that incorporates these lower cost, more nutritious proteins and grains, we have a capacity of leading with compassion on our plate. And so, I think there's arguments on both ends, of course. But, the answer is both things are true. >> Like in Billie Eilish's world, she has the money where she can just go get vegan food or vegetarian food wherever she is. But, there are certain areas in this country which are like high-key, low-key a food desert. And for a lot of people, they don't always have choice in the products that they eat as much as what they can afford to eat.

>> like we said at the start, we weren't arguing that if you are in a circumstance where you can't get access to these foods, that doesn't mean that you don't love animals. That's your circumstance, and that is very difficult and challenging to overcome, but I don't think those are the people we're speaking about. We're speaking about the people who do have access and actively choose not to, because like you said, they're leaning on the cognitive dissonance to just accept the behavior that they potentially know is wrong, but don't want to have to think about it. >> have to remember, it doesn't diminish the fact of animal sentience, and that's what we're here to talk about as vegans, that there is a a deeper meaning to the work that we do and at ethos that we follow. The problem becomes in how we push the narrative, and I think anybody in a place of Billie's position is entitled to feeling frustration in a place of leadership and advocacy. Everyone's been there. 100%. There's an interesting comment from Anthony Ad on his Substack at one says, "I said I read an online piece by Vox which claimed that it was unusual that the overwhelming opposition to her, Billie Eilish's comments, came from those who claim to be part of the progressive left. As someone who spent time in the US and debated and spoken at liberal campuses there, I don't think this is unusual at all. In fact, I think this is entirely unsurprising and predictable.

I've been called anti-indigenous, classist, and racist by people offended that I set up a debate table with the claim that eating animal products is morally wrong. The sad truth is that the progressive left continues to abysmally fail when it comes to animals. I also say this is someone who sits on the left of the political spectrum. Interesting. And we have the Vox clip as well. Let's go to the clip and then I want to talk about it cuz I kind of think Ed is onto something, but I want to hear your take. Last week, the pop star Billie Eilish said something that set corners of the internet on fire. Eating meat is inherently wrong. And then the other thing is two things cannot coincide.

I love animals. I love all animals so much and [music] I eat meat. You just They're just You can't do both. Sorry. You can eat meat. Go for it. You can love animals, but you can't do both. Whatever you think about Eilish, her logic is sound. You can say you love some species like cats and dogs while still eating other species like chickens and pigs. But you can't say you love all animals if you also eat some animals. And Americans eat a lot of animals. On average, each person eats about 24 land animals and 150 aquatic animals. And virtually all of them are raised in truly horrific conditions. Still, Eilish faced enormous backlash for her comments.

Progressive blind spots and media reactions

And it didn't come from the people you might expect like carnivore influencers or right-wing YouTubers. It mostly came from people who seem to be like Eilish on the far left end of the political spectrum. And the response revealed something weird about meat in America. That people will come up with really strange justifications to dismiss veganism and ignore the extreme suffering of animals. For example, one viral response came from a user who said that they quote stop taking white vegan seriously after they watched a documentary about indigenous hunting practices. But Eilish's statement was clearly directed at the average consumer, not at indigenous groups that hunt animals. There's a psychological term for what's going on here. It's called the meat paradox. Psychology researchers have found that a lot of people feel an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance when their love for animals clashes with their enjoyment of eating animals. People then try to resolve this cognitive dissonance, and [music] how they do it can look different depending on their political beliefs. Like I mentioned before, people on the political left might say things like veganism is anti-indigenous, while people on the political right might be more likely to say things like God gave us animals to eat. What it all sounds like to me, and to psychology researchers, are defense mechanisms to avoid an uncomfortable truth, that we are all complicit in the torture of animals for food, and we also have the power to reduce the suffering of animals by eating less meat or none at all. That might make some people uncomfortable, and maybe you'll think I'm an annoying vegan for saying so, but I promise you that if animals could speak for themselves, they'd be a lot less polite than me or even Billie Eilish. >> Do you guys get annoyed by lot of people on the political left? I mean, in the UK, typically like Green Party supporters just have a blind spot for animal rights and and veganism. That does annoy me a bit as a supporter of the Green Party. I'm like, I do find it frustrating that like you can be so focused on climate stuff, but not acknowledge the huge part that animal agriculture has in destroying the environment. Why is that not more publicized or spoken about? But I guess I've just gotten used to it. Like class, I don't know, over the years I get you you just kind of get used to everyone having a blind spot for this particular movement. >> When we watched Angela from the block, who made some really, really good points and has clearly thought about structural inequalities and those kind of issues, it makes a lot of sense, but at a certain point you're kind of going along with it, and maybe it's just the way I think, maybe it's I'm not a expansive, I'm quite simplistic thinker, but it kind of seemed like at times it's mental gymnastics. Cuz if nobody is saying that if you can't eat vegan products, then of course for survival and sustenance, you're going to have to go to animal products. Nobody's got an issue with that. The definition of veganism is to move away from animal exploitation as much as possible and practical. It just seems like there is this kind of intellectualizing of kind of what I think is like a common sense thing.

