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# **Journal for Critical Animal Studies**

Journal for Critical  
Animal Studies

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## JCAS Volume VIII, Issue 1/2, 2010

<b>EDITORIAL BOARD .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EDITORIAL.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ESSAYS</b>	
<b>"Green" Eggs and Ham? The Myth of Sustainable Meat and the Danger of the Local</b> <i>Vasile Stănescu .....</i>	<b>8</b>
<b>My Pet Needs Philosophy: Ambiguity, Capabilities and the Welfare of Domestic Dogs</b> <i>Heather Hillsburg .....</i>	<b>33</b>
<b>From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions: Reframing the Conflict between the</b> <b>Autistic Pride and Animal Rights Movements</b> <i>Daniel Salomon.....</i>	<b>47</b>
<b>EXTENDED ESSAYS</b>	
<b>The Love Whose Name Cannot be Spoken: Queering the Human-Animal Bond</b> <i>Carmen Dell'Aversano .....</i>	<b>73</b>
<b>Animal Absolutes: Liberation Sociology's Missing Links</b> <b>Part II of II essays on animals and normative sociology</b> <i>David Sztybel .....</i>	<b>126</b>
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>Abolition a Multi-Tactical Movement Strategy</b> <i>Anthony J. Nocella, II .....</i>	<b>176</b>
<b>Healing Our Cuts</b> <i>Anthony J Nocella II .....</i>	<b>184</b>
<b>PROTEST SUMMARY</b>	
<b>! For the abolition of the bullfight, the people took the streets ;</b> <i>Center of Abolitionist Studies for Animal Liberation .....</i>	<b>188</b>

**INTERVIEWS**

**Interview with Anthony J. Nocella, II on Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic Industrial Complex (co-edited with Steven Best and Peter McLaren, AK Press, 2010)**

*Richard J White*.....192

**Interview with animal liberation activist and former political prisoner Peter Young**

*Laura Shields* .....199

**Interview with author, anarchist and feminist Abbey Willis**

*Laura Shields* .....204

**CONFERENCES**

**9th Annual Conference for Critical Animal Studies, SUNY Cortland, New York**

*Sarat Colling* .....209

**1st Annual European Conference for Critical Animal Studies, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom**

*Jessica Groling* .....212

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Animal Encounters**

*Reviewed by Amy L. Fletcher*.....216

**Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs: An Inside Look At The Modern Poultry Industry**

*Reviewed by Dylan Ravenfox*.....222

**FILM REVIEWS**

**The Cove (2009)**

*Reviewed by Laura Shields* .....226

**Disgrace (2008)**

*Reviewed by Jacqueline Dalziell* .....231

**AUTHOR GUIDELINES**.....241

## EDITORIAL

The raison d'être of the Journal for Critical Animal Studies is to promote, encourage, support and enable the publication of high quality research and writing that clearly develops the dynamic field of critical animal studies. To do this more effectively the Journal has always actively sought new ways of making itself ever more accessible, relevant and influential across a diverse range of academic, activist, policy making, and public communities. For this reason you will see several major changes in this Issue that we have introduced in order to encourage an expansive critical focus on issues, events and discussions, many of which take place *beyond the academy*.

The familiar face of JCAS, with an emphasis on promoting scholarly peer-reviewed articles, book and film reviews is still firmly in place. The opening **Essay**, "*Green" Eggs and Ham? The Myth of Sustainable Meat and the Danger of the Local*" by Vasile Stănescu developed out of a paper that Vasile presented at the Critical Animal Studies Conference and the Minding Animal Conference in Australia last year. At the Minding Animal Conference the paper won the award for the best graduate student paper. The essay confidentially identifies and lays bare the faulty reasoning that underpins the increasingly popular locavore movement, and makes explicit the need for truly progressive causes to seriously consider the intersections of speciesism, gender, race, class and citizenship on the national and global level.

Focusing on the complex relationships that exist between human "owners" and companion animals, *My Pet Needs Philosophy: Ambiguity, Capabilities and the Welfare of Domestic Dogs* tackles several problematic philosophical questions that surround issues of (non-human) free will and the satisfying of individual preferences. Skilfully harnessing a discussion around Martha Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities and Simone de Beauvoir's conception of morality, Heather Hillsberg concludes by suggesting a constructive range of practical outcomes for dog "owners" in particular to consider, not least the need to explicitly engage in a more expansive dialogical ethic of care.

Daniel Solomon's *From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions: Reframing the Conflict between the Autistic Price and Animal Rights Movement* explores some of the key tensions

that exist between the autistic pride movement and the animal rights movement. One of the central barriers occurs through the uncritical and popular use of the 'argument from marginal cases', which Daniel takes time to unpack and critique in this essay. In recognising the way in which marginal cases in its current use marginalises people, the essay concludes by focusing on the need to harness more inclusive and empowered strategies between those groups involved in fighting for animal rights.

The Journal also includes two excellent **Extended Essays**. The first *The Love Whose Name Cannot be Spoken: Queering the Human-Animal Bond*, by Carmen Dell'Aversano is unashamedly ambitious and uncompromising in both content and outlook and represents the very best and most progressive aspects of contemporary critical animal studies. Beginning with a convincing critique of language and the way language acts as common tool of oppression for both humans and other animals, Carmen juxtaposes the radical fields of queer and animal rights in a convincing and persuasive manner. This highly original approach leads to a rich and complex range of insights and arguments that frames animal rights from a range of queer perspectives. In the conclusion the paper reflects on the role of love: love that, intrinsically, is simultaneously a queer and revolutionary force. The extended essay is superbly written from start to finish, and I believe that it will make tremendous impact on future approaches to this under-researched intersection. Once again the key arguments given in this extended essay serve to expose the naivety or wilful ignorance of those who continue to subscribe to the false belief that human rights and animal rights operate in two mutually exclusive and separate spheres.

*Animal Absolutes: Liberation Sociology's Missing Links, Part II of II essays on animals and normative sociology* is an exceptionally well crafted and meticulously argued contribution to the critical animal studies literature. In Part II, David Sztybel critically discusses the question of positive normative sociology, and skilfully develops a persuasive case that normative ethics, and contrary to popular opinion, can indeed be "scientific". This rigorous discussion draws on a characteristically wide range of disciplines and ideas, explicitly orientating its discussion through a series of themes ranging from 'The Sense of Moral Absolutism', 'Liberation Sociology', and 'Anti-Intuitionism' before building an extensive case for the absolutist moral theory of best caring. As David points out, the need to establish a Liberation Sociology is far removed from being a purely academic, indulgent exercise. Rather such a project makes a central and fundamental commitment to responding to the global crises that

harbour enormously destructive implications for humans, other animals and the environment. Ultimately, as David argues, liberation studies needs to help ethics and not domineering exploitative profiteers to “carry the day”,

Beyond the essays and extended essays, the issue expands to embrace new uncharted territories. As highlighted in the opening paragraph, the inclusion of explicit sections dedicated to 'Commentary', 'Protest Summaries', 'Interviews' and 'Conferences' is intended to make the Journal more relevant to grassroots animal activists, and other social movements, and in doing so challenge the expectations of "the Journal" to be the domain of academic 'ivory-tower' thinkers. Encouragingly, the responses that followed the invitation to submit material for these 'new' areas has been extremely strong, and have brought to the foreground a range of exciting and inspiring areas that invite further reflection and critical discussion.

The **Commentary** features two timely and important articles by Anthony J Nocella II, namely *Abolition as a Multi-Tactical Movement Strategy*, and *Healing our Cuts*, in which Anthony focuses on the causes of conflict within social-based movements, and how to transform conflict into positive and constructive outcomes. The **Protest Summary**, provided by the Center of Abolitionist Studies for Animal Liberation focuses on the anti-bullfighting demonstrations held in Bogota Colombia in February 2010. The demonstrations are inspiring on so many levels, not least as they explicitly highlight the very real merits and virtues of actively making direct positive and inclusive links with other social struggles; links which can serve to both politicise the animal rights movements and "veganize" the political agenda of those who struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The **Interviews** start with a conversation between Anthony J. Nocella II and myself, in which we discuss the recently released book: *Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic Industrial Complex*. This is then followed by two excellent interviews by Laura Shields, first with animal activist Peter Young, and second with the anarchist activist and feminist Abbey Willis. Both interviewees are invited to share their thoughts and reactions to the highly controversial "pieing" of author Lierre Keith at the 2010 San Francisco Anarchist BookFair.

April 2010 was an important month for the Institute for Critical Animal Studies with two prestigious, international ICAS conferences taking place in the USA and the UK. The first of these excellent conferences, the *9th Annual CAS Conference* was held on April 10th At

SUNY Cortland, New York. An insight into the many successes of the conference is found in the **Conference** section, and written by Sarat Colling. The second conference, which took place at the University of Liverpool on 23 April was a landmark occasion for many reasons, and not least as it was the first CAS conference to be held in Europe. Jessica Groling has provided an informative commentary on the programme and contributions that the conference harnessed.

The conclusion to this issue brings the reader back to familiar JCAS territory - the Book and Film Reviews. In the **Book Reviews** Amy L. Fletcher favourably reviews *Animal Encounters* as does Dylan Ravenfox in his review of *Prisioned Chickens, Posioned Eggs: An Inside Look at the Modern Poultry Industry* by Karen Davis. The issue is completed by two **Film Reviews**. The first of these focuses on the award winning documentary-film, "*The Cove*" and is reviewed by Laura Shield. The second review, undertaken by Jacqueline Dalziell focuses on the 2008 film "*Disgrace*", which is based on the highly influential 1999 Booker Prize work of the same name by J.M. Coetzee.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

**Dr. Richard J White**  
**Editor-in-Chief**



## ESSAYS

### "Green" Eggs and Ham? The Myth of Sustainable Meat and the Danger of the Local

Vasile Stănescu<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

In the New York Times bestseller, *The Omnivores Dilemma*, Michael Pollan popularizes the idea of a "local" based diet, which he justifies, in part, in terms of environmental sustainability. In fact, many locavores argue that a local based diet is more environmentally sustainable than a vegan or vegetarian diet and concludes that if vegans and vegetarians truly care about the environment they should instead eat sustainably raised local meat. However locavores are incorrect in their analysis of the sustainability of a local based diet and in its applicability for large scale adaptation. Instead locavores engage in the construction of "a literary pastoral," a desire to return to a nonexistent past, which falsely romanticizes the ideals of a local based lifestyle. They therefore gloss over the issues of sexism, racism, speciesism, homophobia and anti-immigration sentiments which an emphasis only on the local, as opposed to the global, can entail. In this manner the locavorism movement has come to echo many of the same claims that the "Buy American" movement did before it. The conclusion is that a local based diet, while raising many helpful and valid points, needs to be re-understood and rearticulated.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing I ask Salatin when we sit down in his living room is whether he's ever considered becoming a vegetarian. It's not what I had planned to say, but we've been in the hoop houses with the nicely treated hens, all happily pecking and glossy-feathered, and I've held one in my arms. Suddenly it makes little sense that this animal, whose welfare has been of such great concern, will be killed in a matter of days. Naive, I know, and Salatin seems surprised. "Never crossed my mind," he says... Salatin is hitting his stride now. "We tried heritage chickens for

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<sup>1</sup> Vasile Stănescu is a PhD Candidate in the Program in Modern Thought and Literature at Stanford University. He is also Co-Senior Editor of the *Critical Animal Studies* Book Series published by Rodopi Press and was just named "Tykes Scholar of the Year" by the Institute of Critical Animal Studies. This paper, in an earlier version, won the "Best Graduate Student Paper" at the first annual *Minding Animals* Conference in Australia. He can be contacted at [vts@stanford.edu](mailto:vts@stanford.edu)

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Ursula K. Heise Ph.D., Katherine Downey Ph.D., Carol J. Adams, Adam Rosenblatt, James Stănescu, Pamela Stănescu, and Deborah Stănescu who all read over earlier versions of this paper and provide useful feedback and commentary. I would also like to thank the *Minding Animals* Conference organizers and participants as well as the *Journal of Critical Animal Studies* for their feedback and support. All errors are, of course, my own.

three years and we couldn't sell 'em. I mean, we could sell a couple. But at the end of the day, altruism doesn't pay our taxes.<sup>3</sup>”

- Interview by the *Guardian* (Sunday 31 January 2010, 44)

I think there is an enormous amount of political power lying around on the food issue, and I am just waiting for the right politician to realize that this is a great family issue. If that politician is on the Right, all the better. I think that would be terrific, and I will support him or her.

- Michael Pollan, Interview with Rod Dreher, *The American Conservative*, June 20, 2008

## Introduction

In 2007 Oxford University Press chose “Locavore” as the word of the year<sup>4</sup>. Such a move, while purely symbolic, at the same time speaks to the movement’s growing popularity and emerging significance in any discussion on food policy, environmentalism or animal ethics. The essence of the locavore argument is that because it is harmful to the environment to transport food over long distances (referred to as “food miles”) people should instead, for primarily environmental reasons, choose to consume only food which is grown or slaughtered “locally.” This idea of “locavorism” has been described and defended by a range of authors; such as Barbara Kingsolver in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Michael Pollan in his *New York Times* bestselling book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, as well as enunciated by Joel Salatin, the owner of Polyface farms and a featured personality in both *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and the recent documentary *Food Inc.* However, despite this popularity, there is much I find deeply troubling in each of these texts and their ultimate justification for locavorism. For example part of Pollan’s main argument against “organic” meat is that it represents a false pastoral narrative, something produced by the power of well crafted words and images yet lacking ethical consistency, reality, or ultimately an awareness of animals themselves. He describes these problems, and his own motivation in addressing them, while shopping at Whole Foods:

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<sup>3</sup> Salatin’s answer as to why he does not use “heritage” birds (*i.e.* birds that have not been bred for such traits as abnormally large breasts)

<sup>4</sup>“Oxford Word Of The Year: Locavore” *Oxford University Press Blog*  
<http://blog.oup.com/2007/11/locavore/> Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

This particular dairy's label had a lot to say about the bovine lifestyle: Its Holsteins are provided with "an appropriate environment, including shelter and comfortable resting area...sufficient space, proper facilities and the company of its own kind." All this sounded pretty great, until I read the story of another dairy selling raw milk—*completely* unprocessed—whose "cows graze green pastures all year long."

Which made me wonder whether the first dairy's idea of an appropriate environment for a cow included, as I had simply presumed, a pasture. All of a sudden the absence from their story of that word seemed weirdly conspicuous. As the literary critics would say, the writer seemed to be eliding the whole notion of cows and grass. Indeed, the longer I shopped in Whole Foods, the more I thought that this was a place where the skills of a literary critic might come in handy. (2008: 135-136)

However, while I agree with Pollan about the need for literary critics in Whole Foods, I fear many locavore advocates, including Pollan in his own text, suffer from the same flaws of creating an unrealistic literary pastoral, which he attributes to the free-range organic farmer. Hence, as a literary critic, I hope to provide to the locavore movement what they have given to others and to view their work as a text in order to reveal the manner in which they too, create an idealized, unrealistic, and, at times, distressingly sexist and xenophobic literary pastoral which allows them, much as with the first organic dairy farm, to seem to raise the issue of care for actual animals even as they elide the issue of the animal herself. My intention is not to discount the possibility of a more natural, environmentally sustainable food system—a goal I deeply support—but instead to reveal the potential dangers that focusing purely on the "local," at the expense of the global, can contain for both the human and non-human animal alike.

## **Part I: The Environment**

### **The Vegan Utopia**

Tellingly, one of the most forceful rationales for the environmental benefits of a "local" food system is expressed by Michael Pollan in a chapter of the *Omnivore's Dilemma* titled "The ethics of eating meat." Under the pejorative subheading "The Vegan Utopia" Pollan writes:

The vegan utopia would also condemn people in many parts of the country to importing all their food from distant places. ...To give up eating animals is to give up these places as human habitat, unless of course we are willing to make complete our dependence on a highly industrialized national food chain. The food chain would be in turn even more dependent than it already is on fossil fuels and chemical fertilizers, since food would need to travel even farther and fertility—in the form of manures—would be in short supply. Indeed, it is doubtful you can build a genuinely sustainable agriculture without animals to cycle nutrients and support local food production. If our concern is the health of nature—rather than, say, the internal consistency of our moral code or the condition of our souls—then eating animals may sometimes be the most ethical thing to do. (2008: 327)

In essence, then, Pollan takes one of the animal rights' movement's most powerful arguments--the significant environmental degradation that the meat industry routinely produces-- and inverts it<sup>5</sup>. It is now, according to Pollan, *because* of the environment that one is justified in eating meat, indeed required to do so, since the only alternative given by Pollan is a polluting globalization of large scale food importation. Indeed, the argument, if true, is even more powerful than quoted here. If eating locally slaughtered animals is the only way to prevent global warming, animal ethics itself might well dictate the necessity of eating meat because habitat destruction (in part fuelled by global warming) is already causing mass species extinction at unprecedented rates. Such an argument, therefore, represents a particularly powerful and nuanced refutation to veganism and vegetarianism that I fear few animal rights activist, or animal studies scholars, have yet to adequately address.

However, before I engage in a more detailed analysis of Pollan's argument, the main problem with it is that it is simply factually untrue. What is most telling about the passage quoted above is that it lacks any form of citation or footnotes, forms of documentation which *do* pepper Pollan's books in other places of possible controversy. Pollan is far from alone in this omission, for virtually every other locavore claim for environmental supremacy also lacks any form of documentation to

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<sup>5</sup> Of course Pollan himself also indicates this same environmental degradation of factory farming and his claim is that small scale local farm will solve the problem. My point here is simply that Pollan inverts one of the most common claims made by animal rights' advocates.

back up repeated claims that being vegan is *more* harmful to the environment than eating locally slaughtered animals. Instead locavores, almost universally, rely upon the “commonsense logic” that since transportation harms the environment, the longer something has been transported, the more harmful, definitionally, it must be to the ecosystem. However, recent studies have brought this common sense wisdom into question. For example, a study conducted at Lincoln University in New Zealand shows that the way apples, lamb, and dairy items are produced in New Zealand makes them more energy-efficient to buy in the U.K. than those same products grown on British soil. The study concludes:

Food miles are a very simplistic concept relating to the distance food travels as a measure of its impact on the environment. As a concept, food miles has gained some traction with the popular press and certain groups overseas. However, this debate which only includes the distance food travels is spurious as it does not consider total energy use especially in the production of the product.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the only study to date to focus on whether a local or vegetarian diet is more helpful in reducing green house gases, conducted by Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews at Carnegie-Mellon, reached the following conclusion:

Despite significant recent public concern and media attention to the environmental impacts of food, few studies in the United States have systematically compared the life-cycle greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with food production against long-distance distribution, aka “food-miles.” We find that although food is transported long distances in general (1640 km delivery and 6760 km life-cycle supply chain on average) the GHG emissions associated with food are dominated by the production phase, contributing 83% of the average U.S. household’s 8.1 t CO<sub>2</sub>e/yr footprint for food consumption. Transportation as a whole represents only 11% of life-cycle GHG emissions, and final delivery from producer to retail contributes only 4%. Different food groups exhibit a large range in GHG-intensity; on average, red meat is around 150% more GHG intensive than chicken or fish. *Thus, we suggest that dietary shift can be a more effective means of lowering an average household’s food-related climate footprint than “buying local.” Shifting less than one day per week’s worth of calories from red meat and dairy*

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<sup>6</sup>Caroline Saunders, Andrew Barber, and Greg Taylor “Food Miles – Comparative Energy/Emissions Performance of New Zealand’s Agriculture Industry” *Research Report* No. 285 Lincoln University, New Zealand, July 2006. 93.

*products to chicken, fish, eggs, or a vegetable-based diet achieves more GHG reduction than buying all locally sourced food.*<sup>7</sup>

In other words, shifting from beef to vegetables for even a single day a week would in fact be more helpful in reducing greenhouse gases than shifting the entirety of one's diet to exclusively locally produced sources. This conclusion becomes less surprising when we consider the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change findings that meat production contributes more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire transportation industry, including all automobiles, combined<sup>8</sup>.

