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I'm not one of those vegans. I'm a vegetarian. I think it's a mistake to confuse what I eat with who I am.

It's okay to be an –ist
AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE ABANDONMENT OF COHERENT SPEECH

One of the greatest dangers we face is that of spinning ourselves into a world of labels. We are told that we must define ourselves in order to be understood. But these labels are not just arbitrary, they are essential to our identity. They help us to understand ourselves and others.

There are two main ways in which labels can be used. The first is as a definitive label, where the term is used to define something. For example, if someone says they are a vegetarian, they are defining themselves as someone who chooses not to eat meat.

The second way in which labels can be used is as a descriptive label, where the term is used to describe something. For example, someone might say they are a feminist, meaning they support gender equality.

It's important to recognize the difference between these two types of labels. Definitive labels are rigid and can restrict our ability to think outside of the box. Descriptive labels, on the other hand, are more fluid and allow for flexibility.

In my opinion, it's best to use descriptive labels. It's okay to be an –ist, as long as we understand that it's just a label and not a definition of who we are.

Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness
www.tangledwilderness.org
A young couple walked into a restaurant, out on their first date. The first man pulled the chair out for the second man and they began to search their menus.

“Should we get the duck?” asked the first man to the second.

“Oh no, I don’t eat meat.” The second man replied.

“My apologies. Then perhaps the pasta parmesan?”

“Hrm... no... how about the pasta marinara, and no cheese?”

“Oh? Are you vegan then?”

“No, but I don’t eat animal products.”

“How is that different than vegan?” the first man inquired curiously.

“Because unlike some people, I don’t define myself based on my dietary choices.”

“I see.”

To be interested in an –ism or to be an –ist ought to be much the same. When I speak of the historical and present-day domination of women by men, I am advocating feminism. Perhaps I am a feminist. But this is an abstraction of the wrenching in my gut when I overhear domestic abuse, when I see the Girl’s Gone Wild tour bus drive up to a cheering crowd.

The slander against ever using an –ism or –ist is mind-boggling (and was first found among right-wing reactionaries!). I suggest that the next time you hear said slander, you ask whether they are opposed of all formation of nouns or adjectives from verbs, or merely those which trigger a defensive reaction due to the speaker’s inability to see a world that is not composed of boxes.

“In the United States of the mid-nineteenth century, the phrase “the isms” was used as a collective derogatory term to lump together the radical social reform movements of the day (including as slavery abolitionism, feminism, and early socialism, among others.) [thanks wikipedia!]"