That's not been around for 10 or 20 years. This concept of veganism and non-violence. Where you are in a place where you don't need to exploit an animal, why not like subscribe to that idea? Why are you bringing in all kinds of other things which are clearly not relevant in this context? But I think like to clarify, we don't believe that people here in those situations should have to be forced to be vegan. But there are small faction of the vegan movement who suggest that you should be vegan absolutely no matter what and like are against those kind of cases and are against any sort of animal exploitation.

So I feel like we as people are quite like nuanced in our thinking about that stuff. I think we've got an attitude that's like, yeah, there are some cases where it's impossible and we accept that. But there are some vegans who don't feel that way. Yeah, and I think they're just sometimes they're bonkers.

Often I just don't understand it, but like other times I think they're so angry and they are maybe misunderstood. And maybe the people on the other side who are like, how can Billie Eilish say this? This is Maybe they're just misunderstood and angry and what's coming out of their mouths doesn't actually represent what they feel. Billie Eilish thinks you can't love animals unless you're vegan and I'm really tired of hearing that. So I'm going to explain why that's really stupid logic. I donate to the animal shelter every month to show I love animals. So if you don't donate to the animal shelter every month, you don't love animals. The idea that eating plant-based is morally better is also I think bull because unless you're someone who's like living off the land, like your land, like you grew it, that's totally different. But someone has to like grow that strawberry you're eating.

They have to pick that strawberry, they have to ship that strawberry to whatever grocery, whatever Erewhon it is that we're purchasing it from. Unless you're eating like farm-to-table, like you know the farmer, there are people that are being exploited in the process of procuring you that strawberry. With the same logic, you can't claim to love

humanity or love people if you're participating in their exploitation. Why did Billie Eilish just spam post a bunch of animals getting abused like that was going to solve something? You just traumatized like thousands of people. I mean, isn't that the meat paradox in itself, right? It describes like the discomfort people are feeling or experiencing when they like to eat meat. They really don't want to think about what is required for that meat to be provided to them on their plates, right?

And I think people normalize this in multitudes of ways, right? Brock Bastian, who kind of coined this term meat paradox, said that this comes with like the four ends, right? The first is natural, like it's natural to do this.

Animals eat animals, right? We've evolved to eat meat. It's normal. Everybody does it. It's necessary. We need protein to survive. We need meat.