In fact, recent research suggests that organic free range animals may, in specific cases, be more harmful to the environment than animal raised "conventionally." As the Audubon society recently reported:

Ironically, data released in 2007 by Adrian Williams of Cranfield University in England show that when all factors are considered, organic, free-range chickens have a 20 percent greater impact on global warming than conventionally raised broiler birds. That's because "sustainable" chickens take longer to raise, and eat more feed. Worse, organic eggs have a 14 percent higher impact on the climate than eggs from caged chickens, according to Williams. "If we want to fight global warming through the food we buy, then one thing's clear: We have to drastically reduce the meat we consume," says Tara Garnett of London's Food Climate Research Network. So while some of us Americans fashionably fret over our food's travel budget and organic content, Garnett says the real question is, "Did it come from an animal or did it not come from an animal?"<sup>9</sup>

## **Lack of Land**

Moreover, while locavores imagine all factory farms eventually turning into more sustainable small-scale family farms, that ideal is simply not physically possible given

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<sup>7</sup>Christopher L. Weber, and H. Scott Matthews, "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States" *Environ. Sci. Technol.*, 42 (10), April 16 2008, (3508) Downloaded from <http://pubs.acs.org> on May 1, 2009. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Black "Shun meat, says UN climate chief: Livestock production has a bigger climate impact than transport, the UN believes" BBC New, June 7 2008 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7600005.stm>. See also the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United States (FAO) report *Livestock's Long Shadow*.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Tidwell, "The Low-Carbon Diet" *AudubonMagazine.org* Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

the world's current rate of meat consumption. According the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's recent report *Livestock's Long Shadow*, over fifty-five billion land animals are raised and slaughtered every year worldwide for human consumption. This rate of slaughter already consumes thirty percent of the earth's entire land surface (approximately 3,433 billion hectares) and accounts for a staggering eighty percent of the total land utilized by humans (Steinfeld *et al*, xxi). Even when the land currently used for feed crop production is subtracted, as theoretically it might be in a fully local farm system, the total area *currently* occupied by grazing alone still constitutes, in the words of the report "26 percent of the ice-free terrestrial surface of the planet" (Steinfeld *et al*, 2006: xxi). And this number is only expected to grow as both human population and human consumption of meat and dairy continue to rise.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in addition to problems of sustainability, meat consumption also entails a massive loss of biodiversity which, ironically, would actually be *increased* by a shift to a locally based diet, as even more land would have to be set aside for free-range grazing. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization report, "306 of the 825 terrestrial ecoregions identified by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)...reported livestock as one of the current threats." (Steinfeld *et al*, 2006: xxiii)

Nor would it be possible to keep such farms small, tied to the community, or even "local" in any meaningful sense of that term. As Joel Salatin himself admits to Pollan, in explaining why he primarily uses neighbors coming over to help out to kill the animals he raises: "That's another reason we don't raise a hundred thousand chickens. It's not just the land that couldn't take it, but the community, too. We'd be processing six days a week, so we'd have to do what the industrial folks do, bring in a bunch of migrant workers because no one around here would want to gut chickens every day. *Scale makes all the difference*" (2008: 230, emphasis added). I will return to Salatin's

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<sup>10</sup> "Growing populations and incomes, along with changing food preferences, are rapidly increasing demand for livestock products, while globalization is boosting trade in livestock inputs and products. Global production of meat is projected to more than double from 229 million tones in 1999/01 to 465 million tones in 2050, and that of milk to grow from 580 to 1,043 million tones. "(Steinfeld *et al*, xx) To be fair Pollan has himself, in his most recent work, started to make calls for people to decrease their meat consumption. However these calls are both not stringent enough and not echoed in the wider movement. Given the exponential rate of projected increase for meat consumption, what is need is a significantly long term and cross the board decrease of the number of animals raised and killed for slaughter.

comment about “migrant workers” later, but my point here is that locally based meat, regardless of its level of popularity, can never constitute more than either a rare and occasional novelty item, or food choices for only a few privileged customers, since there simply is not enough arable land left in the entire world to raise large quantities of pasture fed animals necessary to meet the world’s meat consumption. And even if such a transition were physically possible, the resulting size of such farms would undo much of their supposed sustainability and community integration and hence their very purpose in existing in the first place. Unfortunately, this simple physical reality is ignored by many in the locavore movement, such as Barbara Kingsolver, who tells her children that they cannot have fresh fruit, during the winter, but instead must consume meat because it is, purportedly, more sustainable (2007: 33).

### **Belgium Chocolate**

Indeed, one is left with the feeling that local food activists themselves must realize the lack of environmental benefit as many of them fail to follow the practices which they themselves advocate with any version of environmental consistency. For example, in preparing his local based meal on Polyface farms, Pollan admits, “I also need some chocolate for the dessert I had in mind. Fortunately the state of Virginia produces no chocolate to speak of, so I was free to go for the good Belgian stuff, panglessly” (2008: 263). While this line of reasoning might make sense in terms of other arguments for going local, such as preserving local economies, in terms of global warming and green house gases it is clearly not intellectually consistent. Even if, for some unspecified reason, chocolate was essential for Pollan to have, it is not at all clear why that chocolate would have to come from *Belgium* instead of any of the more local sources of chocolate from within the whole of the United States (which also might be more effective in terms of preserving local economies). Indeed, most of the locavores mentioned continue to enjoy a variety of nonlocal based goods such as coffee, tea, olive oil, and, in my favorite example from Kingsolver, non-locally produced Budweiser (2008: 151).



Nor does Joel Salatin, the owner of Polyface farms whom Pollan holds up as a possible model, make much consistent environmental sense. For example, he refuses to fed-ex any of his meat since he says, “I don’t believe it’s sustainable—or organic, if you will—to FedEx meat all around the country” (2008: 133) and instead tells Pollan that he will have to “drive down here” to Virginia to get it (ibid). But *driving*, in individual cars, particularly from California to Virginia, is a significantly less effective form of transporting goods (think of all the extra steel) than a single fully loaded delivery vehicle. And Salatin is, in fact, proud of how far individual people will drive in order to purchase his food. As he posts on his own website, as a positive review from a customer, “I drive to Polyface 150 miles one way in order to get clean meat for my family.”<sup>11</sup> Hence romantic notions of face-to-face contact, perhaps even the great American road trip, seem to play a greater role in the Pollan-Salatin encounter than any environmental logic.

Indeed, one of the revealing ironies associated with all of the locavores mentioned is the surprisingly large amount of driving, flying, and transportation they themselves regularly and apparently “panglessly” engage in. For example, Michael Pollan travels all around the country, from Kansas to California just within in the pages of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*; Kingsolver is even more extreme, leaving by car from Arizona so that that she can farm in rural Georgia, then driving all the way to Canada (from Georgia) for a family vacation, which she particularly enjoys because she is now able to consume so many food products which otherwise would have been out of season. As she writes, “Like those jet-setters who fly across the country on New Year’s Eve, we were going to cheat time and celebrate the moment more than once. Asparagus season, twice in one year: the dream vacation” (2007: 158). Kingsolver and her family even fly to Europe, in part, to enjoy the local cuisine (2007: 243). And Joel Salatin, who was unwilling to ship his meat to California, recently agreed to fly there himself for a talk at Stanford. Ironically, the talk was, in part, on the environmental benefits of a local economy. Perhaps a certain amount of irony and hypocrisy within the locavore movement can be justified by the argument that while still far from fully realized, it is on the path towards ever greater locavorism. What is distressing is the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.polyfacefarms.com/story.aspx> Last accessed April 1, 2001.

manner in which violation of even the basic ideas of locally based lifestyle occur “panglessly” and the manner in which the movement justifies itself via actions more harmful for the environment than the current food system, such as driving to purchase far away local produce, and enjoying out of season food in Canada and Europe.

### **T-Shirts and DVD’s**

Moreover, the aspect which most clearly belies all the reasons purportedly given to justify the locavore movement-- not just in terms of the environment, but also in terms of protecting local business and protesting against the abuses of globalization-- is that it resolutely focuses *only on the question of food*. Neither Pollan, nor Kingsolver, nor even Salatin, is attempting to learn how to weave their own clothing, although cotton, as an agricultural commodity, raises many of the same issues as imported food. For example, the journal *Environmental Health Perspective* recently documented similarities in the environmental effects of the food industry and the fashion industry, in terms of both pollution and worker exploitation. According to the article:

Cotton, one of the most popular and versatile fibers used in clothing manufacture, also has a significant environmental footprint. This crop accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United States, the largest exporter of cotton in the world, according to the USDA. The U.S. cotton crop benefits from subsidies that keep prices low and production high. The high production of cotton at subsidized low prices is one of the first spokes in the wheel that drives the globalization of fashion.

Much of the cotton produced in the United States is exported to China and other countries with low labor costs, where the material is milled, woven into fabrics, cut, and assembled according to the fashion industry’s specifications. China has emerged as the largest exporter of fast fashion, accounting for 30% of world apparel exports, according to the UN Commodity Trade Statistics database. In her 2005 book *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*, Pietra Rivoli, a professor of international business at the McDonough School of Business of Georgetown University, writes that each year Americans purchase approximately 1billion garments made in China, the equivalent of four pieces of clothing for every U.S. citizen. (A450)

Hence, at least in terms of “miles,” cotton is actually a more egregious example than food. Nor is this the end of the “clothing miles” as the United States purchases so

much clothing that domestic charity outlets simply cannot process it all.<sup>12</sup> So the extra clothing is then shipped *back* to the developing world (where in most cases it was originally manufactured), which for some developing countries actually constitutes the number one import from the United States.<sup>13</sup> A single cotton t-shirt, then, comes from cotton grown in the United States, is sent to the developing world to be manufactured into clothing, then back to the United States to be purchased, and finally shipped to the developing country where the clothing is either donated or purchased. And what is true for cotton is equally true for almost every other product regularly consumed in the United States. Almost every item currently is both produced and consumed in a global marketplace and is therefore part of these exact same systems of production and distribution. In terms of shipping distance it is just as significant to discuss “clothing miles” “computer miles” or even “cell phone miles,” many of which are actually transported far longer distances than food and are far more toxic in their results. And in terms of non-environmental concerns, working conditions for many non-agricultural products may well be worse than for the more traditional rural labor of farming (excluding certain products such as coffee and chocolate)<sup>14</sup>. My point here is not to criticize locavores unfairly for minor hypocrisy or failures of judgment which do not undermine the logic of the argument itself. Rather, my concern is that a narrow-minded focus on only “food” and “food miles” renders invisible many other environmentally unsound practices, whether they are conscious decisions to drive around in search of the best local food, or unconscious participation in the consumption of non-food goods with an environmental and human cost. For example, in Salatin’s online “gift store” in less than four lines he both states that “We do not ship food items, anytime, anywhere, period” and, at the same time,

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<sup>12</sup> “Only about one-fifth of the clothing donated to charities is directly used or sold in their thrift shops. Says Rivoli, ‘There are nowhere near enough people in America to absorb the mountains of castoffs, even if they were given away.’” (A450)

<sup>13</sup> “Clothing that is not considered vintage or high-end is baled for export to developing nations. Data from the International Trade Commission indicate that between 1989 and 2003, American exports of used clothing more than tripled, to nearly 7 billion pounds per year. Used clothing is sold in more than 100 countries. For Tanzania, where used clothing is sold at the *mitumba* markets that dot the country, these items are the number one import from the United States.” (A452)

<sup>14</sup> For example in the case of clothing “According to figures from the U.S. National Labor Committee, some Chinese workers make as little as 12–18 cents per hour working in poor conditions. And with the fierce global competition that demands ever lower production costs, many emerging economies are aiming to get their share of the world’s apparel markets, even if it means lower wages and poor conditions for workers.” (A450)

advertises for all nonfood based products, such as tote bags and DVD's<sup>15</sup>, that "All shipping is free! Please allow 2-4 weeks for delivery." There is no discussion of how, where, or by whom any of these other products have been made. Therefore a vegan who drastically decreased her consumption of nonagricultural products, particularly electronic products, wore clothing purchased from second hand shops, and made sure that all of her waste was disposed of in an ethically consistent manner would, in fact, be a far more effective "locavore" even if the entirety of her diet were imported from other countries.

## **Part II: The Danger of the Local**

### **Blood and Soil**

If being local is not then "really" about protecting the environment, what is it about? One answer is suggested by Professor Ursula Heise, of Stanford University, in her recent text *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Heise illustrates how the emphasis on "the local" within the broader environmental movement as a whole can possess a deeply disturbing strain of conservatism, provincialism, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. Indeed, she even goes so far as to excavate genealogically the Nazi's emphasis on *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil), and the bizarre manner in which they interwove calls for environmentalism with a hyper-nationalism based on a romanticized *autochthonous* relationship with both the soil and the local. Of course none of these arguments, by either Professor Heise or me, is meant to suggest the locavore movement, or the local move in environmentalism, possesses any connection with Nazism. It is meant rather to speak to my fear that an outspoken concern for the environment can also contain and support conservatism against those viewed as alien to the speaker's sense of his/her "local" community. Specifically, I believe that many in the locavore

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<sup>15</sup> According to the Environmental Protection Agency, DVD's are a particularly egregious source of e-waste pollution since they derive from rare mined earth materials, are virtually impossible to recycle, leach into water supplies, and produce toxic results for both the environment and human health. Furthermore, as flyer made by the EPA for school children tries to explain "Once discs are packaged, they are ready to be sent to distribution centers, retail outlets, or other locations. Transportation by plane, truck, or rail requires the use of fossil fuels for energy, which contribute to climate change."

movement are moved by a desire for a nonexistent literary pastoral, of a wholly inaccurate nostalgia for a by-gone age. For example, Pollan invokes precisely this image in his description of his first wholly local dinner at Polyface farms “much about dining with the Salatins had, for me, the flavor of a long-ago time and faraway place in America” (2008: 203). However, the danger of this literary pastoral fairytale is not only that it is wholly inaccurate (the Salatins use ATV’s daily to move around their cattle) but that it also possesses the potential to mask the darker side of the nostalgic past that an exclusive focus on “the local” likewise elides.

### **Women in the Kitchen**

For example, since locavores choose to focus, unscientifically, only on the question of food, that focus blends over into negative portrayal of women and particularly feminists, who are frequently portrayed as culprits because of their decision, supposedly, to no longer to cook. And, following logically from this first claim, there is tendency to argue for the return of traditional gender roles of heterosexual men farming and ranching while heterosexual women cook and clean. For example, both Michael Pollan and the movie *Food Inc.* specifically hold up Joel Salatin and Polyface farms as a possible template for a local based economy. But what Pollan does not tell us (and may himself have failed to realize) is that Salatin believes so firmly in traditional gender roles that in the past he did not even accept women as workers or interns for the farm labor aspect of his farm although they could work in the kitchen.<sup>16</sup> Salatin’s attitude—that the proper place for women is in the kitchen and that their role has somehow been “lost”—surfaced in a recent interview:

Hey, 40 years ago, every woman in the country – I’ll be real sexist here – every woman in the country knew how to cut up a chicken... Now 60% of

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.irregularartimes.com/polyface.html> accessed May 1st, 2009. Note: this may be changing due to outside pressure. However it was certainly the case when Pollan attended the farm. Indeed the website, while stating that they will accept six men and two women, still reads at the beginning “An extremely intimate relationship, the apprenticeships offer young men the opportunity to live and work with the Salatin’s.” (emphasis added). It is unclear how many, if any, women have been allowed to serve in the farm labor aspect of the apprenticeship.

our customers don't even know that a chicken has bones! I'm serious. We have moved to an incredibly ignorant culinary connection.<sup>17</sup>

Barbara Kingsolver, too, express explicit gender conservatism; throughout her book, she argues against what she sees as the excesses of feminism which she describes as “the great hoodwink of my generation” (2007: 127) because it wrongly removed the woman from hearth and home, concluding with her complete pride in becoming the type of housewife who finally knows how to make her own cheese (2007: 126-127 and 156). As Jennifer Jeffrey has written in a particularly insightful article “The Feminist in My Kitchen”

One day during the *Pennywise Eat Local Challenge*, as I was dashing between meetings and wondering how on earth I was going to create an evening meal composed of local ingredients within budget with almost no time to shop, this thought flashed through my head: this whole eat local concept is *so not friendly* for women who work...

If eating local is still a challenge for me, what about women who, voluntarily or not, log 8 to 10 hours a day, five or six days a week, in an office or hospital or courtroom? What about women who, in addition to working long hours and commuting back and forth, also have children at home who need love and affection and help with homework? ...

Can we call ourselves feminists (simply defined here as people who desire the equality of all women, everywhere) and still suggest that an ideal dinner consists of handmade ravioli and slow-simmered marinara from vine-ripened, hand-picked tomatoes and a salad composed of vegetables that (let's be honest) are Not Available at Safeway?

An argument she, likewise, specially connects back to Barbara Kingsolver's own book:

Barbara Kingsolver took a year of her life to grow a garden to feed her family, and proceeded to write a beautiful book about the experience, but what if she had done the same thing twenty-five years ago, near the start of her writing career? My guess is that such a book (if it made it to publication at all, which is doubtful), might not have had such a receptive audience, but *more importantly*, all of that weeding and

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<sup>17</sup>Interview: Joel Salatin This article appeared on p44 of the *Observer Food Monthly* section of the *Observer* on Sunday January 31 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jan/31/food-industry-environment>. Last accessed April 2010.

watering and meal-planning might have distracted her from the hard, lonely work of learning to write.<sup>18</sup>

### **All American**

Furthermore I am concerned by the criteria that Joel Salatin uses to determine who will receive one of his, now highly, competitive internships on his farm. For example the very first requirement reads that the candidates must be “[b]right eyed, bushy-tailed, self-starter, eager-beaver, situationally aware, go-get-‘em, teachable, positive, non-complaining, grateful, rejoicing, get’erdone dependable, faithful, perseverant take-responsibility *clean-cut, all American boy-girl appearance characters. We are very, very, very discriminatory.*”<sup>19</sup> (emphasis added) In the first place this list reiterates that same tendency towards gender conservatism as already discussed, since it is hard to imagine that a woman who wears only male clothes would be considered a clean cut all American girl appearance. Nor would, I imagine, a man who wears women’s clothes much less a homosexual or a transsexual be considered an all-American boy girl appearance. In fact it is odd to me that “appearance” is such an essential category of who Salatin will, or will not, allow to work on a farm.

There is also a second concern that this litany of traits suggests to me, particularly in his use of the phrase “All American.” For what does an “all American” appearance even mean in a nation of vast racial and immigrant diversity? I find these comments of particular concern as the college that Salatin chose to attend, Bob Jones University, prohibited African-Americans from attending until 1975 and still prohibited interracial dating in the year 2000 when a media uproar and declining student attendance finally forced the university to overturn its rules<sup>20</sup>. And furthermore, Bob Jones University has throughout its entire history prohibited, as official policy, all acts

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<sup>18</sup>Jennifer Jeffrey, *The Feminist in My Kitchen*, <http://jenniferjeffrey.typepad.com/writer/2007/06/one-day-during-.html> Accessed April 1st, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.polyfacefarms.com/apprentice.aspx> Accessed May 1st, 2009.

<sup>20</sup>“Statement about Race at BJU” Bob Jones University <http://www.bju.edu/welcome/who-we-are/race-statement.php> Last accessed April 1, 2010.

of homosexuality as perversion condemned by God.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, at least when he was choosing which college to attend, issues of racial inclusion, gay rights, or even social justice were not particularly strong motivating forces in Salatin's life. Nor has Salatin repudiated this relationship with Bob Jones University, which in 2009 recognized Salatin as the "alumus of the year."<sup>22</sup> Salatin has also described the conservative talk show host Glenn Beck, who is both anti-gay marriage and anti-immigration, as "agendaless" and "truth-seeking."<sup>23</sup> And furthermore, as earlier mentioned, Salatin is himself prone to make remarks concerning migrant workers which seem at times to portray them in a negative or at least a demeaning light. For example, in testimony in front of Congress on how to make a more transparent meat system, Salatin claimed "Industrialized food and farming became aromatically and aesthetically repugnant, relegated to the offcasts of society C and D students along with their foreign workers."<sup>24</sup> Nor is this tendency limited to Salatin alone. As Kelefa Sanneh writes in the *New Yorker* "Agrarianism, like environmentalism, hasn't always been considered a progressive cause, and there's nothing inherently liberal about artisanal cheese or artisanal bikes...Rod Dreher, a *National Review* contributor and the author of 'Crunchy Cons,' is ardently pro-organic and ardently anti-gay marriage. Victor Davis Hanson, the author of 'Fields Without Dreams: Defending the Agrarian Idea,' is also the author of 'Mexifornia,' about the dangers posed by immigration."<sup>25</sup> It is, therefore hard to imagine how Michael Pollan can both, perhaps rightly, indict organic produce

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<sup>21</sup> Student Handbook, Bob Jones University, '05-'06, 29

<sup>22</sup> "Headlines: Giving Due Honor: Accolades for Students and Grades" *BJU Review* Winter 2009 (Vol. 24 No.3) 2 [http://issuu.com/bjureview/docs/bju\\_review\\_winter\\_2009\\_\\_vol.\\_24\\_no.3](http://issuu.com/bjureview/docs/bju_review_winter_2009__vol._24_no.3) Accessed April 1, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis McCrary, "Cultivating Freedom: Joel Salatin practices ethical animal husbandry— no thanks to the feds." *American Conservative* November 1, 2009. <http://www.amconmag.com/> Accessed April 1, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Testimony of Joel Salatin, Polyface Farm, Swoope, Virginia United States Congress "After the Beef Recall: Exploring Greater Transparency in the Meat Industry" *House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform* April 17, 2008. While I agree with the view the migrant workers are exploited in factory farming systems it is unclear to be how grouping them intermediately with C and D students and referring to them as social outcasts helps to improve their working conditions. Please see footnote 23 for additional commentary on this point.

<sup>25</sup> Kelefa Sanneh "Fast bikes, slow food, and the workplace wars" *New Yorker Magazine*, June 22, 2009. [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/06/22/090622crat\\_atlarge\\_sanneh](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/06/22/090622crat_atlarge_sanneh). Last accessed April 1, 2010.



harvested by recycled biodiesel tractors as insufficiently progressive because of their unfair treatment of Mexican farm workers and, at the same time, support Joel Salatin as a representative of the future vanguard of a progressive and egalitarian food movement.<sup>26</sup> As the British columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown recently argued:

Should good people be party to a vociferous movement which wants to refuse entry to "alien" foods? Look at the language used and you realize it is a proxy for anti-immigration sentiments: these foods from elsewhere come and take over our diets, reduce national dishes to third-class status, compete unfairly with Scotch broth and haggis, both dying out, excite our senses beyond decorum, contaminate the identity of the country irreversibly.

Turn to the clamour for the west to cut imported foods and a further bitter taste spreads in the mouth. If we decide – as many of my friends have – not to buy foods that have been flown over, it only means further devastation for the poorest. These are the incredibly hard-working farmers in the developing world, already the victims of trade protectionism imposed by the wealthy blocs. It means saying no to Fair-trade producers too, because their products have to travel to our supermarkets. Are we now to say these livelihoods don't matter because we prefer virtue of a more fashionable kind? Shameful are the environmentalists who are able to be this cavalier. They could only believe what they do if those peasant lives do not matter at all.<sup>27</sup>

Hence, I fear that the “locavore” movement possesses within it the same potential for anti-immigrant sentiment that the earlier “Buy American” movement displayed. For example as Dana Frank argues in *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism*, the early 1970’s, 1980’s and early 1990’s were filled with calls to “Buy American” which foreshadowed many of the same reasons now provided to support locavorism including fears of globalization, support for union labor and critiques of

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<sup>26</sup> While it could be argued that Salatin comments about migrant labor only reflect concern about labor standards Sanneh makes, I believe, an excellent rejoinder: “Proponents of homegrown food and “(very) small business...sometimes talk about how artisanalism improves the lives of workers. But the genius of this loosely organized movement is that it’s not a labor movement; it’s a consumer movement.” Although I have search extensively I can no evidence of where Joel Salatin has been directly working with farm workers unions to improve their labor conditions. And farm worker unions were reportedly kicked out of talks before the screening of *Food Inc.* <http://www.ciw-online.org/news.html>

<sup>27</sup> “Eat only local produce? I don't like the smell of that: The language in this debate is a proxy for anti-immigration sentiments” *The Independent* May 12, 2008 <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/yasmin-alibhai-brown/yasmin-alibhaibrown-eat-only-local-produce-i-dont-like-the-smell-of-that-826272.html> Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

exploitive labor practices in other countries, all interwoven with a desire to protect traditional “American” ways of life. However as she documents throughout her book:

Popular “Buy American” advocates promised, nonetheless, to protect and to serve the American people; but the inward-looking protection of “us” against the threatening “foreigners” spiraled downward into narrower and narrower clubbishness. What began innocently at the border of Orange County, Florida, or the State of Alaska ended less innocently at an economic border drawn by race or citizenship. (1999: 243)

This is in turn the basis of my fear that any movement which seeks to prevent the importation of goods from certain countries possesses the danger of justifying nationalistic fears of those nations and groups of peoples. And this worry is perhaps all the more relevant when the product being boycotted is food since an increasing number of both anthropological and sociological texts continue to highlight the deep connection between a culture and the food that it eats<sup>28</sup>. Hence to stigmatize a food, purely because of where it comes from, runs the extreme risk of serving as proxy to stigmatize its people as well as decrease diversity as a whole. As James McWilliams writes:

A final paradox: in a sense, any community with an activist base seeking to localize the food supply is also a community that’s undermining diversity. Although we rarely consider the market influences that make community diversification possible, a moment’s reflection reveals a strong tie between cultural diversity and market access. Critics of globalization argue (often with ample evidence) that global forces undermine the world’s range of indigenous cultures — wiping out vernacular habits, wisdom, and languages. They overlook, however, how the material manifestations of diversity are brought to us by globalization.

Localization, by contrast, specifies what is and is not acceptable within an arbitrary boundary. In this sense, it delimits diversity. Anyone who doubts this claim should imagine what the culinary map of New York City would look like without open access to globally far-flung producers. It’s only because globally sourced distributors are able to provide

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<sup>28</sup> For a partial list see: Mintz, Sidney W., and Christine M. Du Bois. “The Anthropology of Food and Eating.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 31 (2002): 99-119.

specialized ingredients that Harlem, Chinatown, and Little Italy are such vibrant emblems of urban, culinary, and cultural diversity<sup>29</sup>.

## **Saving Souls**

It is therefore revealing to return to Michael Pollan's earlier claim, made in the context of putting locavore against veganism, that what solely motivates veganism is a desire for absolute moral purity, even to the point of destroying nature, in order to save the vegans' "souls." He continues this theme throughout his text with references to vegetarians as overly self-righteous, indeed to the point of claiming that they are "Puritans" since "A deep current of Puritanism runs through the writing of the animal philosophers, an abiding discomfort not just with our animality, but with the animals' animality too. They would like nothing better than to airlift us out from nature's "intrinsic evil"—and then take the animals with us. You begin to wonder if their quarrel isn't really with nature itself" (2008: 322). However, the irony of this argument is that while Pollan routinely indicts vegans as being metaphorically self-righteous puritans, the only option both he and Kingsolver provide are people who, for religious reasons, feel no complication about killing animals because they lack souls. As Pollan writes, "When I was at the farm I asked Joel how he could bring himself to kill a chicken. 'That's an easy one. People have a soul, animals don't; it's a bedrock belief of mine. Animals are not created in God's image. So when they die, they just die'" (2008: 331). In fact, since they have no souls and are therefore wholly unrelated to people, Joel Salatin encourages even young children to slit the throats of animals:

Interestingly, we typically have families come – they want to come and see the chicken butchering, for example. Well, Mom and Dad (they're in their late-20s early-30s), they stay out behind in the car, and the 8-, 9-, 10-, 11-year-old children come around to see this. We have not found any child under 10 that's the least bit put off by it. They get right into it. We'll even give them a knife and let them slice some throats.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> James McWilliams "Is Locavorism for Rich People Only?" *New York Times* Blog October 14, 2009 <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/14/is-locavorism-for-rich-people-only/?pagemode=print>. Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> "Annie Corrigan, Joel Salatin And Polyface Farm: Stewards of Creation" *EarthEats* March 26, 2010 <http://indianapublicmedia.org/earthheats/joel-salatin-complete-interview/> Accessed April 1 2010.

Hence, I wish to suggest, many of the proponents of the locavore movement seek to re-inscribe the very speciesism it first seems to draw into question. Indeed it is hard to imagine how a locavore movement ever could translate into an actual improvement of animals' lives since many of its most famous proponents hold that animals lack souls and furthermore that man's domination and consumption of them is the very definition of our humanity. For example Pollan and Kingsolver claim, with no citations, a laundry list of increasingly esoteric human characteristics which, supposedly, only eating meat has produced in humans including large brains (291), all forms of social interaction including the undefined "pleasures of the table" (272), human free will (297), a variety of children's books (Kingsolver, 2007: 222) and even "civilization" itself (*ibid*). In the most amusing example of this attribution of human traits, Pollan suggests that the reason marijuana works on humans is because it mimics the effects of hunting within human brains. He writes:

Later it occurred to me that this mental state [while hunting], which I quite liked, in many ways resembled the one induced by smoking marijuana: the way one's senses feel especially acute and the mind seems to forget everything outside the scope of its present focus, including physical discomfort and the passing of time... . Could it be that the cannabinoid network is precisely the sort of adaption that natural selection would favor in the evolution of a creature who survives by hunting? A brain chemical that sharpens the senses, narrows your mental focus, allows you to forget everything extraneous to the task at hand (including physical discomfort and the passage of time), and makes you hungry would seem to be the perfect pharmacological tool for man the hunter. (2008: 342)

Therefore, one of the oddest parts of the locavore literature is that even as its proponents graphically and indeed poetically describe the abuses of the factory farms they, at the same time, remove any reason why anyone should be concerned at all; since animals lack souls, we cannot understand what, or even if, they think or feel, and our domination of them represents the very essence of what defines us as humans. In fact Joel Salatin has, repeatedly, spoken out *against* so called "Prop. 2" ballot initiatives around the country sponsored by the American Humane Society in order to outlaw the worst abuses of factory farming such as battery cages and gestation

crates<sup>31</sup>. While Prop. 2 initiatives are themselves controversial within the animal rights community, since they result in larger cages instead of no cages, Salatin's critique is not that they do not go far enough. Instead his claim is that people should be able to, legally, do whatever they want with farm animals. Hence he actually argues for less oversight and control of how farmers raise their livestock. While such a practice may, or may not, as he claims, help small farms who process animals expand their operations, at the same time it would seem to increase the already horrific abuse of all animals that do receive at least some minimal protection under the law currently as well as undercut any other efforts to increase the level of such protection in the future.

### **I Am A "Locavore" (and a Vegan)**

While each of these critiques might seem to suggest that I am opposed to all of the goals espoused by "locavorism" this is in fact not the case. I support urban community gardening, farmers markets, Community Support Agriculture (CSA's), and organic farms which eschew the use of monoculture crops, pesticides, and treat their workers well. Indeed, perhaps my greatest concern about the manner in which the locavore movement articulates itself is based on its repeated, but largely false, dichotomy between "vegan and vegetarians" on the one hand, and conscious food consumers on the other, as though it were impossible to be concerned about the welfare of animals, the environment, and the broader questions of food policy and food justice all at the same time. Hence, perfectly reasonable arguments against monoculture crops are morphed into unreasonable attacks on vegetarians as though the only two possible options were eating meat or conventional produce from large scale industrial farms. However, the reality is that many vegetarian and vegans, since they have already taken the step to self consciously control and direct their diet, are frequently more aware of the dangers industrial farming practices pose and therefore more likely to seek out ethically grown fruit and vegetables--wherever in the world

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<sup>31</sup> For one example among many see the interview "Joel Salatin - The Pastor of the Pasture" Mandy Henderson *Columbus Underground* February 28, 2010. <http://www.columbusunderground.com/joel-salatin-the-pastor-of-the-pasture>. Last accessed April 1, 2010.

these may exist. In fact, my opposition to industrial farming practices stems, in part, *from* my life-long commitment to animal rights. Hence as Pollan and others have pointed out, confined animal feeding operations (CAFO's), or "factory farms" are economically feasible only because of the massive subsidies that the government routinely provides to large scale industrial farmers who grow vast acres of soy, wheat, and corn which in turn are sold to factory farms who are the largest consumer of such products in the United States.

It is, therefore, not my goal to end the movement for conscious consumption of all food products, including vegan ones, since I believe large-scale industrial agriculture is deeply harmful to the environment, workers, and animals. It is instead meant to suggest that we need a new understanding and new articulation of the manner in which the locavore movements goals are expressed and understood. What matters is not the overly simplistic notion of "food miles" but the total carbon foot print, as well as the total environmental impact of any food purchase – a concern which can only lead to a significant decrease in the amount of meat consumed if not vegetarianism or veganism -- and not only food, but the whole array of services, including clothing and electronics, which are marketed in the current global market place. Moreover, it deeply matters how and why these calls for "locavorism" are framed, and the tendency of many in the movement to unfairly and inaccurately criticize feminists and immigrants as corrupting to an idealized, romantic state of a local community is deeply troubling and potentially quite dangerous. As the Buy American movement, originally started by anti-sweat shop unions, demonstrates, originally "progressive" causes which fail to consider the intersections of gender, race, class, and citizenship can devolve into only nationalistic regionalism. And it is my hope that the false division between vegan and local can be ended, so that both animal rights activists and food policy activists can unite into a shared and, therefore, exponentially more effective movement. It is my hope not to end the growing consensus on the need for a more just diet, including my issues raised by locavors, such as farm subsidies for agribusiness, but instead to expand the struggle to include a consideration for the full panoply of social justice issues that a truly just and therefore truly "green" diet must entail.

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# **My Pet Needs Philosophy: Ambiguity, Capabilities and the Welfare of Domestic Dogs**

**Heather Hillsburg<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Domestic dogs are reliant on their human owners for survival. In light of this dependence, can a dog exercise free will? Within contemporary animal studies, the question of whether or not pet ownership is morally sound is often debated. Within this debate, however, an animal's individual preferences are often ignored thus erasing an animal's potential to exercise free will. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), Martha Nussbaum addresses this issue by extending the ethics of capabilities she has developed for humans to domestic animals. Nussbaum argues in order for the domestication of animals to be morally sound, animals must be enabled to fulfill various capabilities that will improve their quality of life. While Nussbaum contributes to the promotion of domestic animals' well being, an animal's status as an individual goes largely undiscussed. This paper will critique Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities in light of Beauvoir's text *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), Beauvoir's discussion of imminence and transcendence, as well as Beauvoir's conception of morality. I will focus my attention of domestic dogs and will argue that privileging a dog's species and breed-based capabilities over the animal's individual preferences actually limits the capabilities Nussbaum is attempting to extend. I will also explain that a dog's capabilities can be better met by following a regiment of small adjustments to and close observation of, the capabilities a dog is enabled to exhibit. Through this methodology a dog's preferences and choices can be respected without privileging one facet of a dog's identity over another.

## **Introduction**

Domestic dogs are reliant on their human owners for food, water and to facilitate meaningful interaction. In light of this dependence, is it possible for a companion animal to exercise free will? Can a dog be a sovereign individual? Within contemporary animal studies, the question of whether or not pet ownership is morally sound is often debated. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), Martha Nussbaum addresses this issue by extending the ethics of capabilities she has developed for humans to

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<sup>1</sup> Heather Hillsburg has a B.A. in English from York University, Canada, A masters of arts in English with a concentration in Women's Studies from Lakehead University and will begin a PhD. in Women's Studies this fall at the University of Ottawa. Her research interests include Feminist Theory, Feminist Philosophy and Contemporary Women's Fiction.

domestic animals. Nussbaum argues that domestic and captive animals must be treated according to their species and breed based capabilities, rather than function as a source of unconditional love for their owners. While Nussbaum's ethics grounded in group norms and behaviours, she pays little attention to the possibility that an animal could choose to exhibit behaviours that fall outside of these parameters. When studying Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities along side of Simone deBeauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948, 2003), it is clear that ignoring a set of animal behaviours limits the potential for that animal to exercise individual choice, thus negatively impacting an animal's welfare. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948, 2003), Beauvoir discusses transcendence, the moral existence of the ambiguous subject as well as the interconnectedness of one subject's freedom with that of another. While Beauvoir's existential philosophy was written to address the concept of human ethics and freedom, like Nussbaum's work, Beauvoir's ethics can be usefully extended to apply to human relationships with animals. In this paper, I will critique Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities in light of Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity, Beauvoir's discussion of imminence and transcendence, as well as her conception of morality. I will argue that when a pet owner privileges a dog's species and breed-based capabilities over the animal's individual preferences they actually limit the capabilities Nussbaum is attempting to extend to dogs. Finally, I will also argue that rather than adhering to species and breed norms, dog owners can better fulfill their pets' capabilities by following a regiment of small adjustments to the behaviours a dog is enabled to exhibit paired with close observation of a dog's responses. Through this methodology, unlike strict adherence to species and breed norms, a dog's capabilities, preferences and choices can be respected without privileging one facet of a dog's identity over another.

Animal rights activists and philosophers debate the question of whether humans have moral obligations or responsibilities towards their companion animals. According to Immanuel Kant, a person "does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge" (qtd. in Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 2006, p. 330). Konrad Lorenz illustrates a paradigm shift within contemporary animal studies and writes that "[t]he fidelity of a dog is a precious gift demanding no less binding moral responsibilities than the friendship of a human being" (1970, 2008, p.543). While Lorenz addresses the responsibility of owning a pet, the very notion of animal ownership foregrounds

the pet's subordinate position within human-animal relationships, and illustrates that this position is becoming increasingly problematic. Paul Shephard explains that, despite laws that condemn animal abuse, "the domestication of animals has never ensured their tender care. Although looked upon with affection, even modern pets are property that is bought, sold, 'put down' and neutered" (2008, p. 552). The responsibilities humans have towards their canines are also complicated through a domestic dog's position in the home as a loving companion. While many dog owners attempt to treat their pets with justice and care, many of these same dog owners inadvertently impede their pets' welfare by treating their pets like humans rather than as animals. In his article "I (love) My Dog," Keenan Ferguson explains that "the dog functions as an ersatz human in the sense of an object of care giving: a repository for affection, guardianship and love" (2004). This construction of domestic dogs is critiqued for a variety of reasons. Donna Harraway states that "[t]o regard a dog as a furry child, even metaphorically, demeans dogs and children- and sets up children to be bitten and dogs to be killed" (2003, p. 37). Expecting dogs to provide unconditional love for their human owners places pets in an impossible situation. No creature is capable of loving unconditionally, and demanding this love also assumes that a dog can communicate this affection in terms that humans can understand. In this case, not only are dogs expected to respond to mistreatment with affection, they are also required to transcend species and language boundaries to communicate this affection to their owners. Dogs will fail on both counts, and the underlying ideologies that allow pets to be given away because they don't "fit" into a family unit are ignored.

In *Animals, Property and the Law*, Gary Francione explains that mistreatment of animals is grounded in their status as property. For Francione, animals do not have "rights" in the traditional sense of the word, but rather are accorded the same "rights", or lack thereof, as property. Francione outlines that within the doctrine of legal welfarism, animal owners determine the welfare of animals. Consequently, how animals are treated is usually informed by what conduct will maximize the efficient use of animals as property (2003, p. 253). Within this framework, even the most beloved pet can be mistreated if it benefits human interests. Pet owners may claim that their dogs are "friends" or "family members", in reality however, many pets are subjected to neglectful or abusive treatment that suggests that pets are not actually valued members of a family unit but commodities that are bought, sold and often

disposed of. While it is important to acknowledge that animals continue to occupy the legal status of property, dog owners do not necessarily have to replicate these conditions in their homes. My discussion of animal's capabilities, transcendence and individuality departs from an understanding of the home as a place where pet owners do not see companion animals such as dogs as property, nor are they viewed as sources of unconditional love. If dogs genuinely occupy the role "friends" or "family members", they must be treated with love, respect and discipline like other members of these groups. Further, as family members, canines must also live productively in family units, and even though a dog may enjoy more rights than is afforded through his status as property, like other members of a family unit, a dog cannot simply do as he pleases. This does not mean that domestic dogs should be treated the same way as humans, but rather that dog owners must treat their pets as creatures who have rights that are evaluated alongside those of humans. These rights cannot be compromised for human gain, regardless of what may be condoned by the legal system outside of the home. In this case, understanding dogs as friends or members of the family is not simply lip-service, but rather denotes a commitment to an animal that accords him or her rights and freedoms, including allowing a dog to exercise free-will.

If the home can function as a place where dogs are imbued with rights, what are the responsibilities of the humans who live in family units to ensure that dogs' rights are not encroached upon? Nussbaum grounds her critique of the treatment of companion animals in an understanding of animals' needs, and explains that treating a dog like a human erases the dog's species-specific capabilities (2006, p. 340). For Nussbaum, the ethics of capabilities she develops for humans can function as a set of guidelines that will allow animals living under human control to live and flourish according to their species and breed specific capabilities. It is also important to note that domestic dogs cannot simply exercise their full capabilities through their own will or freedom. The application of Nussbaum's ethics of capabilities to animal subjects is problematized because dog ownership has become so widespread that the lives of dogs are intimately connected with those of humans. Consequently, dogs require intervention and support in order to live to the fullest of their capabilities from the same human owners who often erase their dogs' species specific needs by regarding their pets as human-like rather than as non-human animals (2006, p. 366). Nussbaum argues that regardless of this dependence, domestic animals must be treated as

“companions in need of prudent guardianship, but endowed with entitlements that are theirs, even if exercised through guardianship” (2006, p. 376). Further, while domestic animals may have “natural” tendencies that allow them to flourish in the wild, it is important to remember that domestic dogs may not be able flourish outside of human care because they have evolved over millennia with human beings (2006, p. 376). Many activists within animal liberation movements may champion for the freedom of domestic animals from human interference. While this is an important political movement from which valuable gains are made for animal rights, I locate this essay within the framework of animal welfare and discuss domestic dogs as they are currently located in the home with humans. Consequently, for purposes of this paper, I understand Nussbaum’s capabilities as those that are possible when a dog’s position in the domestic realm, within a community of humans, is taken into account.

Nussbaum begins her ethics of capabilities by explaining that every person or animal has basic entitlements. She then elaborates that “[f]ailure to secure these to citizens is a particularly grave violation of basic justice” (155). Nussbaum also explains that the relationships between humans and animals must to be regulated with justice and care (2006, p. 326). Nussbaum outlines a basic set of capabilities for animals as adequate opportunities for nutrition and physical activity; freedom from pain, squalor and cruelty; freedom to act in ways that are characteristic of the species; freedom from fear and opportunities for rewarding interaction with other creatures of the same species and of different species; a chance to enjoy the light and air in tranquillity (2006, p. 326).

Nussbaum goes on to explain that a captive or domestic animal must be treated according its breed and species specific capabilities, as well as according to the animal’s individual preferences (2006, p. 376). Within Nussbaum’s ethics, it is morally unsound to prevent an animal from benefiting from the aforementioned capabilities. Nussbaum explains that humans must also consider an animal’s individual preferences and choices in their evaluation of that animal’s capabilities (2006, p. 378). Although her methodology is subject to repeated scrutiny, Nussbaum defends her capabilities approach and states, “[t]here is no sure-fire recipe for doing this right; but we have to begin somewhere” (2006, p. 355). Although Nussbaum advocates for working towards a more ethical way to keep domestic animals, when

examining this ethics of capabilities in light of Beauvoir's existential philosophy, it is clear that Nussbaum may be impeding the pursuit of the capabilities for which she advocates. Nussbaum champions for enabling a dog's capabilities while respecting individual preferences; within her framework, however, a dog's identity as part of a breed is privileged over the animal's preferences and needs as an individual. As a result, a dog's capabilities and what is meaningful for the animal remain fixed according to the animal's species, breed or even the whims of an owner, rather than being flexible to cater to an animal's ever-changing needs or preferences that may stand outside of species norms.