How to advocate for veganism more effectively

And it's nice. It tastes good. I deserve it. All of those are very ego-driven. And I think oftentimes with behavior change, the crux of changing someone's behavior has to come from them breaking their ego, you know? It can't come from somebody else telling them what's being reflected in their response. It's your ego that's talking here. And with veganism, there is that hopeful potential death to ego that we all experience, right? Or at least we aim for. It's the normalization of the need for it, the want for it, the desire for it that doesn't align. And again, it falls into that whole cognitive dissonance aspect. So, it's a matter of how we converse with others to break that way of thinking. And so, I think that's what this is all about. It's not what Billie said, it's almost like how she said it and how it landed for everybody. It hurt. When that insult is exacerbated on media, it stinks. I'm so sure that if she was having a longer discussion on a podcast, it was just like a quick question. And I'm so sure that if she was having a discussion like this with us, she would be saying the same things. I don't think she believes that every single person in the world has to and can be vegan. I don't think she thinks that. >> And she's not arguing that she comes from a privileged place. I mean, Billie is been vegetarian since birth and went vegan at 12. She comes from privilege. There is no doubt about that. That's not the only reason why she's vegan. From that privilege came education, access to understanding, which launched her vegan advocacy. And also her mom, who's a major vegan activist and has helped her make her tour more vegan, lower the carbon footprint, have vegan meals available at the tour dates. They're doing amazing stuff. They are trying to be forward-thinking and trying to make it accessible for everyone. You know, the judgment of like, "Oh, well, she's so privileged so she couldn't understand." She's doing what she can to actually have a big impact and to help other people also make that choice. That was something that British actress Jameela Jamil said in response to Billie Eilish. I don't know if you've seen it. She has access, she says here, to the best food and a lifestyle where she's too busy to prepare that food, someone else can. So, she might not be in tune with how few people can actually afford good vegan protein that isn't highly processed, which is bad for people as the body can't digest it properly. And you know, she's talking about other health issues that people can have, foods that are high in histamine, people living with mast cell. But she's like saying, you know, we should shame the farming industry and their practices and they do need to do better, but we shouldn't be pushing it onto the people that are consuming that stuff cuz it's actually a systemic issue. That's kind of what I got from it. Is that what you got that she was trying to say? Having read it now, yeah, but it's still not that clear. What Jameela is saying is true that the farming industry obviously is abhorrent and like the way industrial agriculture is shouldn't be how it is. I don't think we should keep participating in it while it is so bad expecting it to get better cuz surely that just drives demand, right? I get obviously she's saying Billie's privileged, so Billie doesn't have the same circumstances as other people. For the people who do, if you just keep buying from a system that you don't agree with, doesn't that send a signal to that system to just keep going and never change? >> Listen, I I think they both come from a space of privilege, but they also both speak from a place of advocacy for those that are, you know, less fortunate. I think that there's a need to neutralize what's been happening. I don't know why it's going to pass on its own. Let's be honest, the media picks up something, it's going to find something else to sink its teeth into, no pun intended. I don't know why we're going up in arms about this, to be quite honest. We're talking about a very vocal vegan advocate with millions of followers who has done everything. She's actually worked with my colleague at Greener by Default, her mother at Support and Feed, to help, like you said, green her events. And so, it's understanding how they're implementing default nudge-based strategies to encourage her fans in ways to eat more plant-based. And the difference between that aspect and what she said publicly is just that. One's a nudge, done quietly, it's just setting up the system for consumers to see things in ways that they are predicated to pick more plant-based options. They don't feel like they're being sold a lie. They don't feel like they're being taken advantage

of. They're buying tickets to go to her concerts, they love her music, and they know that she's vegan. They know they've been touting, Support and Feed has been touting that they've been doing this greening of their events and concerts. People are still buying tickets that aren't vegan, and they're purchasing food while they're there. So, what's the biggest difference? She said it how it is, basically, instead of being like, "Hey, try this. Maybe it" Do you know what I mean? She just was blunt. She vocally said, "You can't love animals and eat them." She made consumers feel bad about their choices, right? And that's the crux of it. That's not going to change someone's behavior. And what we see is people double down. They dig their heels in. They'll eat double the meat for every vegan. That does it, right? You've heard that argument. So, I think there's a way that could share the message more effectively to bait more people into seeing what she really sees. And it's not baiting, but it kind of is. You have to feed crumbs. Yeah, but I guess she also just got frustrated and she was just like, "This is annoying. I want to say it." And yeah, she stands by it. We love Billie, always love Billie. Love her for who she is. I love her music, and we PBN stand behind you.