Like Nussbaum, Simone deBeauvoir addresses the issue of human morality, and while Beauvoir does not discuss companion animals, her ethics can usefully be extended to human-animal relationships. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948, 2003), Beauvoir explains that a person is simultaneously "a sovereign and unique subject" as well as "an object for others...nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends" (1948, 2003 p. 7). In "Beauvoir's Idea of Ambiguity," Stacy Keltner asserts that for Beauvoir, "[a]mbiguity signals the tension between seemingly opposing experiences of the self as both a free subject and an object for others" (2006, p. 201). The tension between the self as a sovereign individual and the self as part of a collective creates what Beauvoir calls ambiguity. Beauvoir explains that individuals embody the contradiction of existing simultaneously as individuals and as part of a collective. As a result, according to Beauvoir, individuals are themselves, ambiguous (1948,2003 p. 130). Beauvoir believes that the ambiguous subject must continually transcend meaning, that is, re-evaluate meaning so that it is congruent with an individual's socio-historical context. When an individual is not able, or simply refuses to, renegotiate their ambiguity, they are living in immanence rather than actively transcending (Keltner, 2006, p. 211). For the purposes of this essay, and in my extension of Beauvoir's analysis of human ethics to domestic animals, the collectives or communities to which a dog belongs are those that are established and governed by humans, where dogs depend on human intervention for survival. As a result, a dog is simultaneously a member of a breed, a species, a member of a community that includes the humans, and a sovereign individual within these different groups.

Although Nussbaum asserts that a dog's individual preferences and choices must be considered, she situates an animal's individuality within the confines of both breed and species specific norms, thus privileging the collective over the individual rather than viewing each dog as ambiguous. Consequently, the dog's individuality is at risk of being erased, and its ambiguity is made an impossibility as the individual animal is reduced to a part of a collective who benefit from capabilities defined for them by their human masters. Because the capabilities promoted through Nussbaum's paternalism favour breed and species norms rather than weighing them equally with individual preference or choices, the capabilities promoted may not even be of use to an animal who falls outside of these trends. As a result, Nussbaum's erasure of a dog's ambiguity pulls a lynchpin that destabilizes the moral existence of both dogs and humans when examined in light of Beauvoir's philosophy. In "Transcendence and Immanence in Beauvoir's Ethics," Andrea Veltman explains that for Beauvoir, "transcendence refers less to the movements of an intentional conscious subjectivity and more to constructive activities that situate and engage the individual with other human freedoms" (2006, p. 114). Conversely, immanence refers to "the negative labour necessary...to perpetuate the status quo" (2006, p. 115). Veltman asserts that for Beauvoir, immanence designates futile chores marked by passivity and submission to biological fate, while transcendence is characterised by activities of creation, progress and discovery (2006, p. 119). Veltman goes on to explain that transcendence engages a subject with the world, working towards future projects while immanence is futile, consuming time and labour but accomplishing nothing. Within Beauvoir's philosophy, the ambiguous subject must continuously transcend their ambiguity, or renegotiate meaning as described above if they are to live meaningful existences in pursuit of life's projects (1948, 2003, p. 121). Because Nussbaum's framework makes a dog's ambiguity an impossibility, transcendence is also impossible.

Further, as Nussbaum's paternalistic ethics confine the dog's individuality to the narrow parameters of species based capabilities, the only meaning the dog will be able to create will be meaning that fits within the parameters established along these same guidelines and norms. As a result, the domestic dog is not actually transcending and negotiating what may be of individual importance, but remains immanent as the dog's actions do nothing but reaffirm the status quo, which is, in this case, the set of capabilities determined through species and breed specific capabilities.



Nussbaum's erasure of a dog's ambiguity and ability to transcend also has serious moral implications for a dog's human owners. Stacy Keltner explains that the central ethical claim in "The Ethics of Ambiguity" is that the condition of one individual's freedom lies in the freedom for all individuals (2006, p. 208). In her discussion of Beauvoir's ethical-spiritual way of life, Karen Vintages explains that Beauvoir's conception of freedom is couched in "willing oneself free", that is, working towards one's own freedom. Vintages asserts that for Beauvoir, to will oneself free denotes a commitment to freedom, and this commitment involves working for everyone's freedom, not simply your own (2006, p. 220). Consequently, to work for one's own freedom, one works for that of others, because, according to Beauvoir, people are all interconnected (1948, 2003, p. 24). Thus, if one individual is impeding the freedom of another, they themselves are not free. As a result, to prevent an animal from transcending its ambiguity, or in making that transcendence an impossibility through the erasure of an animal's ambiguity, that animal is not free. When that animal is not free, by extension, the human who erases that animal's ambiguity and limits its freedom is also not free.

Aligning the freedoms of humans with those of their pets may initially seem to conflate what it means to be free for each species (if freedom is even possible for either species). As previously discussed, the lives of dogs have become so entwined with those of humans that the repercussions of limiting the freedom of a pet cannot go undiscussed. In "The Companion Species Manifesto", Donna Haraway addresses human-dog relationships and explains that dogs and humans are bonded in what she calls "significant otherness" (2003, p. 16). Haraway states that "[h]uman life has changed significantly with dogs. Flexibility and opportunism are the name of the game for both species, who shape each other throughout the still ongoing story of co-evolution" (2003, p. 29). If humans and dogs are not only co-existing but also co-evolving, and the lives of humans and their dogs are inextricably connected, then the freedom (or lack thereof) of both dog and owner could also be connected. It seems deeply problematic that a commitment to freedom, and the moral repercussions of limiting that freedom, would not extend to animals that not only co-exist, but also co-evolve, with humans. Haraway draws on the philosophy of Vicki Hearne to discuss how humans and dogs are connected by an ethics that is more complex than simply

according an animal certain rights. Haraway explains that in relationship, dogs and humans construct 'rights' in each other, such as the right to demand respect, attention, and response... The question turns out not to be what are animal rights, if they existed preformed to be uncovered, but how may a human enter into a rights relationship with an animal? (2003, p. 53).

Haraway foregrounds the mutuality between humans and their companion animals. Central to a relationship of rights with an animal is the understanding that like a human, a dog has capabilities and freedoms that must not be compromised. Because humans and dogs are linked, as Nussbaum and Haraway believe, then perhaps the freedoms of human and dogs are also co-existing and co-evolving. When considered in light of Haraway's mutuality and relationship of rights, a human's freedom could be connected to the freedom and ambiguity, or lack thereof, enjoyed by their dog.

In her discussion of freedom and transcendence, Beauvoir explains that "[t]here are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads" (1948, 2003 p. 37). Similarly, in his discussion of the mistreatment of domestic animals, Paul Shephard explains that dogs are kept in this state of servitude, and explains that

What is wrong at the heart of keeping pets is that they are deficient animals in whom we have invested the momentum of two million years of love of the Others. They are monsters of the order invented by Frankenstein except that they are engineered to conform to our wishes, biological slaves who cringe and fawn or perform or whatever we wish (2008, p. 553).

While domestic dogs discussed by Shephard and the dis-empowered humans addressed by Beauvoir are distinct and must not be conflated, there are similarities between Beauvoir's description of the oppressed and Shephard's discussion of dogs. In both instances, the autonomy and freedom of the individual is compromised; a human is prevented from exercising free will and a dog is only permitted to display behaviours that reinforce the notion that it loves his or her owner unconditionally. Nussbaum advocates for a form of paternalism that creates opportunities for a dog to live according to its capabilities. Within this paternalism however, she does not fully

account for the communication barriers that inevitably characterise interspecies relationships which also complicate her paternalistic ethics. Consequently, the ethics of capabilities described by Nussbaum leaves dogs at risk of not being able to break through Beauvoir's proverbial ceiling, performing capabilities that are ultimately to the benefit of a dog's human owners rather than to the animal itself.

Once we have acknowledged that humans must honour a dog's status as a sovereign individual and as a part of a collective, how can dog owners go about treating their dogs in a way that does not privilege either their individuality or their connection to a larger group? How can this be done when communication between humans and dogs often reinforces the hierarchies that demand that a dog fulfil human desires? One solution may lie in the careful monitoring of companion animals, as discussed by Miriam Stamp Dawkins. In "Evolution and Animal Welfare" Dawkins explains that "many of the so-called symptoms of poor welfare are in fact evolutionary adaptations" (1998). Dawkins argues that some patterns of "natural" behaviour are simply not necessary for animals once they are captive, and allowing an animal to partake in such behaviours may not necessarily improve an animal's welfare. Further, some behaviours that may seem dysfunctional to the outside observer may be an evolutionary response to captivity and when subjected to further study, these "dysfunctional" behaviours may actually improve the animal's welfare (1998). Dawkins explains that, for example, if an animal chases its prey for a long distance before feeding, there is no way to know if the animal will be motivated to repeat this same act in captivity. Dawkins argues that unless animals are continuously and carefully observed we will never know which capabilities to promote among captive animals, and which the animal is no longer motivated to pursue (1998). Further, Dawkins asserts that animal owners must continually make slight changes to the behaviours their animals are allowed to exhibit and observe the animal's responses to these changes in order to decipher which behaviours are important to a specific animal (1998). While Dawkins is discussing zoo animals in this instance, her methodology can be extended to dogs. A dog owner can observe which behaviours their pet chooses to pursue by continually monitoring and making slight changes to the behaviours a dog is enabled to exhibit. When a dog shows no interest in a specific behaviour then the owner can enable a different capability. This practice would allow a dog to negotiate their own capabilities through human mediation rather than live

within the parameters of potentially irrelevant species or breed-based capabilities imposed by humans. Dawkins also asserts that this process must be continuous; what is important for an animal at one phase of their life may be of no importance at a later time (1998). As a result, a dog's human owner can never stop observing, changing and reassessing their pet's behaviour if they are going to continually enable relevant behaviours. Further, within this process a dog may exhibit behaviours that are inappropriate for life within a family unit. In this instance, a dog must be granted room to make mistakes, and rather than be given away or put down, a dog's position as "friend" or "family" member must be continually reaffirmed.

Part of the process of enabling dogs to transcend their ambiguity is re-evaluating what humans have understood to be productive animal behaviours. Dawkins explains that animal welfare is often assessed based on the presence of displacement and vacuum activities. Displacement activities are characterised as "odd or irrelevant behaviour that appears to have nothing to do with conflict" (1998). Vacuum activities are the behaviours an animal performs in the absence of any stimuli that might compel an animal to display these behaviours, for example, a caged chicken going through the motions of covering itself with dust (1998). Dawkins explains that both behaviours are thought to be evidence of high levels of frustration or conflict in a particular animal, and are thus used as markers of poor welfare (1998). Dawkins argues, however, that this interpretation of behaviour may be misguided, as "the performance of a vacuum activity may itself be an adequate substitute for the real thing" (1998). In light of Dawkins' analysis, unconventional behaviours may be evolutionary adaptations to living in captivity, and may actually contribute to an animal's welfare rather than act as an indicator of distress. As a result, Dawkins explains that an animal's own choices function as "an indispensable part of welfare assessment" (1998). , Dawkins believes that the behaviours an animal exhibits may stand outside of breed and species norms. (1998). When applied to domestic dogs, Dawkins' methodology allows a dog to create meaning based on their current preferences and conditions, or, in Beauvoir's terms, transcend its ambiguity. Dawkins illustrates that vacuum or displacement activities (such as a dog circling a spot on the floor before he or she lays down to rest) are not necessarily indicative of frustration, and a dog owner must take this into account when enabling and evaluating capabilities. This is not to say that a dog's species and breed can go ignored when establishing capabilities, but

that these cannot be used as determining factors. As a result, by using an approach based on mutuality and close observation, while considering but not strictly enforcing species and breed norms, a dog may live with the freedom to exist as a sovereign individual and as a group member while continuously renegotiating meaning.

It is important to note that this solution, as well as the application of existential philosophy to domestic dogs, has difficulties that must be acknowledged. As each animal differs in breeding and temperament, the hallmarks of an animal's transcendence cannot be enumerated into a comprehensive list. Rather, in transcending his or her ambiguity, a dog will have the opportunity to live beyond the expectations of unconditional love for its owner, and choose which behaviours to display, whatever these may be. In her article "Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue," Josephene Donovan explains that central to the mistreatment of animals is the ideology that not only justifies this cruelty, but allows humans to benefit from it. Donovan argues that an effective methodology to fight animal cruelty must not only work to end acts of injustice against animals, but must also dismantle the "ideological rationalisations that legitimate animal exploitation and cruelty" (2006). Donovan asserts that a dialogical ethic of care must be established, and within this ethic education is central to the dismantling of the aforementioned ideologies (2006). The application of Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity to Nussbaum's Ethics of Capabilities is an example of such a dialogic; this process is continuous, and requires both human and animal to engage in a conversation that will lead to a dog's ever-changing needs and preferences being met. A human who interacts with a companion animal must not only continually evaluate their pet's preferences and behaviours, but must also monitor their own to ensure that the relationship between humans and dogs in a household is characterised by mutuality. Further, the ideological rationalisations that allow animals to be treated cruelly can be subverted within the homes where domestic dogs are located. While regarding family pets as living creatures and individuals who are more than simply property may not initially dismantle the legal framework that permits wide scale abuse of animals, it is a start in the process to accord animals a more expansive list of rights.

Enabling dogs to transcend their ambiguity is not an easy task. Simone deBeauvoir explains that "it is incumbent upon ethics not to follow the path of least resistance"

(1948, p. 142). In the case of animal welfare, an ethical path is long and difficult to follow. Dawkins' method of experimentation is "painstaking, and in some ways [a] tedious task, as the same questions will have to be asked about different species and about different behaviours within the same species" (1998). Adhering to these principles would require that a dog owner commit a considerable amount of time to continually observe their dog and make slight changes to their pets' daily routine, rather than adhere to standards of what a dog, or a species of dog, may prefer. Pet owners must be continually engaged in a dialogical ethic of care to ensure that a dog can exercise its capabilities and act upon its preferences while occupying the status and rights of an individual within a familial unit. Nussbaum's guidelines must not be disregarded, but rather, can be used as a point of reference to establish a dog's place within a collective, while the observation and gradual changes proposed by Dawkins would solidify a dog's status as a sovereign individual. This, in turn, would serve to re-inscribe the animal's ambiguity and allow the dog to make choices and reaffirm meaning and transcend that ambiguity. Although this solution leaves a dog's preferences to be mediated through a human lens, this process is done from within a space where a dog is understood as more than simply property. While a human and companion animal are at risk of misunderstanding one another throughout this process, the application of Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity to current practices of raising domestic dogs is a step in the direction of improving a dog's wellbeing.

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# **From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions: Reframing the Conflict between the Autistic Pride and Animal Rights Movements**

**Daniel Salomon<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the conflict between the autistic pride movement and the animal rights movement over Peter Singer's use of the "Argument from Marginal Cases." It is written from the perspective of a person who is an autistic and a committed animal rights activist. This paper radically reframes the conflict using an approach which is both non-dualistic and reconciliatory. A "linked oppressions" model builds solidarity and fosters coexistence, thus bridging the divide between the disability and the animal rights movements. A radical reframing of the conflict can lead to a possible truce, if not constructive alliance building between these two disparate movements.

## **Introduction**

Peter Singer and other activist-scholars have established the philosophical legitimacy of discourse regarding animal ethics; thus, animal ethics can no longer be dismissed as sentimentalism by the Western intellectual establishment (Best 2009; Linzey 2000, 2009; Webb 1998). Nonetheless, the framing of animal ethics needs to be critiqued; a neurotypical bias remains implicit in the way animal ethics is typically framed, which keeps intact and perpetuates speciesism.<sup>2</sup> Neurotypicalism privileges a form of cognitive processing characteristic of peoples who have a neurotypical (non-autistic) brain structure, while at least implicitly finding other forms of cognitive processing to be inferior, such as those natural to autists and nonhuman animals. Specifically,

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Salomon, OEF, 30 years old, is a high-functioning autistic himself, with an MA in Research from Andover Newton Theological School, a Graduate Certificate in Science and Religion from the Boston Theological Institute, a BS in Liberal Studies from Salisbury University, formally Salisbury State University, with concentrations in Biology, Environmental Studies, and Conflict Analysis/Dispute Resolution, and a Naturalist Certificate from the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Also, a professed member in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, Salomon is the author of four self-published books which addresses environmental and animal issues. Two of Salomon's books are available on Amazon.com Kindle Store, and the third, on Amazon.com. He can be contacted at: [sherrydsal@aol.com](mailto:sherrydsal@aol.com)

<sup>2</sup> There are many parallels between the autistic critique of animal ethics and the feminist critique of animal ethics especially with respect to intersections between patriarchy and neurotypicalism. Thus, both feminists and autists question many of the same biases in animal ethics literature, either implicitly or explicitly. See Best's article, listed in bibliography, which independently addresses some of the neurotypical biases in critical animal studies literature, without using the term neurotypicalism.



neurotypicalism privileges vermal reasoning (i.e. reasoning that relies heavily on the brain's vermis) over other ways of knowing, being, and experiencing.

According to neurology researchers, the defining difference<sup>3</sup> in brain structure between autists and neurotypicals may lie in the development of the vermis in the cerebellum (Courchene et al. 1988; Courchese et al. 2001; Belmonte et al. 2004; Mitchell et al. 2009; Mostofsky et al. 2009). A fully functioning *vermis cerebelli*, found in neurotypicals, allows neurotypicals to develop an “abstract concept of the world” (Grandin 2005: 26).<sup>4</sup> Much animal ethics discourses precede based on the unquestioned acceptance of this “abstract concept of the world” and that such an “abstract concept of the world” is necessary to advance the animal liberation cause. One possible reason is that autism is listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV) as a mental disorder, implying that the insights and virtues of autists are suspect. The DSM IV also claims that autists have a “qualitative impairment” in both social interaction and communication. The DSM IV model fails to account for two realities: First, is that autistic characteristics may provide advantages, strengths, and even virtues. Second, personality and character traits of autists, especially those with Asperger's and high-functioning autism, vary significantly from the DSM IV model, with some individuals being significantly more social and communicative than the classic stereotype of an autist.<sup>5 6</sup>

Both the autist and neurotypical ways of knowing, being, and experiencing have their strengths and weaknesses. The strength of the autist approach is that while the vermis is not as strong, this apparent neurological deficit enables autists to see each entity as

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3 The word “difference” is used instead of “maldevelopment,” the actual words of one researcher quoted, to avoid making a nonscientific value judgment when describing scientific evidence. The word “maldevelopment” judges that some brains and nervous systems are better than others, which is non-scientific and demeaning to autists.

4 A disconnect remains between how neurological and behavioral approaches to studying the autism spectrum relate to one another (Belmonte et. al), e.g. vermis differences (neurology research) versus frontal lobe differences (behavioral, as in Grandin) as the defining brain difference between autists and neurotypicals. The purpose of this paper, the author will contend that the neurological data is for all practical purposes consistent with behavioral data, in terms of connecting relevant behavioral findings with relevant neurological findings. It also underscores the strong neurological basis for autism.

5 For one autist's argument that neurotypical diagnosticians oversimplify when contending that autists have a relative lack of empathy, see “Some Thoughts About Empathy” by Jim Sinclair (<http://web.archive.org/web/2008062500027/web.syr.edu/~jisincla/empathy.htm>) 1988.

6 Boundy (2008) offers another critique of the medical definition of autism.

a separate reality, resulting in greater awareness of the details of the world-around-them (Grandin 2005: 26, 30-31, 50-52, and 293-297). Grandin (2005, 6-7,) contends that nonhuman animals also have this same capability of seeing concrete reality with limited conceptual bias. By contrast, neurotypicals miss precise details of the world due to an “inattentional blindness,” in which sensory inputs are structured by “an entire set of social-symbolic conventions, form, and expectations” divorced from nature, but instead imbedded in human culture (Wolfe 2008: 113). In other words, “inattentional blindness” produces a certain worldview and phenomenology, which is culturally constructed, and thus open to critique.

For the purposes of this paper, neurotypicalism (Sinclair 1998) or vermal reasoning can also be construed as conceptualism (McKim 1996; Lonergan, 1957 1971) which is present in Hellenistic philosophy (Greaves et al. 1997; Lonergan 1957 1971) and more recently in some parts of Enlightenment philosophy (Lonergan 1957 1971). Vermal reasoning is internally generated logic (Grandin 2005; Houston and Frith 2000; Rachels 1999) which by nature is consistent (Linzey 2009; Rachels 1999), coherent (Linzey 2009; Rachels 1999), conceptually hierarchical (Lakoff 2003; Johnson 2003), binary (Boole 1779-1848), dualistic (McKim 1996), abstract (Grandin 2005) (Nussbaum 2006), simplified (Grandin 2005), generalized (Grandin 2005), homogenized (Grandin 2005), and artificially compartmentalized (Prince-Hughes 2004), developed devoid of experiential reality (Linzey 2009; Rachels 1999; Houston and Firth 2000). This privileging of vermal reasoning over other forms of reasoning not only invalidates and makes suspect autistic insights, but neurotypicalism also invalidates and makes suspect animal intelligence.

The neurotypical bias can be removed from animal ethics discourse by focusing critical attention on the lived experiences of nonhuman animals themselves. In other words, neurotypicalism is fundamentally speciesist because neurotypicalism conceptually both insulates and inoculates one from the lived reality and hence the needs of nonhuman animals, making empathy for and meaningful improvement in the quality of life for nonhuman animals difficult. A neurotypical approach to animal ethics makes the correct usage of certain thought processes, ideologies, and

methodologies more important than how one actually treats nonhuman animals (Best 2009: 19-33; Webb 1998: 58-60.).<sup>7</sup>

One such example is the philosophical thought experiment known as the ‘Argument from Marginal Cases’ (AMC) which has been effectively used by Singer and others animal ethicists to provide a philosophical foundation for animal rights; nonetheless, it retains a neurotypical bias toward the reasoning characteristic of neurotypical brain structures (Singer 1999: 326-327). This argument rests on three incorrect assumptions about people with mental disabilities: First, infants and people with mental disabilities lack understanding (Singer 1999: 326). Second, verbally rational life is more valuable than non-verbally rational life (Singer 1999: 326). Third, infants and those with mental disabilities are incapable of reciprocity (Singer 1999: 328). By using the AMC to frame the cause of animal liberation, Singer privileges verbal reasoning over other forms of reasoning, such as visual reasoning (Grandin 2005: 26), which allows these other classes of beings to understand, to reason, and even to reciprocate, albeit differently. Singer’s use of the AMC thus keep intact the speciesist assumption that the rational capacities of neurotypical<sup>8</sup> humans beings is the standard by which nonhuman animals are judged and given moral consideration (de Waal 1996; Armstrong and Botlzer 2004, 312).

Autists have been oppressed by many of the same persons and institutions as nonhuman animals. For example, biomedicine has a history of applying Skinner-like animal experiments in the development of invasive and sometimes traumatic behavioral modification programs for autistic children (Grandin 2005: 13). Autists know firsthand what it feels like to be treated like a nonhuman animal; to have their full capacities ignored, devalued, dismissed, trivialized, marginalized; and to have their subsequent needs and wants not addressed or taken seriously. Thus, this paper contends that autists are uniquely positioned to contribute constructively to the cause of animal liberation. Autists can articulate what is like to be treated like a nonhuman animal, can articulate what it is like to be a non-neurotypical (a category which

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<sup>7</sup> These are more feminine ways of knowing, too.

<sup>8</sup> Singer (e.g., 326) uses the word “normal” multiple times in his work.

encompasses nonhuman animals as well), are able to profoundly empathize with the plight and needs of nonhuman animals, and can provide unique insights into animal intelligence.

### **The ‘Argument from Marginal Cases’**

The primary foundation of the contemporary ‘Argument from Marginal Cases’ as used in animal ethics comes from utilitarianism, an Enlightenment philosophy which can be traced back to the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. A working definition of utilitarianism is “that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good” (Driver 2009). Singer (1999: 324-325,) attempts to answer Bentham’s question about the moral standing of non-human animals: “the question is not, Can they reason? Nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (Bentham 1988: 26). Singer (1999: 327) contends that the fact that non-human animals can suffer is a sufficient basis for giving non-human animals moral consideration. Nonetheless, by arguing that only rational beings can suffer, Singer (1999: 326) keeps intact the notion that reason is an important criterion for giving non-human beings moral consideration.

Bentham (1988: 26) employs the AMC when writing: “But a full grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old.” Bentham goes on to say that suffering is the most important criteria for giving a being moral consideration. Singer picks up on this speculation, synergizing it with what Bentham dismisses as a less important ethical criterion: capacity for reason. Singer (1999: 326, 328-329) then proceeds to use Bentham’s comparison between certain non-human animals and newborn human infants, expanding it to include those with mental disabilities and arguing that certain non-human animals are more rational than certain classes of human beings. Other animal ethicists, such as Tom Regan (1983, 2006), have also adapted the AMC to their own work.

The AMC has both strong and weak forms (Dombrowski 1997: 179-181). Singer (1999: 326, 327,), Regan (1983: 315, 316,)<sup>9</sup> Dombrowski (1997, 3-4, 189-193) and Patton (1988: 231-235,) subscribe to the strong form, which contends that humanists need to defend “*why* marginal cases have rights” (Dombrowski 1997: 179). (Singer would say “moral consideration” since, as a strict utilitarian, he is ideologically opposed to rights.)<sup>10</sup> Wolfe (2009: 121-123), Linzey (2009: 5, 30-37, 151-155, 165-167), and Nussbaum (2006: 359-366,) subscribe to its weak form, which contends that “[if] marginal cases [can] have rights, we can then argue that animals, too, [can] have rights” (Dombrowski 1997: 179).

**Figure 1: Differences between Strong and Weak versions of AMC**

	<b>Strong AMC</b>	<b>Weak AMC</b>
<b>Compare</b>	Argues From Marginal Cases, e.g., infants and those with mental disabilities.	Argues From Marginal Cases, e.g., infants and those with mental disabilities.
<b>Contrast</b>	Either/Or, Dualistic, Hierarchical, To Choose Between, e.g., peoples with mental disabilities <i>or</i> certain nonhuman animals.	Both/And, Holistic, Balanced, To Choose Both, e.g., peoples with mental disabilities <i>and</i> certain nonhuman animals.

Linzey and Nussbaum critique the strong form of the AMC. Linzey (2009, 154-155) disagrees with Singer on three points. First, Singer does not account for the history of the animal movements, which has seen the animal rights cause and the children rights cause as inseparable. Second, Singer pits human rights against animal rights, which provides bad witness to a highly speciesist society that sees animal rights in opposition to human rights. Third, Singer grants nonhuman animals moral consideration based on their demonstrating a certain standard of self-awareness—a criterion that many nonhuman animals cannot meet. Thus, rejecting as immoral any

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9 The author notes Dombrowski’s observation that there are subtle differences between Singer’s and Regan’s use of the AMC. The author still classifies Singer and Regan together in terms of the “strong” position, which is consistent with Dombrowski’s observations, while acknowledging that both philosophers do not recognize the intrinsic value of peoples with mental disabilities.

10 Unlike the others, Patton (233) acknowledges the gifts of some disabilities.

argument asserting the tyranny of the strong over those who lack certain morally irrelevant capacities, Linzey argues for a weaker version of the AMC. Beings that lack certain capacities—beings such as nonhuman animals, infants, and children, who are at the mercy of the strong—must be given special moral consideration on just these same grounds.

Nussbaum's critique of the AMC is that it does not recognize legitimate ontological differences between those with mental disabilities and nonhuman animals. Most importantly, those with mental disabilities are dependent on human society for their survival and subsequent flourishing, while nonhuman animals—with the exception of those under human dominion, e.g., on factory farms—are not. In other words, nonhuman animals, in natural settings, would be able to rely on other members of their species to help them survive and flourish. Those with mental disabilities, if exiled from the rest of human society, have nowhere else to go. Thus, Nussbaum (2006: 359-366) argues, human society has moral obligations to those with mental disabilities.

Under the force of these two critiques, the strong form of the AMC is an inadequate basis for framing animal liberation. It can be argued that the weak form of the AMC is also inadequate, and for this we turn to the voices of autists (and caregivers) themselves. These voices provide additional critiques of the strong form, as well as introducing a critique of the weak form.

### **'Marginal Cases' Create Marginalized Peoples**

Autists (part of the mostly grassroots online, autist pride movement, usually those with high functioning autism and Asperger's, see [www.wrongplanet.net](http://www.wrongplanet.net) for an example, and Boundy [2008] and Sinclair [1988] for more analysis) and their caregivers (include those who have low-functioning autism) object to the 'Argument from Marginal Cases' in both its strong and weak forms (e.g., Ari Ne-eman 2008). Both forms have a stigmatizing history and work from incorrect assumptions about the nature of the autism spectrum. Animal ethics scholars employing the AMC make

negative value judgments, not only about autism itself but also about the worth of persons who fit this category of beings. These judgments are based on assumptions that do not hold empirically, as more autists and others with developmental disabilities reveal their inner lives, including Temple Grandin, Dawn Prince-Hughes, Donna Williams, and Steven Shore. These individuals reveal that autists have vibrant, though different, inner lives.

Before animal ethicists employed the AMC, others used a similar argument to deny rights to certain people because of a perceived lack of humanity. For example, Hugh Blair, a Scottish nobleman of the eighteenth century, was denied proclamation of his marriage because the Church of Scotland believed he was “stupid” (Houston and Frith 2000:45). These two contemporary scholars—a psychologist and a historian—contend Blair had autism. More recent examples include the programs to euthanize or sterilize people with disabilities. A quarter million people with disabilities were murdered during the Holocaust, through gassing, even starvation, even weeks after the war ended in Germany. In United States, programs involving sterilization of individuals with disabilities, which were even widespread as late as the 1970s. (Disability Social History Project) At the time of writing, the United States Congress is debating whether or not to pass legislation which would restrict harmful restraining and seclusion of children in public schools. This proposed legislation responds to allegations from a government report which examined ten cases, involving children with disabilities, which involved both psychological and physical abuse, which required both civil and criminal legal action. One case even involved the death of a 7-year-old-girl. (Disability Scoop 2009, 2010) Examples like this suggest too many in the autistic community that the AMC in its strong form is fundamentally oppressive.

Contrary to Singer, Shore (2004: 58), who has Asperger’s, argues one should not assume that “marginal cases” do not have the “same needs, wants and potential for a fulfilling life as everyone else.” The ideology of identifying certain people as “marginal cases” leads to the stigmatization of entire groups of people.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion and critique of the social science concept of stigmatization in relationship to the question of disability see Nancy Eiland, *The Disabled God*, 57-66.

Stigmatization, in turn, can lead to discrimination, persecution, oppression, bigotry, and, in its most extreme cases, genocide as the above examples have demonstrated.

Some autists contend that the weak form of the AMC is also problematic because it does not honor the gifts and virtues which one's so-called "disability" brings (Neeman 2008; Boundy 2009). The weak form can be used to justify discrimination and exclusion out-of-hand because autists are seen as liabilities rather than assets to an organization, e.g., prospective employers. In addition, the weak form can be used to justify "curing" or "fixing" autists, rather than accepting them the way they are. Finally, while some animal ethicists liken autists to nonhuman animals, viewing them as 'moral patients' (incapable of conscious moral action) rather than 'moral agents' (Regan 2004, 314), autists see themselves as full human beings who are moral agents, though perhaps in ways that differ from neurotypicals. Nonetheless, the autist objection to the contentions of Singer-esque animal ethics is not based in bigotry toward nonhuman animals, but in a need to defend their identity and existence in the context of an unsympathetic neurotypical society (Ari Ne-eman 2008).

### **Why Does Animal Ethics Still Remain So Insular?**

Despite new evidence demonstrating that autists and others with intellectual disabilities are full human beings, some animal ethicists continue to defend the AMC in both its strong and weak forms (DeGraza 2006, 40-41; Linzey 2009 5, 30-37, 151-155, 165-167; Matheny 2006, 18-19; Regan 2006, 13; Singer 2006). The AMC is also implicit in activist literature, as indicated by several recent PETA campaigns, including "Milk Causes Autism" (PETA 2009b) and "Fishing Hurts" (PETA 2009a). In the latter campaign, a sub-heading—"PCBs Will Make You Stupid"—alluded to the connection between PCB consumption in fish and an increase in intellectual disabilities. Another example is drawn from the AskCarla.com column (Ask Carla 2009) in which Carla gives a loaded and judgmental interpretation, which is far from objective or factual, about the worth of peoples with developmental disabilities: "There are animals who are unquestionably more intelligent, creative, aware, communicative, and able to use language than some humans, as in the case of a chimpanzee, compared to a human infant or a person with a severe developmental



disability, for example.” When one holds onto an argument, despite significant contrary evidence, it is no longer a matter of ignorance; it is a matter of ideology based in disinformation (Lakoff 2004). Neurotypicalism is such an ideology, indicated by the way use of the AMC transforms the animal rights movement from a life-affirming movement into a life-denying movement, in the sense that certain beings are now sometimes excluded.

Drawing on the analysis presented by Wolfe, I offer four hypotheses for the continued support of the AMC. First, disability studies literature has historically not addressed the relationship between disability studies and animal studies, making it fundamentally anthropocentric and speciesist from the animal ethicist’s point-of-view. This is evident in Wolfe’s comment that a recent conference on disability studies lacked any paper referencing “the relationship between disability and trans-species affinity” (Wolfe 2009: 119-121). Second, animal ethicists perceive that nonhuman animals are being used by autists and others with disabilities as a ticket to a neurotypical, ablest society, with the nonhuman animals not getting sufficient libratory benefits in return. On this point, consider Wolfe’s (2009: 122) discussion of the animal rights movement’s objections to Temple Grandin’s advocacy for welfare instead of rights. Third, assuming limited resources, compassion, and goodwill, there is the identity politics factor of “my constituents are more marginalized and unrecognized than yours” (Wolfe 2009: 121). Although, Wolfe does not endorse this position, many other animal ethicists and activists do. Fourth and finally, animal ethicists still fundamentally contend that autists and others with disabilities are “useless,” that they cannot reciprocate, and that they are moral patients who are completely dependent on moral agents for their survival (Wolfe 2009: 122-123). These sentiments, as revealed by Wolfe, continue to pervade animal ethics and activism.

These objections to autistic animal ethics are not cogent for a number of reasons. First, connections can be made between disability studies and animal studies. For example, Wolfe talks about the shift in the disability movement from what he calls “fetishization of agency,” which is a more civil rights and legalistic approach, to an awareness by some people in the movement that “we now ‘need to find a new way of talking about the place of disabled people in the universe and to find the place of

disability in some universal,”” which is a more cosmological and anthropological approach (Wolfe 2009: 119-120). This cosmological-anthropological approach can open up room to encompass the nonhuman world because this approach is more outward than inward, more communitarian than individualistic, and yet it does not deny ecological individualism—the value of each individual animal, whether human or nonhuman.

Second, nonhuman animals do in fact get significant libratory benefits from autists reaching out to animalkind. Consider Dawn Prince-Hughes’s lifework with gorillas; her work might not have happened, if she were not an autist. I am another example. I identify myself as an animal rights activist and have published books which constructively address and sympathetically engage animal issues. I am a vegetarian, have recently started an animal ministry with [www.allcreatures.org](http://www.allcreatures.org), and have been militantly against hunting for population control and the ethical hunting position since I was a youth. I do not attend circuses, rodeos, or bullfights; I avoid wearing animal products when possible; and I do not hunt, fish, or trap. My practices reflect not only my principles, but also a fundamental difference in my mindset: I do not get pleasure from these activities. Unquestioningly, nonhuman animals receive at least some libratory benefits from my existence.

The third issue, the identity politics argument, implicitly assumes that there are “deserving and undeserving poor,” revealing an acceptance of the implicit paternalism of the oppressor, and holding that some group’s issues are categorically more important than others, e.g., consider the conflicts between African-Americans and Latinos, between illegal and legal immigrants, between earlier and newer immigrants, and between the working poor and those on welfare. This argument quantifies suffering, e.g., physical suffering is greater suffering than psychological suffering or more of this group died in a genocide than that group, rather than embracing everyone’s suffering as legitimate, e.g., both physical and psychological suffering both qualifies as suffering, or the fact that members of any group died in a genocide is a serious justice problem. It is fundamentally dualistic, e.g., one group getting justice, while another does not. This line of thinking also enables oppressors to get two or more oppressed groups fighting among themselves, as the above examples imply, rather than uniting against their common oppressor, e.g., classism, xenophobia,

poverty, unjust barriers, and unlivable wages. Also, it assumes a scarcity of resources, compassion, and good-will that is available to help the marginalized, e.g., the unquestioned paradigm in economics of a presumed scarcity or an unquestioned cynicism in the power for individuals and societies to change. The alternative is to negotiate with the oppressors to more equitably distribute goods and services, e.g., activism and moral suasion, now disproportionately controlled by the dominant group in society, e.g., neurotypical, speciesist power holders.

Finally, it has already been shown that the fourth argument, that autists and others with disabilities are “useless” and lack moral agency, is contrary to fact. Grandin is an autist, and also a Ph.D. professor of animal science at Colorado State University, who has published over three hundred scientific papers as of 2005, gives thirty-five lectures on animal management a year, another twenty-five on autism per year, and half the cattle in the United States are handled in more benign slaughter systems she has designed (Grandin 2005: 7).<sup>12</sup> Sinclair, another autist activist, counters the moral patient argument, by arguing that in his struggle toward acquiring “certain expressive and receptive communication skills, possibly including some basic instincts that make communication a natural process for most people, combined with any cognitive or perceptual differences” (Sinclair 1988: 1) takes the posture of “I don’t mind that I have to do this work...I am interested in learning about how people’s minds work...But I *do* mind when in spite of so much effort I still miss cues, and someone who has much better inherent communication ability than I do but has not even taken a close enough look at my perspective to notice the enormity of the chasm between us tells me that my failure to understand is because *I* lack ‘empathy.’ If I know that I do not understand people and I devote all this energy and effort to figuring them out, do I have more or less empathy than people who not only do not understand, but who do

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12 A benign slaughter system is not necessarily the logical conclusion of autist animal ethics, nor is Grandin’s welfare approach unanimously defended by all in the autist community. For example, Sinclair who is also an autist and a vegan, argues forcefully against Grandin’s approach, instead arguing for a hard-line animal liberationist position, in his short essay, “If you love something, you don’t kill it” <http://web.archive.org/web/20080330071836/web.syr.edu/~jisincla/killing.htm>, 1998.

Note also that Grandin does not have a monopoly on confusing love with killing, e.g., Just War Theory and Ethical Hunting. Both examples are nonautistic in origin. This illustrates autist productivity and contributions; it does not imply Grandin’s approach is a universally accepted autist animal ethic.

not even notice that they do not understand me?” (Sinclair 1988: 2-3) Sinclair is an example of an autistic, making conscious moral decisions in his interactions with other people, thus clearly meeting Regan’s definition of a moral agent, while Grandin is just one of many autistic examples as productive, contributing members of society. Thus the animal ethics argument that non-neurotypicals are useless moral patients is not cogent.

There is a much more persuasive way of framing animal ethics, which is also nonanthropocentric and non-speciesist, as well as mutually liberating, uniting, and empowering to both autists and nonhuman animals.

### **The Linked Oppression Model—Its Power and Promise**

Steven-Bouma Prediger describes “linked oppressions” as it relates to both the ecofeminist argument and the ecojustice argument: “One might call [it] the fourth argument [in his typology for environmentalism] ‘poor and oppressed unite’ since it posits a link between various forms of oppression” (Prediger 2001: 168). Prediger (2001:168-169) continues, “Given that sexism and racism and the exploitation of the earth are connected, concern for one should entail concern for the others. The ecology movement and the various movements for human liberation, which have for too long been separate and at times antagonistic projects, must see themselves as allies in a common quest. There is, happily, growing recognition of this fact.”

I propose a variation of the linked oppression model, namely that there is a correlation between how autists are treated by neurotypical society and how neurotypical society, as a whole, treats nonhuman animals, and that the causes of autistic pride and animal liberation are intricately linked, interdependent on one another. Both oppressions have the same primary cause: the ideology of neurotypicalism. When those without a fully functioning vermis, including autists and nonhuman animals, do not conform to the wishes of neurotypical society, neurotypical society starts to “interfere with, censor, and control” (Houston and Frith 2000: 43) those understandings or behaviors which do not conform to neurotypical standards or desires.

This model is consistent with reality and it helps resolve the conflict between animal rights and disability rights which is manifested in some religious, ethical, and public policy debates. It also has the power to break down another powerful false dualism: the choice between preserving human dignity at all costs and giving the nonhuman world significant moral consideration. This is a false choice, between being for Peter Singer's "argument for marginal cases" or being for Pope John Paul's "dignity of man" argument. Each of these two approaches is inadequate.

Singer's use of the AMC has already been dealt with. The other extreme is just as destructive and must also be rejected by autists and other peoples with disabilities. The "dignity of man argument" espoused by people like Pope John Paul II holds that the unique value of human beings must be preserved at all costs, in order to prevent such practices as abortion and euthanasia. The dogmatic contention that humans are both unique and superior forces Singer and others to embrace the AMC in an attempt to deconstruct specieism.

The animal rights and the disability movements need a framework and strategy that draws on a synthesis of the thesis and antithesis of the "dignity of man" argument and the argument from "marginal cases." Both extremes are harmful and counterproductive. The AMC is fundamentally oppressive to autists, while the "dignity of man" argument is fundamentally oppressive to nonhuman animals. Both positions are fundamentally inadequate. Yet, these two positions are also fundamentally true. There is something intrinsically valuable about all human life. And, it is equally true that there is something intrinsically valuable about nonhuman life. In essence, what needs to be preserved at all costs is the dignity of all life, human and nonhuman. Once it is recognized that choosing between the rights of nonhuman animals and the rights of persons with disabilities is a false dichotomy, it is possible to see that both groups are oppressed because they are not neurotypical. To this we turn.

### **The Autist-Animal Connection**

A fully functioning vermis does not make a neurotypical person superior to autists and nonhuman animals. As the author has demonstrated, the autist mind has its own gifts

and virtues. Yet, neurotypicals believe that their fully functioning vermis makes them superior to and worthy of the conquest of all others who do not conform or measure up. Let's look at how this oppressive dynamic plays out, building a profile of the harmful effects of neurotypical society.

First, neurotypical society sees autists and nonhuman animals as peripheral in terms of social justice (Houston and Frith 2000). Autists and nonhuman animals are considered by neurotypical society to be the "undeserving poor," versus homosexuals, women, the economic poor, or African-Americans, "the real poor," which are considered legitimate, because they demand less and are considered more like the dominant society (Johnson). Moreover, if the autist struggle for justice is addressed at all, it is oftentimes as a tacked-on issue appealing to people's self-interests, whether in the form of "segregationist charity" (Eisland 1994: 73-75) for autists and others with disabilities or "compassion" (Nussbaum 2006: 2, 325) for nonhuman animals.

Second, neurotypical society sees autists and nonhuman animals as expendable (Houston and Frith 2000). If autists or nonhuman animals get in the way of the neurotypical agenda, they are sacrificed to the common good of neurotypical society. If he or she is disruptive, an autist is expelled from a community, such as when an elementary school teacher in Florida, disciplined a troublesome five-year-old who was in the process of being diagnosed with Asperger's, by letting all his fellow students vote him out of the class, as well as publicly chastising and humiliating him (Wixon 2008). If he or she is found to be a nuisance, a nonhuman animal is killed, such as the standard policy of wildlife managers of addressing overpopulated and invasive species problems through hunting and other methods of eradication, as has been employed to deal with white tailed deer, resident Canada geese, or nutria problems. Even reintroduced wild wolves are not above being eradicated, even though they are endangered.

Third, neurotypical society patronizes and dominates autists and nonhuman animals (Houston and Frith 2000). Neurotypical society looks down on autists and nonhuman animals and does not treat them as equals. For example, a dog is seen as cute and made obedient. An autist is treated like a little child, even when a full adult.

Fourth, neurotypical society expects autists and nonhuman animals to conform to neurotypical sentiments and standards set by neurotypical society (Houston and Frith 2000). Nonhuman animals are expected to not be a nuisance. Autists are expected to become “normal.”

Fifth, neurotypical society punishes autists and nonhuman animals when they do not conform (Houston and Frith 2000). Animals are euthanized when they are seen as a threat to neurotypical society. Autists are subjected to powerful psychotropic medications and traumatic behavior modification training, in efforts to get them to conform (Diament 2009, 2010).

Sixth, neurotypical society oppresses autists and nonhuman animals by putting them into situations in which they are incapable of properly defending themselves, or even properly handling themselves, thereby causing them to perform poorly at best (Houston and Frith 2000). For example, last year a pet chimp became violent under stress, because he ingested wine and medicine. Keeping the chimp as a poorly maintained pet, resulted in the chimp being drugged; neurotypical society then set-up a normally compassionate police officer to fatally shoot the chimp in self-defense, and to save the life of the owner (Wilson 2010). In the past, I have been denied support which would have helped me to succeed. When I did not do well, despite much effort, institutions severely punished me. For example, a doctoral program I attended for one year would have been successful if I had received the accommodation of a reduced course load, which was the recommendation of Disability Services, but was departmentally discouraged by the program. Because I was discouraged from taking a reduced course-load, I did not make the necessary grades to stay in the program, and was asked to leave.

Seventh, neurotypical society feels justified in violating the rights of autists and nonhuman animals with impunity. Because neurotypical society conceptualizes the autist and nonhuman animal as cognitively inferior to the neurotypical, neurotypical society believes that they cannot handle these rights (Houston and Frith 2000).

Eighth, neurotypical society privileges neurotypical ways of knowing and being over autistic and nonhuman animal ways of knowing and being (Houston and Frith 2000). Nonhuman animals are seen as inferior. Autists are seen as savants.

Ninth, neurotypical society is suspicious of rational or intelligent behavior in autists and nonhuman animals (Houston and Frith 2000). Perceived rational or intelligent behavior in nonhuman animals is dismissed as being anthropomorphic. Perceived rational or intelligent behavior in autists is dismissed as unbelievable.

Tenth, neurotypical society is suspicious of and threatened by the special relationship autists have with nonhuman animals, which serves as a prophetic witness against the anthropocentrism and speciesism which dominates Western culture (Houston and Frith 2000). For example, I have been targeted repeatedly because of my views on nonhuman animals. In Boy Scouts, the children used to tease me about my interest in birdwatching. Even today, I continue to feel like a target because of my beliefs about nonhuman animals. While recognizing that members of other groups are also bullied, e.g., homosexuals, in this case, I am convinced that I was bullied because I was an autist. Neurotypical children, who are also sensitive to animals and animal issues, have the advantage of a certain set of social skills to navigate through a bullying situation, which often involves silence in certain situations. Autists do not have these skills, or are in the process of developing them and oftentimes feels uncomfortable lying or being less than authentic. This is corroborated by statistical evidence. Surveys in 2002 and 2009 corroborate that incidents of bullying in the autism community were in the 90% range in 2002 and dropped only four percent in eight years, despite increased education, consciousness, and knowledge of the autism spectrum in the last decade. The 2009 study also reported lack of responsiveness to parent complaints by school officials (Little 2002; The Boston Herald 2009)

Finally, neurotypical society bullies and intimidates autists and nonhuman animals when an autist or a nonhuman animal engages in his or her natural behaviors (Houston and Frith 2000). Autists are mercilessly bullied in school, and even into adulthood. I can easily become a target, and be repeatedly revictimized, whenever I engage in my natural behaviors as an autist. This is often sanctioned by neurotypical society through unresponsive teachers and administrators and unsympathetic social



institutions. Nonhuman animals are also bullied though more intensely physically violent, oftentimes lethal, means, as a result of neurotypical society's propensity to sanction the practices of sport hunting, recreational fishing, bullfighting, and rodeos. Bullying of autists is usually emotional, although not always, e.g., also can include beatings (Little 2002). Bullying of nonhuman animals is usually physical, although not always. For example, when a little girl chases pigeons in the park, the same underlying mentality is at work. The purpose of bullying--- whether sports hunting or playground teasing --- is to systematically and radically exclude a certain class of beings from the mainstream of human society, with the goal of dominating these beings, thereby giving them an inferior social status. Bullying of autists and nonhuman animals are similar in that both are considered accepted practices to vent aggression, domination, and violent urges, because both classes of beings are considered other and inferior.<sup>13</sup> (Johnson 2003)

As I have demonstrated in the above profile, neurotypicals have behavioral problems that impact other persons and beings, just as neurotypicals claim autist and nonhuman animal behavioral problems impact neurotypicals. Now, we will look briefly at some objections to this framework.

### **Practical Implications of the Linked Oppression Model**

In advocating and defending this version of linked oppressions, I have received three main objections: that I stereotype neurotypicals (Sinclair, personal conversation), that I scapegoat neurotypicals (Sinclair, personal communication) and that I invalidate the neurotypical perspective (Boyle, personal communication). With respect to the first objection, it is important to make clear a distinction between individual persons who happen to be neurotypical and neurotypicalism, which is a worldview or ideology held by neurotypical society *as a whole*, and which informs collective neurotypical behavior, cultural assumptions, and institutional structures (Boundy 2008). Not all neurotypical individuals subscribe to this worldview in its entirety (Boundy 2008).

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<sup>13</sup> Generalized principles are derived from Houston and Frith, although, in most cases, Houston and Frith did not apply their analysis to nonhuman animals. See Linzey (2009: 87-88), "Hunting as anti-social behavior," for an example of a correlation between bullying in children, animal cruelty, and hunting.

Some neurotypicals are becoming increasingly sensitive to autistic oppression and pride (Boundy 2008). Some neurotypicals are beginning to question the legitimacy of anthropocentrism and speciesism, such as Singer, Regan, Rachels and Linzey, and even the primacy of verbal reasoning itself (Boundy 2008). Nonetheless, by the mere fact that neurotypicals are the ruling majority, every neurotypical to one degree or another has bought into, benefits from, and is validated by at least part of the neurotypical worldview (Boundy 2008; (Sinclair 1988 1998; Diamant 2009 2010; Little 2002; Johnson 2003; Disability Social History Project). In other words, neurotypicalism informs individual neurotypical's social location, sense of social privilege, and experiences of reality much in the same way race, gender, or sexual orientation does (Boundy 2008; Sinclair 1988 1998; Diamant 2009 2010; Little 2002; Johnson 2003; Disability Social History Project). This model recognizes, consistent with scholarship in sociology, that individuals behave collectively as part of a given society and social arrangement (see Appelbaum and Chambliss [1997], for an introduction to the sociology perspective). Individuals are, in part, "socially produced" (Cipollo, university sociology lectures).

With respect to the objection about scapegoating neurotypicals, I respond with recognition that neurotypicals are not the only ones capable of doing wrong or doing evil. Autists can and do wrong things, even evil things, to nonhuman animals. But the point of this model is that autists are not to blame for their own oppression. Nor are they inherently disabled or diseased. Nor is autism inherently psycho-pathological or socio-pathological, with neurotypicalism being the norm for determining a person's abilities, health, or functioning. The author forcefully affirms that autists have a right to exist in this world, and to be included in the world, as much as neurotypicals do, and that we have unique gifts and talents, which can contribute to human society and the nonhuman world in ways at which neurotypicals have not been completely successful. This is in radical opposition to the prejudgment that peoples on the spectrum are "dead weight," distracting attention away from animal liberation. In fact, this is a radical affirmation that autists are not "marginal" to the animal liberation cause. We have a function in the "cosmos," as well as intrinsic value as individuals. This model is a radical deconstruction of the notion that what is considered by neurotypical society to be "normal" are the way things should be, or that such conceptions of the "normal" even fully take into account what actually "is." In other

words, this analysis provides a “serious and radical critique” of “conformity” and a revolutionary affirmation of life, in all its myriad of forms. It forcefully affirms the value of different nervous systems, whether human or nonhuman.

Finally, I do not invalidate neurotypicals. In fact, I contend that autists are interdependent (not dependent) on neurotypicals and neurotypical society. Neurotypicals can bring the following to the table: methods for reducing interpersonal conflicts; a system of accountability for harmful autistic behaviors; recognition that the human body is a valued part of the Natural World; scientific and philosophical reasoning; measures to reduce anxiety, fear, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors in the autistic; and spiritual, ethical, and scientific formation for the autistic, in terms of cultivating their sensibilities toward nonhuman animals. According to this model, neurotypicals are definitely welcomed at the autistic table; they just need to meet autists and nonhuman animals halfway.

## **Conclusion**

Autists and nonhuman animals share a common plight at the hands of neurotypicalism, an ideology that privileges verbal reasoning. Consequently, autistic activists and animal liberationists must unite or at least reach a truce. This does not mean that PETA and other animal groups need to be a social service agency for autists and others with disabilities. PETA and the various animal movements can focus on giving nonhuman animals the best defense against speciesism and institutionalized animal cruelty possible, because these groups have precious little funding, resources, sympathy, and positive media access. Nor do autistic pride groups and individual autists need to agree with PETA and other animal groups on every issue or strategy. Autists and the autistic community should be free to develop their own positions and strategies, for addressing animal issues that provide an original, unique, thoughtful, important, and necessary, critique, ethic, strategy, and vision for animal liberation. So therefore, both the autistic pride movements and the animal liberationist movement need to stop attacking and disrespecting out-of-hand each other’s positions, strategies, motives, and ontological foundations, especially the employment of *ad hominem* arguments as rhetorical devices. Both parties need to recognize that the plight of

autists and the plight of nonhuman animals are fundamentally linked, and that both movements (autist pride and animal liberation) are fighting the same oppressor (neurotypicalism) and working toward the same goal of liberating the oppressed in a society which is fundamentally neurocentric, with each of the two movements offering unique gifts in their quest to ameliorate this injustice. (Bouma-Prediger 2001)

Such a view neither stereotypes nor scapegoats neurotypicals, but simply points out the benefits neurotypical individuals receive from society's present structure. Neurotypicals and autists alike bring complementary gifts to the table. The conflict between autists and animal liberationists is completely unnecessary, alienating a group of people who do not need to be alienated, and who can be of service to the animal liberation cause.

Certain sectors of the animal movements alienating a group of people, who do not need to be alienated, is both counterproductive and undermining to the animal liberation strategy. Most certainly, the animal rights movement, scapegoating an oppressed group of people, who have a predisposition toward being sympathetic, even empathic, toward nonhuman animals, is especially undermining and degrading to both parties. Yet, when certain peoples and groups in the animal movement remain insular to a neurologically chauvinistic strategy, autist individuals and groups will continue to feel compelled to make negative comments about the animal rights movement online, hurting the animal liberation cause in the process.

Whether one is arguing the AMC or Linked Oppressions, it is important to realize, that these arguments are merely "means to an end," strategies toward our collective goal of animal liberation, whatever that vision looks like in theory and practice, depending on the vision of the individual or group involved. We all need to keep what is in the best interest for animals in mind, not becoming insular to certain strategies or arguments, particularly when they loss integrity and persuasiveness, starting to undermine the credibility of the movement in the process, making it difficult to recruit much needed allies, because the target groups finds the framing of animal rights, repulsive and offensive. We need to be both pragmatic and strategic, while retaining our highest ideals, for this endeavor to be fruitful, accomplishing our intended goal-the actualization of animal liberation.

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## EXTENDED ESSAYS

### The Love Whose Name Cannot be Spoken: Queering the Human-Animal Bond<sup>1</sup>

Carmen Dell'Aversano<sup>2</sup>

To the animals who accepted my  
love,  
for their love,  
with love.

My own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose,  
but queerer than we *can* suppose.  
J.B.S. Haldane

#### Abstract

The hermeneutic category of queer has established itself as a powerful tool of social criticism and political action. Questioning and crossing identitarian barriers, and drawing attention to the ways to which non-normative identities are repressed by mainstream culture is queer's central theoretical vocation. This paper aims to extend its application by considering the case of humans who cross the most entrenched identitarian barrier upheld by all human societies and in the whole course of history by identifying prioritarily with non-human animals. The paper starts with a critique of the language in which the oppressive relationship of our species to other ones is encoded, examines the consequences of this oppression for both human and animal identity, highlights its function as the hidden foundation of human intraspecific violence, and closes by showing the deep consonance between the two most radical proposals in the fields of queer and animal rights respectively, Edelman's critique of "reproductive futurism" and the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement.

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1 The first part of the title is an allusion to "the love that dare not speak its name", the last line of the poem "Two Loves" by Lord Alfred Douglas, renowned - more than for its literary merits - for having been quoted during the trial of Oscar Wilde; the phrase has always been interpreted as a reference to same-sex love.

2 I-CARE (International Centre for Alternatives in Research and Education) and Università di Pisa, Italy. Please address correspondence to:  
Carmen Dell'Aversano, Facoltà di Lettere e filosofia, Università di Pisa, Via S. Maria 67, 56126 Pisa, Italy; e-mail dellaversano@humnet.unipi.it

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## **1. Introduction**

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. (Halperin 1995 62)

What makes queer so productive as a hermeneutical category is its structural elasticity, its definitional indeterminacy:

Queer [...] does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. (Halperin 1995 62)

Because of its fluid nature, of its being unaligned with any specific identity category, queer has the potential to subvert accepted ways of thinking on any issue. Subversion, as well as fluidity, is definitory of queer; indeed, its fluidity is not an end in itself, but simply the most effective and aesthetically fulfilling means to accomplish the political and metaphysical task of permanent and neverending subversion.

The main analytic and hermeneutic device queer uses in its subversive enterprise is denaturalization, a radical and ruthless ability and willingness to question all assumptions of individual and social identity: queer signifies “a resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner 1993 xxvi), it “mark[s] a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception” (Doty 1993 3). And what makes it so politically, as well as intellectually, significant (and what I personally like most about it) is that “almost everything that can be called queer theory has been radically anticipatory, trying to bring a world into being” (Berlant & Warner 1995 344).

The aim of this paper is to present a radically anticipatory attempt at denaturalization, a systematic questioning of one of the most basic and most pervasive assumptions on which society, with all its potential for hegemony and repression, rests, and which is, indeed, basic to the very shape of our shared life on this planet: that of the “natural” divide between humans and animals.

Such an endeavour is not peripherally related to the central vocation of queer. Historically, queer's primary aim has been to draw attention to incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire, and to question the dominant model of heterosexuality, demonstrating the impossibility of any "natural" sexuality, and calling into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as "man" and "woman". Theoretically, though, it is vital to note that queer is about sex only incidentally: the real topic of its polymorphously transgressive reflections is identity; the fundamental – and most productive – idea in queer (from Butler 1990 onwards) is that identity is not an essence but a performance, exacted through a pervasive matrix of assumptions, inscriptions and expectations, and that subjects themselves, far from building the reassuringly solid foundation of a realist ontology, only come into being as products of performances. The central place of desire in queer reflection has much to do with the centrality of desire as a fundamental mode of relation, and consequently as a major way that identity is shaped, enacted and disciplined: to liberate desire means to liberate identity, to open it up to new possibilities of performance and to open the world up to their subversive implications: queer does not simply maintain that it is OK to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (this is a given of progressive common sense, about the least queer position imaginable...) but states that *any* construction of identity (including LGBT ones) is a performance constituting a subject which does not "exist" prior to it, and encourages to bring into being (both as objects of desire, of fantasy and of theoretical reflection and as concrete existential and political possibilities) alternative modes of performance; accordingly, the point of a queer critique of human-animal relations is not simply to assert animal rights (even though this is sacrosanct, and what matters most to me not only as a theoretician but as an activist and as a person), but to investigate the performative consequences of the human/animal binary in a vast array of identities, including those of oppressors.<sup>i</sup>

A queer analysis of human-animal relations can easily point to incoherencies which question the stability of taken-for-granted relations between species, with the limits they impose on feelings (of proximity, affection, empathy...), on political consciousness (of the routine oppression of other species by our own) and, consequently, on action (above all on the refusal to further participate in this

oppression). In the case of animal queer, the dominant model to be questioned is of course the assumption of a “natural divide between species”. Just as heteronormativity grotesquely maintains that any member of the “opposite sex” is more appropriate, suitable and attractive as a sexual partner than any member of one’s own, humannormativity maintains that *all* members of one species (*homo sapiens*) have more in common with one another than any of them can have with any member of any other species. Demonstrating the fraudulent basis of the obligatory assumption of an aprioristic and unconditional “natural” similarity and solidarity among humans, and exposing the violent and manipulative means which are routinely employed to enforce it, a queer analysis of human-animal relations cannot but end up calling into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as “human” and “animal” and, consequently, subjecting the specular identities they engender, and the performances they exact, to a radical critique.

It is my conviction that a queer perspective on animal issues has the potential to show them to be considerably broader and more ramified (and therefore both more interesting intellectually and more relevant politically) than they are usually assumed to be, even by people sympathetic to, or engaged in, animal rights. Accordingly, the issues I will address in what follows, however diverse they might appear, are really parts of a single unitary argument; it might be useful to briefly sketch the shape that it will take here.

In section 2 (“Animal Queer”) the queering of the human-animal barrier in some humans’ identities and emotions builds the starting point for a connection between queer theory and animal issues.

Conceptualizing species identity as the product of a performance makes Butler’s analysis of gender immediately relevant to human-animal issues. Section 3 (“Performing mastery”) explores both the theoretical side of the issue (starting with a critique of the human/animal binary, and methodically highlighting the applicability of Butler’s seminal findings to animal queer), and one of its most far-reaching practical aspects: the performance of mastery as one of the foundational components of human identity, constituted in opposition to animal ones.

In the performance of human “identity”, animals are routinely used to bring into existence in every human society a space for a class of sentient beings to which no rights are ascribed, and for a form of murder which escapes both sanction and notice. Section 4 (“Performing ‘dehumanization’”) assesses the momentous implications of this fact by referring to Philip Zimbardo’s singling out of “dehumanization” as the core process of the psychological mechanism of violence. Human-animal relations are the training ground for dehumanization, and the practice of violence that humans, by virtue of the performance of human identity which is exacted from them, get in their relations with animals is a precondition for the possibility of every other form of violence.

The subversive vocation of animal queer hinges on its replacing sameness with otherness as the criterion of inclusion; because it is defined by love for the irreducible, unassimilable *other*, radicalism is a constitutive aspect of animal queer. Section 5 (“The anti-Child”) broadens the theoretical argument for animal queer by highlighting the deep consonance between one of the most radical proposals to come out of queer critique, Lee Edelman’s denouncing of heteronormativity’s narcissistic investment in the future, and on children as its symbols, and an equally radical vision of animal queer utopia, that of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement.

The Conclusions (“Species Trouble”) focus on the potential of animal queer to resolve the dichotomy between a theory of utopian radicalism and a politics focused on the struggle for rights: affirming animal rights is only possible within a radical framework aiming to subvert the most entrenched assumptions of human culture.

## **2. Animal Queer**

It is morning; slowly, I crawl back from sleep to consciousness. The perception which leads me back from dreams to the waking world is her smell, which has been enveloping and soothing me all through the night. I reach out to stroke her head, resting next to mine on the pillow, and extend my other arm to hug her. She is completely relaxed and trusting. Her small body yields to my touch, and she moves further against me, to nestle under my arm. I bury my face in her fur, gratefully breathe in her warmth and whisper “I love you.”

T'aimer dans la plus totale déréliction, c'est éprouver soudain ton étrangeté absolue, je te désire car ton corps m'étonne, ses aspects les plus usuels me deviennent des météores lointains dont la configuration bouleverse. Je te convoite car nous n'avons rien de commun. (Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1977 244)<sup>ii</sup>

I will start by considering a fact which has so far inexplicably escaped the attention of queer theory. Some humans' most primitive instinct, deepest need and most heartfelt conviction is to identify prioritarily with non-human animals, to form their most lasting and most vital bonds with non-human animals and to empathize with and support non-human animals in preference to human ones. These people dare (or cannot help but) cross the most stable and most entrenched barrier regulating the flow of emotions towards socially sanctioned objects in all human cultures and societies and in the whole course of documented human history; by all definitions of the word, this makes them queer.<sup>iii</sup> What makes them even queerer is the repression, abuse and oppression to which they, as humans who, in feeling, political consciousness and action, dare to cross the boundary separating their species from other ones, are ruthlessly and systematically subjected. Human love for animals is ridiculed, marginalized, despised and repressed with a violence that easily escalates to murder even more than same-sex love between humans in the most homophobic societies. Modes of political consciousness which question the legitimacy of the routine and murderous oppression of other species by our own are delegitimized as political positions and denied hearing in the political arena. Political action aimed at correcting, or at least at granting visibility to, the gratuitous cruelty of human behaviour towards animals is dismissed as extremist, extravagant, irrelevant or crazy.<sup>iv</sup> In what follows I will use the term "animal queer" to refer to the cluster of perceptions, feelings, modes of consciousness, actions and theoretical orientations which are defined by a prioritary emotional and existential commitment to empathy with non-human animals; even though they may never have heard of queer, humans who identify prioritarily with non-humans, who make this identification the core of their perceptual, emotional, cognitive, philosophical and political identity, and who maintain it in the face of continuous and violent societal disapproval and sanction "font du queer sans le savoir"<sup>v</sup> and, in so doing, show the category of queer to be productive, both

existentially and hermeneutically, far beyond what its original proponents ever envisioned.

It is probably unnecessary in this context to point out that in animal queer genital activity is not the point;<sup>vi</sup> after all,

the point of queer critique is to develop critical frameworks that can disrupt and rewrite the countless ways the human potential for sensual pleasure is socially produced as sex [...]. (Hennessy 1994 106)

Much of what theorists of lesbian feminism have said about love between women is relevant to animal queer:

Love between women has been primarily a sexual phenomenon only in male fantasy literature. 'Lesbian' describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. (Faderman 1985 17-18)

Like lesbian feminism, animal queer is about political choice and emotional preference much more than about what heteronormativity construes as "sex".<sup>vii</sup> Like lesbian feminism, animal queer, by the simple fact of its existence, can question and jeopardize the deepest foundations of society, can expose humanormativity and its multiple facets of more or less subtle or violent repressions for the fraud that it is. This is the reason why it must not and cannot be allowed to speak, to be acknowledged, to exist.

The repression of animal queer is even more thorough and systematic than the repression of other forms of queer. One important aspect of this repression should be dealt with at the outset, because of its relevance to the very possibility of a queer analysis of the human-animal relationship: the fact that language does not allow for the distinction between sex and gender to be translated into human-animal terms. An individual belonging to the human species is *assumed*, by the way language works, to identify primarily with the human species, to feel emotions and loyalties coherent with this identification, and to act accordingly. The possibility of queering the divide



between the sexes is often referred to, at least with terms of abuse; the possibility of queering the divide between our species and the others is not even acknowledged linguistically. I do not think queer theory has ever confronted a more entrenched and more hegemonic case of naturalization, which not only deproblematizes certain discourses, identities and lifestyles but makes alternative ones not simply dangerous or stigmatized but unthinkable: throughout human history social discourse about the human-animal bond has been so repressive that it has systematically failed to provide for the possibility of expressing a fracture between the equivalents of sex and gender in terms of species. As far as species is concerned, biology is automatically assumed to be destiny; not only in terms of genetics and anatomy but in terms of existential, ethical, political and emotional possibilities. What Butler writes about gender makes eminent sense in this context; one need only replace the word “gender” with “species”:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which practices of desire do not “follow” from sex or gender. “Follow” in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. (Butler 1990 24)

This is the same matrix which requires that certain kinds of political, ideological and emotional alignment which do not follow the lines separating the species cannot exist: compassion for human suffering can and should lead to political action; compassion for animal suffering must not; rape, as something that one does to another’s body without their consent, must be condemned and prosecuted; meat-eating, which can be defined in exactly the same terms,<sup>viii</sup> must continue. One must not feel for any animal more than one feels for the even most distant or hateful “fellow human”. Everything which makes human society human and dictates what humans are and how they must live together conspires to make animal queer “the love which cannot speak its name”.

In order not to solve this problem (which, like all systemic problems, can only be solved by a shift in collective awareness and a corresponding momentous change in social practices), but to make it visible, and therefore accessible as a topic for discussion, I would like to propose that the terms “biological species” and “species identity” be used as analogues to “sex” and “gender” respectively in animal queer

discourse. Accordingly, my biological species is human, but my species identity leads me to identify with the species that the species I biologically belong to oppresses, tortures and murders, much like a human can be biologically male but identify with any of a number of different genders, and loathe and fight their oppression by normal heterosexual discourse and by some other humans with whom he may share his sex.

That the differentiation between biological species and species identity is far from specious, but offers a productive way to analyze phenomena that would otherwise defy awareness and description, is demonstrated by the fact that it can also be observed in nonhuman animals. The primates raised by human families in cross-fostering experiments on the acquisition of language identified with the human species and, when brought into contact with their biological conspecifics, often expressed – linguistically! – their disgust and dismay (Fouts 1997 122). It is interesting to note that many of these persons, who had not only developed an identification with our species and with many of the features of the culture in which they had been raised, but an impressive mastery of human language, were later sold to laboratories to be subjected to painful, invasive and ultimately deadly experiments.<sup>ix</sup>

One of the assumptions of queer is that identification and desire can cross the societal boundaries separating sexes, genders and sexual definitions, and that, indeed, these boundaries have been set up largely to tame and to segregate love and empathy, to enforce a conformity of emotion resulting in a conformity of behaviour. Up to now, queer studies have neglected one fundamental boundary which is enforced in an even more totalitarian way than any with which queer critique has dealt with so far, but which is nevertheless crossed every day by currents of empathy, fondness and love: the boundary separating humans from animals.

The nature of the transgression reveals the nature of the boundary: both have to do primarily and fundamentally with emotion. What we now know about empathy and the neural structures underlying it<sup>x</sup> makes it clear that we:

feel the feelings of other animals. [...] As I watch an animal, I'm not reaching for the closest word to describe behavior I see; I'm feeling the emotion directly, without words, or even a full, conscious understanding of the animal's actions. [...] My feelings actually know what's going on

inside the animal, and this emotional empathy seems to be innate. (Bekoff & Goodall, 2007 128)

This is the experience that Derrida refers to when he writes

the response to the question "can they suffer?" leaves no doubt. In fact it has never left any room for doubt; that is why the experience that we have of it is not even indubitable; it precedes the indubitable, it is older than it. (Derrida 1999 p. 396)

From earliest infancy, we are taught to ignore, repress and ridicule this "experience [that] precedes the indubitable", this "direct[...]" "feeling", which is real and evident before and beyond consciousness and language, and as immediate and trustworthy as any we will ever have access to in our lives. From earliest infancy, we are taught to discount both our own feelings for animals and the feelings of animals themselves. Learning to eat what in most of the world is considered a "normal" diet implies being indoctrinated in an attitude of callousness towards physical and psychological torture, pain, fear and ultimately murder; it implies repressing feelings of empathy, of compassion, of justice and protectiveness for innocent and weaker beings.

Like transgressive feelings of same-sex love, transgressive feelings of empathy and affection towards animals are initially repressed through ridicule; but sometimes ridicule is not enough. The repression of "unnatural" feelings for animals and the enforcement of the "natural" divide separating the species which has the right to kill from those which exist to be killed<sup>xi</sup> can take a form as extreme as any that have been devised in the plurimillenary history of repression of human-to-human queer love: that of having the transgressor participate in the ritual murder of the object of her "unnatural" affection. Innumerable children have been served their pet lamb or duck for dinner, or have been forced to abandon their puppy or kitten at the beginning of the holiday season. A few have reacted with permanent shock and horror;<sup>xii</sup> most have yielded to societal pressure, and have learned to regard their most authentic and deepest emotions as nothing more than childish "squeamishness". In all its horror, this is, in the experience of many of us, the moment in which our identity is founded and constructed as "human" in contrast to the "non-human". And the "non-human", embodied in the corpse, maimed beyond recognition, of the being we loved the most,

is the locus of a multitude of meanings: it is the place where an absolute and capricious power may be wielded, where the suffering and the life of others do not count, where no other subjects can exist; it is the Sadean universe: a place of unconditional superiority which is inaccessible to discussion and does not need to be argued for or demonstrated, but which will be reaffirmed in the face of any kind or amount of contrary evidence, always through the same means: through violence and murder.

Both in literature and in personal reminiscences, I have repeatedly come across memories of this horrific initiation ritual into the primacy of the bond between humans and into the need to repress all feelings that threaten that bond by transgressing the boundary between species; one of its most popular embodiments is to be found in a text which enjoyed considerable popularity in the middle of the 20th century, *The Yearling*, a novel by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939 and in 1946 was made into an MGM film which was distributed worldwide. It is the story of a Florida boy and his pet deer, whom he is forced to shoot when the deer grows up and threatens to eat the family's crop. The book's title refers not only to the murdered creature, but to his human companion; it is clear from the story that it is through the killing of his nonhuman friend that the protagonist makes the transition from "yearling" to full member of human society, defined by the willingness and ability to kill beings of other species to demonstrate his loyalty to his own. The way the murder is accomplished in the book is in itself telling: the protagonist's father commands him to kill his friend; when the boy does not comply, his mother is ordered to do so instead, but she, however willing, is not technically up to the task and only wounds the creature horribly; the boy finally ends what his mother had begun. The realignment of transgressive boundaries and the repression of "unnatural" emotions takes place under the auspices of the father, who sanctions and directs the use of violence; the recourse to violence itself is motivated and justified by the economic good of the group, and sharply differentiates between feminine and masculine roles: the mother is supposed to approve of the killing but should ideally not take part in it (and is shown to be incompetent when she does), while the young son must perform it himself to show, paradoxically, both his achievement of virile maturity and his willingness and ability to submit to his father's orders.

### 3. Performing mastery

[T]he human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. Hence, it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less “human”, the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the “human” as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (Butler 1993 8)

Traumatic experiences are not always necessary to make love and empathy towards non-human animals unthinkable and unfeeling. Social discourse on animals shapes them into the Jungian shadow of humans; this starts with names of other species used as terms of abuse, but actually permeates all facets and modes of human self-perception.<sup>xiii</sup>

Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond.

That wrong was committed long ago and with long-term consequences. It derives from this word or rather it comes together in this word *animal* that men have given themselves at the origin of humanity and that they have given themselves in order to identify themselves, in order to recognize themselves, with a view to being what they say they are, namely men, capable of replying and responding in the name of men. (Derrida 1999 400)

Identity is a process of identification both with and against: we recognize in ourselves what we want to identify with and disacknowledge whatever we do not want to identify with, projecting it onto the other. Just like gender identities, the respective identities of human and nonhuman animals are created, maintained and reinforced by a continuous and complex performance, equivalent, in its omnipresence as in its repressive power, to that which gives rise to gender:

[G]ender [is] the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusion and denials, signifying absences. [...] The disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interest of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within [...], contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender – indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another. (Butler 1990 184-185)

Species identity is socially produced and stabilized in the same way, and conceals and represses the same things. Innumerable cultural practices have as their purpose the production of the minds and bodies of animals in such a way as to reinforce zoophobic stereotypes: it is readily apparent that what we take to be the “nature” or “essence” of farm animals is the product of the systematic violence inherent in industrial agriculture and mass slaughtering,<sup>xiv</sup> and that the “essence” of laboratory animals is produced through the mind- and body-destroying practices<sup>xv</sup> of lifelong imprisonment and torture.<sup>xvi</sup>

Claiming that species identity is, like gender, the product of a performance is not enough: the manner and mechanisms of the performance must be investigated. As in all queer analysis, in animal queer too one major issue is that of how language produces the basic fictitious constructions that bring into being and support regimes of power.

“This must be the wood,” she said thoughtfully to herself. “where things have no names. I wonder what’ll become of *my* name when I go in? [...] But then the fun would be, trying to find the creature that had got my old name! [...] –just fancy calling everything that you met ‘Alice’ till one of them answered! Only they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise.” [...]

Just then a Fawn came wandering by: it looked at Alice with its large gentle eyes, but didn’t seem at all frightened. “Here then! Here then!” Alice said, as she held out her hand and tried to stroke it; but it only started back a little, and then stood looking at her again.

“What do you call yourself?” the Fawn said at last. Such a soft sweet voice it had!

“I wish I knew!” thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, “Nothing, just now.”  
“Think again” it said: “that won’t do.”

Alice thought, but nothing came of it. “Please, would you tell me what *you* call yourself?” she said timidly. “I think that might help a little.”  
“I’ll tell you if you come a little further on,” the Fawn said. “I can’t remember here.”

So they walked on together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly around the soft neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field, and there the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice’s arm. “I’m a Fawn!” it cried in a voice of delight. “And dear me! you’re a human child!” A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed.

Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveller so suddenly. “However, I know my name now.” she said: “that’s *some* comfort. Alice–Alice–I won’t forget it again. [...] (Carroll 1871, chapter 3)

This excerpt from a children’s book from almost 150 years ago says it all: the dependence of humans on animals for their self-definition (“Please, would you tell me what *you* call yourself? [...] I think that might help a little”), the suffering which this definition inflicts on humans, as well as animals (“just fancy calling everything that you met ‘Alice’ till one of them answered! Only they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise”), the frustration and despair of humans at the impossibility of forging authentic bonds with “animals” (“Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveller so suddenly”), and the way language offers an empty consolation, which we feel compelled to hang on to nevertheless (“However, I know my name now [...] that’s *some* comfort. Alice – Alice – I won’t forget it again. [...]”), even though it makes a more meaningful, fuller life impossible.<sup>xvii</sup>

Carroll’s fleeting but haunting portrayal of life and love in the “wood where things have no name” leads us to investigate what things are like in the rest of the world, where things do have names. More specifically, it leads us to an analysis of the words “human” and “animal”, of the way they work and of the harm they do.

We should start with a simple observation. The claustrophobic limitation to the number of genders which the mainstream discourse on sexuality can admit of has some flimsy appearance of legitimacy in the binary distinction between the sexes; no such excuse exists for the binary division between “humans” and “animals”. We routinely refer to “animals” without stopping to consider why the label “animal” is considered appropriate for a given being, through what means and to what ends it is used, and whether indeed it means anything at all.

[A]nimal, what a word! Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “the Animal”, they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal. (Derrida 1999 400)

I am obviously not claiming that there are no boundaries among different animal species. A human is not a dog; a dog is not a shrimp; a shrimp is not a bat; a bat is not an oyster; an oyster is not a chimpanzee. But that dogs, shrimps, bats, oysters and chimpanzees should be lumped together on one side of a line dividing them from humans is untenable by everything we today know about physiology, neurology, ethology and psychology.<sup>xviii</sup> Analogously, there are differences between most males and most females of our species; but we can – and should – question why just those differences are socially and politically so important, and get to be the traits that humans are defined by.

[O]ne will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named the Animal, or animal in general. Whenever “one” says, “the Animal”, each time a philosopher, or anyone else says, “the Animal” in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be man (man as rational animal, man as political animal, speaking animal, zoon logon echon, man who says “I” and takes himself to be the subject of a statement that he proffers on the subject of the said animal, and so on), each time the subject of that statement, this “one”, this “I” does that he utters an asinarity [bêtise]. (Derrida 1999, 399)

There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of “living creatures” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an



animality that is simply opposed to humanity. [...] Among nonhumans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. (Derrida 1999 415-416)

Biological differences are not – are never – the point: the point are the discursive and institutional conditions under which some biological differences become social and political differences which are used to establish boundaries, to exclude, to oppress, to maim, torture and murder.<sup>xix</sup> When people bring up the differences between humans and so-called animals they are not really referring to what the discourse of science has ascertained about animals over the last couple of hundred years; they are pointing to social institutions whose sole purpose is to discursively enforce a repressive norm. Why respectively the biological sex of the body and the species an individual belongs to should be so salient and primary are the questions a queer perspective on gender and on species should be asking. The human/animal category is the instrument for the imposition of a norm, not a neutral description of biological facts.

Speciesism is made unthinkingly compulsory and naturalized by regulating species as a binary relation in which the only two really meaningful and consequential terms are “human” and “non-human”; just as in normative heterosexuality the differentiation between male and female is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire, which provides it with an indispensable pragmatic, emotional and political foundation, the practices regulating human-animal relations within the framework of speciesism are the foundation of the fraudulent and untenable binary differentiation between humans and “animals”. This act of differentiation results in a hypostatizing of each term, in a seemingly unshakeable coherence of biological data, cultural constructions and emotions, feelings and attitudes analogous to the “internal coherence of sex, gender and desire” (Butler 1990 31) in naturalized heterosexuality.

The human-animal norm defines an identity for both humans and animals. It defines what we as humans can and should be, do, feel and think; it defines the kinds of relationships we can and cannot have with other humans and with “animals”. As such, even though countless billions of animals are murdered every year because of its effects, it oppresses humans as well as animals.

As Foucault points out (Foucault 1975), systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent. This process of production is in no way neutral: it has legitimating and exclusionary aims, but most of all its end is to make these aims impossible to acknowledge by anyone residing and thinking *within* the system. In order to be unfailingly effective, both legitimation and exclusion have to be naturalized and to become inaccessible not so much to criticism as to simple recognition. By relegating the conceptual, emotional, social and political operations which establish the binary frame of “human vs. animal” in the prediscursive domain, the stability of this frame, and of the system of oppression which it helps found, is maintained. Just as the “production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*” (Butler 1990 10), the production of biological species as the prediscursive ought to be understood as a major, and pernicious, effect of the cultural construction we have chosen to designate as *species identity*.

In the construction of gender through the performance of the gendered body,

coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and [...] this idealization is the effect of a corporeal signification. [...] acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality. (Butler 1990 185)

We can witness the operations of the same process in the construction of an animal identity through the performances which are violently enforced on animal bodies. But what is most interesting to an audience biased towards humans and their rights are the “punitive consequences” that haunt the performance of *human* species identity, as well as gender, “as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems”: just as “[d]iscrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (Butler 1990 190) we punish ruthlessly and savagely those humans who fail to convincingly perform the right species identity: just as “gender is a kind of persistent impersonation which passes as the real” (Butler 1990 XXXI); the “persistent impersonation” which

we call being “human” (as opposed to “animal”) permeates every facet of our being, but its most devastating consequences, as well as the most serious punishments for transgressions, have to do with emotional, ethical and political attitudes. As any vegetarian who ever tried to dine in the company of meat-eating acquaintances can attest, humans objecting to the murder of animals are labelled as “squeamish”, “childish” or “weird”; the minimal existing legislation on animal welfare is routinely disregarded, and pressure groups trying to ensure that it be enforced are ridiculed and marginalized;<sup>xx</sup> and even the most private and least threatening forms of the human-animal bond are pushed firmly beyond the limit of social acceptance: anyone who lost a companion animal knows that the grief is made more bitter and unbearable by the need to maintain an unobjectionable public façade, since its emotional impact cannot be shared with anyone who is not herself an animal queer.<sup>xxi</sup>

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production [...]. (Butler 1993 95)

As we have just seen, at the heart of the performance through which human subjects are constituted are prohibitions and taboos regarding the most positive emotions, and the most enlightened ethical attitudes: compassion, empathy, protection, altruistic justice, love. All of these are radically repressed “with the threat of ostracism and even death” when they are felt for objects which fall outside the boundaries of the social circulation of emotion, and thus implicitly question and threaten those boundaries. And the reason is that, like all forms of identity, our human species identity is flimsy and precarious but must *appear* to be the solid foundation of a stable order, and therefore the continuous and painstaking work on the performance needed to establish it must be hidden from thought and sight:

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. (Butler 1990: 25)

Our “humanity”, as well as the “animality” of animals, is a performance forced on unwilling actors, kept up by what we as humans do to differentiate ourselves from animals, and by what we compel animals to do in order to keep them as radically separate as we can from us. That the animals are unwilling is evident from the physical means of coercion, and the violence up to and including murder, that are used to exact the performance from them; but we humans are no less unwilling. Most of us have simply forgotten what we felt:<sup>xxii</sup> getting back in touch with our own emotions is the first step towards deconstruction of the binary model of species relationship and towards a change in the relations between our species and other ones.

What Butler writes about the suspect naturalness of sex and gender is just as true of what most of us take to be most natural about ourselves: our prized “humanity”:

a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a “natural sex” or a “real woman” or any number of prevalent social fictions, and [...] this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relationship to one another. [...] As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and a reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (Butler 1990 191).

Once we start looking at things this way, the “animality” of animals and our own “humanity” crumble beneath our feet:

If gender [species identity] attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured. (Butler 1990 192).

Species identity too, as well as gender,

ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender [species identity] is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender [species identity] is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered [possessing a species identity] self. This formulation moves the conception of gender [species identity] off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender [species identity] as a constituted *social temporality*. (Butler 1990 190)

And it takes only the willingness to become conscious of the cumulative effects of innumerable, daily acts of repression, of the “gestures, movements and styles of various kinds” which from the day of our birth have been disfiguring not only our “bodies” but our minds, emotions and souls, shaping our way of performing our humanity so as to appear as different as possible from animals, to realize that humanity, “is also a norm than can never be fully internalized; the ‘internal’ is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody” (Butler 192). The reality of species identity, like that of gender, “is created through sustained social performances”:

the very notions of an essential sex and of a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler 1990 192-3).

And what Butler writes of gender is just as true of species identity, and of its relationship to the compulsory human normativity from which the core script of our performances is determined, and which, accordingly, most of us would not, and cannot, think of questioning.

An enlightening contribution towards a genealogical critique of the human-animal identity category, investigating the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and

*cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with definite and discernible aims, is offered by Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Plumwood's ecofeminist analysis of the relationship between humans and nature provides a detailed and useful description of the means and techniques employed to keep up this performance and is therefore profoundly relevant to animal queer. At the root of ecofeminism is the understanding that the many systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing. Building on the socialist feminist insight that racism, classism, and sexism are interconnected, ecofeminism recognizes additional similarities between those forms of human oppression and the oppressive structures of human "mastery of nature", which Plumwood defines as "seeing the other as radically separate and inferior, the background to the self as foreground, as one whose existence is secondary, derivative or peripheral to that of the self or center, and whose agency is denied or minimized" (Plumwood 1993 9). But the very possibility of this relationship depends on a complex performance, through which both the master and his "other" are compelled to adopt opposite and complementary identities which create, shape and reinforce it.

In Western culture, male oppression of women, colonialist oppression of native peoples and human oppression of nature are justified on the same basis: the construction of the dominant human male as a self fundamentally defined by the property of reason, and the construction of reason as definitionally opposed to nature and all that is associated with nature, including women and native peoples, the body, emotions, and reproduction. Plumwood's argument, which was originally formulated about nature in general, is evidently applicable to animals; in particular, her description of the conceptual and cultural devices that make mastery possible are especially enlightening:

1. *Backgrounding*: the master's dependency on the other is denied and made imperceptible;
2. *Radical exclusion*: differences between the master and the other are highlighted and magnified while shared qualities are minimized; value judgments are passed on all differences: all qualities possessed by the master are positive, while all qualities possessed by the other are either negative or not acknowledged;

3. *Incorporation*: the master embodies the norm against which the other is to be measured; the other is defined in terms of how well she approximates the master;
4. *Instrumentalism*: the other is an instrument for the master, does not have ends or interests of her own; her existence is justified by her being a resource for the master;
5. *Homogenization*: the class of the others is represented and perceived as homogeneous: all differences among various groups and individuals are neglected in favour of the only significant difference, that between the master and the other. By reinforcing the separation between the category of master and the category of other, this turns the two categories into natural categories. (Plumwood 1993 42-56).

#### **4. Performing “dehumanization”**

Der Augenblick des *Überlebens* ist der Augenblick der Macht. Der Schrecken über den Anblick des Todes löst sich in Befriedigung auf, denn man ist nicht selbst der Tote. Dieser liegt, der Überlebende steht. Es ist so, als wäre ein Kampf vorausgegangen und als hätte man den Toten selbst gefällt. Im Überleben ist jeder des anderen Feind [...]. [...]

Die niedrigste Form des Überlebens ist die des *Tötens*. So wie man das Tier getötet hat, von dem man sich nährt, so wie es vor einem wehrlos daliegt, und man kann es in Stücke schneiden und verteilen, als Beute, die man sich und den Seinen einverleibt, so will man auch den Menschen Töten, der einem im Wege ist, der sich einem entgegenstellt, der aufrecht als Feind vor einem dasteht. Man will ihn fällen, um zu fühlen, daß man noch da ist und er nicht mehr. (Canetti 1960 249)<sup>xxiii</sup>

Plumwood’s analysis of the discursive production of mastery shows how the ostensibly “natural” and “neutral” facts of mainstream discourse about animals are produced, with flimsy support from various scientific discourses, to serve very definite political and social interests. The “scientific” “facts” routinely invoked in

zoophobic arguments have the function of allowing the discourse of mastery to present itself as though it had no source and no bias, while it is clear that it can actually be ascribed to a definite, and definitely biased, source. In this too, the results of an animal queer analysis have an exact parallel in previous analyses of other forms of oppression: Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* famously questioned the neutrality, and consequently exposed the illegitimacy, of male discourse on women, by acknowledging that men cannot hope to settle the question of women, because they would be acting as both judges and parties to the affair. It should be self-evident (but to most humans it is not) that the same holds true of the discourses of our species about other ones. Just as in Beauvoir's analysis the "universal subject" in all the discourses of the West, whether scientific, political, philosophical, or religious, is always implicitly masculine, and just as implicitly defined by difference from a feminine "shadow", which must bear the weight of all the ills excluded by his definition (irrationality, materiality, sensuality, particularity, immanence...), this same subject is just as clearly defined by its opposition to, and distancing from, the "animal", which is seen in much the same light as the female "other".

The analogy between the positions of animals and women can be fleshed out more fully by referring to Irigaray. In Irigaray's theory of sexual difference (Irigaray 1977), women can never take up the position of a "subject" because they are the excluded in relation to which anything which is representable defines itself by difference; animals serve exactly the same purpose. One major way in which the human-animal divide parallels that between man and woman is in the assumption that mind is the exclusive prerogative of male humans; the "act of negation and disavowal" through which "the masculine pose[s] as a disembodied universality and the feminine get[s] constructed as a disavowed corporeality" (Butler 1990 16) is the same that constitutes the human as a disembodied universality and the animal as pure body, "living matter" used for production and reproduction. The repressive identification of the feminine with the bodily which has a long and inglorious history in Western science and philosophy is only topped by the frankly grotesque denial of the evidence for complex cognition in animals. Everything that we can do and animals cannot is considered evidence of complex cognition; everything that animals can do and we cannot is considered an "instinct", having nothing whatsoever to do with intelligence, even though it should be clear even to a human that "given a long-lived creature that exists in a complex



socio-ecological system, that creature has likely been selected for high-level intelligence and cognition” (Pepperberg 2003) or – if we want to translate this into plain English – that surviving in an environment as complex and as challenging as that in which most animals thrive in the wild, with no police to scare off potential murderers and no supermarkets where to shop for food, requires considerably more intelligence than is needed to vegetate in front of a TV set.

This should make plain that the role of “hard facts” and “scientific evidence” and, ultimately, of the materiality of the body, in differentiating humans from “animals”, just as in differentiating between human males and females, is vastly overestimated: “what constitutes the limits of the body is never merely material, but [...] the surface, the skin, is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed, the boundaries of the body become [in Douglas 1969] the limits of the social *per se*” (Butler 1990 179). Butler further quotes Douglas as suggesting that

all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and [...] all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synechdochical for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. (Butler 1990 180)

The examples of oral and anal sex between men (which Douglas quotes) are obviously relevant, but so is the myth of “animal” filth and pollution, which gives rise to innumerable irrational taboos concerning imaginary health scares.

The boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness. [...] the operation of repulsion can consolidate “identities” founded on the instituting of the Other or of a set of Others through exclusion and domination. (Butler 1990 181-182)

This expulsion-repulsion dynamic is nowhere more evident than in the zoophobic fantasy of “dirty” animals, in contrast to which the identity of the human is established as something constantly needing to be protected from pollution. And the irrationality of our obsession with the dirtiness of animals as a foil to emphasize our

own cleanliness is particularly evident if contrasted with our habit of feeding on animal carcasses, which are of course really unsanitary not because they are animal but because they are carcasses, and decaying flesh, “animal” or human, is just about the dirtiest thing there is. But this seeming incoherence is reconciled on a different level: we need to believe that animals are filthy, repulsive and mindless in order to feel morally justified in killing them; and we need to believe that eating their corpses is good for us in order to feel practically justified in killing them: it is the killing, not the (contradictory, and ultimately irrational) beliefs which are used to justify it, that is the point, because it is the contrast between the impunity of the murder of beings of other species and the sanctions attending the murder of beings of our own which consolidates the boundaries of the group we belong to and establishes our identity as human. And, conversely, our oppression of non-human animals carves out a space in every human society for a class of sentient beings to whom no rights are ascribed and for a form of murder which goes unnoticed and unsanctioned.<sup>xxiv</sup>

And it is just this, the unproblematic, “natural” establishment and continued existence of such a space as a structural feature of all forms of human society (and not any satisfaction of merely rational or utilitarian needs), which is the most important social function served by the oppression of animals which has been a hallmark of human civilization in all cultures and since the beginning of history.<sup>xxv</sup>

The reasons why such a space, where callousness, cruelty and violence can be exercised without fear of social sanctions, is not only thinkable and possible but necessary in all human societies are explained by the work of the prominent social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, who, after spending over thirty years investigating the psychological mechanisms of violence, isolated as its root one key process, “dehumanization”:

One of the worst things we can do to our fellow human beings is deprive them of their humanity, render them worthless by exercising the psychological process of dehumanization. This occurs when the “others” are thought not to possess the same feelings, thoughts, values and purposes in life that we do. Any human qualities that these “others” share with us are diminished or erased from our awareness. [...] The misperception of some others as subhuman, bad humans, infrahuman,

dispensable or “animals” is facilitated by means of labels, stereotypes, slogans and propaganda images. (Zimbardo 2007 222-223)

It is clear from Zimbardo’s own description, and from a multitude of examples he quotes, that the focal case of “dehumanization” is to be found in the human treatment of nonhuman animals. Continuous and systematic cruelty to “animals” offers members of all human societies a constant exercise in the practice of violence that can be turned on any other object at a moment’s notice. The way animals are routinely, unthinkingly and unfeelingly treated provides the performative apparatus (the language, the techniques, the feelings and emotions, the metaphors and justifications) for the oppression of *any* category of sentient beings; and in any human society that apparatus is always already in place, ready to be deployed on the next victim, whether “human” or “animal”.

A final point on the consequences of adopting a dehumanized conception of selected others is the unthinkable things we are willing to do to them once they are officially declared different. (Zimbardo 2007 313)

But of course the point is precisely that these things are not at all “unthinkable”, because they are routinely done to nonhuman animals, which are used as practice targets for the “dehumanization” of human victims. This key point completely escapes Zimbardo who, from his speciesist perspective, is unable to fathom the real meaning of his own evidence. His confusion is clearly demonstrated by one revealing statement: “[d]ehumanization takes away the humanity of the potential victims, rendering them as animals, or as nothing” (Zimbardo 2007 295); this simplistic and misleading identification of “animals” and “nothing” gets seriously in the way of a real understanding of the process of dehumanization, and of violence in general. “Animals” (or other sentient beings) are as different as possible from “nothing”, and “nothing” is not a possible object of violence, since the essence of violence is the reduction of a *subject* to object status. This theme is of course particularly prominent in Sade, but it runs through, and unifies, all the history of violence: the point of violence is that it should be *felt* by its victim, who must therefore retain her perceptions, emotions, feelings and cognition while being stripped of the other qualities which would make her too similar to the perpetrator. And, of course, if the

victim were not similar to the perpetrator in most vital ways to begin with, the perpetrator would not need violence to widen the gap between them as much as possible. Canetti's analysis of the primal form of violence as the "moment of survival", in which a living being triumphs over a dead one, is particularly relevant here (Canetti 1960 249-312).

That animals are really the focal case of "dehumanization" is shown by the effectiveness of animal names as trigger words for its onset. Zimbardo lists an impressive amount of evidence confirming this: a study on "Experimental Dehumanization: Animalizing College Students" (Zimbardo 2007 308), in which hearing the other group of students being described as "like animals" led the subjects to administer the highest possible levels of electric shock ("Imagining them [the other group of college students] as animals switches off any sense of compassion you might have for them, and [...] you begin to shock them with ever-increasing levels of intensity"; Zimbardo 2007 18); "trophy photos" of abusers with their victims mimicking the poses of big game hunters (Zimbardo 2007 19, 364); the behaviour and statements of the guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment, ("Go back to your *cage*", Zimbardo 2007 114; "I practically considered the prisoners 'cattle'" Zimbardo 2007 187); evidence from the doctors involved in the Mock Psychiatric Ward Experience ("I used to look at the patients as if they were a bunch of animals; I never knew what they were going through before" Zimbardo 2007 251); the disturbing T-shirts worn by the "commandos of the New York Police Department", that read "There is no hunting like the hunting of men" (Zimbardo 2007 291), and, of course, "the Nazi genocide of the Jews [which] began by first creating [...] a national perception of these fellow human beings as inferior forms of animal life" (Zimbardo 2007 307) and the evidence from the Abu Ghraib trials, where soldiers said about prisoners "They're nothing but dogs" (Zimbardo 2007 352), and instructors explained to interrogators that "You have to treat the prisoners like dogs. If [...] they believe they're any different than dogs, you've effectively lost control of your interrogation from the very start. [...] And it works." (Zimbardo 2007 414).

The reason why "it works" is that all humans, by virtue of their being human, have received decades of training in how to oppress, brutalize, torture, break and murder other sentient beings, and that they can start applying what they have learned to new

and unsuspecting victims simply by labelling them in the appropriate way. I do not think I am the only one to believe that if nobody ever learned anything of the kind the world would be a much better place.

In my most naively hopeful moments I imagine it will be the queer community – the oxymoronic community of difference – that might be able to teach the world how to get along. (Sloan 1991)

A real “oxymoronic community of difference”, embracing not only all possible variants of “gender trouble” but also the queering of the human-animal barrier, would not need to teach anybody anything, because it would have made violence unthinkable, since the human oppression of non-human animals is not a peripheral case of no political relevance but, as Zimbardo’s own analysis of “dehumanization” shows, the archetype, model and training ground of all forms of oppression and injustice.<sup>xxvi</sup> In this respect animal queer, more than any form of queer, radically threatens the very foundations of human society as we know it, since taking it seriously, not simply as another interesting category for academic analysis but as an ethical and political imperative, implies doing everything we can to dismantle the linguistic, conceptual and performative apparatus which makes all kinds of violence and oppression possible.

In animal queer the dichotomy between liberation theory and civil right politics, which has been discussed at length in queer literature,<sup>xxvii</sup> has no substance: crossing the line dividing our species from the other ones means eradicating the very categories of thought needed to conceive of inequality and injustice. If the definition of queer politics is radical opposition to the established social order as such, and the measure of success of queer political action is the extent to which it smashes the system, then animal rights activism is the queerest possible form of political action, because it is structurally incompatible with continuing to live the way the system expects us to.

The reason why animal queer is structurally and intrinsically subversive, and why it is perceived as radically threatening, and is, accordingly, ruthlessly marginalized, by all forms of cultural and political discourse, is that it replaces sameness with otherness as the criterion of emotional, social and political inclusion: whoever supports animals,

fights for animals, loves an animal loves, supports and fights not for the self but for the other (“the wholly other that they call animal [...] Yes, the wholly other, more other than any other, that they call an animal”, as Derrida 1999 380 would put it), and knows in advance that no middle ground will ever be found, no assimilation will ever be possible, that in one, one hundred or one million years animals will be just as puzzling, as foreign, as alien to all that we can be and understand as they are now. If true love is felt not for the self but for the Other, and if “[a]imer l’autre, c’est préserver son étrangeté, reconnaître qu’il existe à côté de moi, loin de moi, non avec moi”<sup>xxviii</sup> (Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1977 256), then love in its animal queer form is indeed the purest, most coherent and most radical form of love, and as such it has the potential not to reform society or to facilitate social “progress” but to replace it with the unthinkable, with something radically contradicting all assumptions, expectations and definitions, to create the possibility of a happiness we can’t even imagine, because to fathom it we would already have to be different from what we are, to have moved beyond ourselves.

## **5. The anti-Child**

As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such – on disturbing, therefore, and on queering ourselves and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. [...] the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics. (Edelman 2004 17)

The most radical definition of queer’s attitude towards society as such is probably to be found in Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. I believe it to be no coincidence that Edelman’s theory resonates in deep, systematic and serious ways with modes of thought and feeling which have long been commonplace in the animal rights movement, among people who have never heard of queer, but who have been *living* it as a consequence of their most heartfelt feelings and commitments.

To empathize with animals, to affirm animal rights, to fight for animals, to love an animal means to align oneself with a way of being in the world that can never, by any stretch of the imagination, be compared or assimilated with our own: whatever we do for animals, we know we are only doing what we think is best, and by definition not what the animals really need, since there is no way we can ever know what it feels like to be them (Nagel 1974). Consequently, we do not anticipate gratitude, we do not long for acknowledgement, we do not expect anything back. Both because of the radical unknowability of animals, of the impossibility to construct a convincing model of their radically other minds and selves, and of the evident harm our species has been inflicting on theirs, and on the environment without which they cannot survive, we cannot help but realize that the best we could ever do for animals is to leave them alone; and that the best and safest way this could be accomplished is by freeing the planet of our kind for good. Thus animal queer directly leads us to envision the vanishing point of any truly queer critique of identity, which is generally hidden from sight in “tamer” versions of queer: the shaping of the self through, indeed the yielding of the self to, the radically other, the “dissol[ution of] those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves”. A serious and sustained engagement with animals cannot but permanently call into question our own identity, not only problematizing or destabilizing it theoretically but declaring it irrelevant and obsolete through our actions; in this sense, animal rights activism marks, in a way so absolute and radical as to have resisted theorization so far, the entrance of the death drive into political discourse.

This places the animal in sharp contrast with another object of affection, as normative and compulsory as the animal is queer and repressed: the Child. The human-animal bond transports us outside of ourselves, and alerts us to the ultimate equivalence of all beings as objects of love: one does not love “one’s” animal because it is one’s own, but chooses, generally at random, an individual animal to love because one loves animals in general; on the contrary, the parent-child bond cements us into our own identity by handing us a mirror which promises to confirm it in a time which will last well beyond our life span: a parent does not love all children and then chooses, more or less at random, a single one to love, he loves *his* child because it is *his*:

The Child marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity; an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. (Edelman 2004: 21)

The one embodied in the love of animals is a quintessentially queer attitude to identity. What is queer about queer is its critical distance from identity politics, its suspension of identity as a fixed, coherent and natural category. What best describes queer is not its affinity with some forms of identity (gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender) but its anti-normative positioning towards forms of sexual identity in particular and, more generally, its problematizing, through denaturalization, of the very concept of identity. Queer does not aim at consolidating or stabilizing any identity, least of all its own, but has as its ultimate purpose a *critique* of identity, which should not lead to the hegemony of a new or alternative identity, but to the demise of the category of identity as such, by making conscious and calling into question the performance that makes us and others what we “are”, which in animal queer means “humans” and “animals” respectively. Acknowledging, honouring and becoming fully alive to one’s love for an animal permanently subverts one’s perception of self, of the other and of the world, bringing it out of alignment with humannormativity’s priorities, values and performances.

One major object of this subversive perception is time. The animal is indeed the embodiment of Edelman’s “No Future”: in our relationship with an animal, all there ever is is Right Now: this moment of play, the soft feel of fur against my chest and under my hands, the warm smell I love. There is no room for plans or expectations, there are no investments on which returns are awaited. Unlike the parent-child bond, which is defined by teleology, the human-animal bond is not teleological: it does not sagely postpone gratification, it does not project anything into, or onto, the future. Unlike the child, the animal will not develop into a more mature and accomplished version of itself which will show the marks of our good parenting: whatever the particular gifts and specific qualities of an individual animal, she was born with them, and most of them do not make sense in a human perspective anyway. Unlike the child, the animal has no hold on the future, and does not see the meaning of progress; unlike the child, upon whom we can project our frustrated hopes of a distant Utopia, an



animal will not see a better world, both because our notions of the good are profoundly foreign to her and because she will not survive her human companion: by loving an animal we accept a devastating mutilation of our future, which in all likelihood will hold a time when we still are, and the person we love the most, even if she was much younger than we to begin with, will no longer be; by loving an animal we embrace, and not in the abstract, “the fate of the queer [which] is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity” (Edelman 2004 30). Whoever loves an animal necessarily finds herself, simply by virtue of this love, deeply alienated from the “logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order” “enact[ed]” by “the Child” (Edelman 2004 25), and occupying “the *structural position* of queerness [...] imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from [...] the politics of reproduction” (Edelman 2004 27).

To someone who loves an animal, the future holds no promise but that of the cruel and definitive dissolution of her love. While children make death less salient and less omnipresent because their life span is equal to our own and their lives start later, animals make the presence of death much more intensely and frequently perceptible: to love an animal means to allow death into one’s life, and to do so by conscious choice and in full awareness, realizing (maybe for the first time) that “love is as hard as death” (*Song of Songs* 8:6), no less and no more. However tenderly protective our love for an animal, we know that no selfish hope of survival, no narcissistic dream of continuity can be associated to our bond with her. Unlike children, animals do not attenuate but emphasize our own impermanence by contracting our life expectancy even further. Because of our love and through our love we cannot but identify with “the queerness [Edelman] propose[s, which] in Hocquenghem’s words,

is unaware of the passing of generations as stages on the road to better living. It knows nothing about ‘sacrifice now for the sake of future generations’ [...]. And so what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively – to insist that the future stop here.(Edelman 2004: 31)

This opposition between animal and child, as the embodiments respectively of Right Now and the Other and of Future and the Self, and the identity of the animal as the

anti-Child, is evident in their opposite locations and functions in the social discourse of normativity:

In its coercive universalization, [...] the image of the Child [...] serves to regulate political discourse – to prescribe what will *count* as political discourse – by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address. (Edelman 2004: 11)

And reciprocally, everything that concerns animals, however well-founded and urgent, *by definition* cannot make its way into political discourse. If the child is “the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests: the secular theology that shapes at once the meaning of our collective narratives and our collective narratives of meaning” (Edelman 12), the animal, as the prop for the performance of “dehumanization”, is the locus of the permanent denial of all meaning and relevance. If, as Edelman writes,

*queerness* names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children’, the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. [...] [while] *queerness*, by contrast, figures [...] the place of the social order’s death drive [...] *queerness* attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social (Edelman 2004: 3)

nothing could be queerer than the love for animals, which, by its very nature, which entails a serious and irrevocable commitment to the dismantling of the performances and devices on which social order as such rests, “marks the ‘other’ side of politics: [...] the side outside all political sides, committed as they are, on every side, to futurism’s unquestioned good” (Edelman 2004: 7).

It is thus no coincidence that the fetish of the Child should be omnipresent in the many-sided polemic against animal rights. In public debates, anti-vivisection activists are routinely asked by experimenters whether they would rather kill a mouse or a child (the answer is, of course, neither); and every time the subject of animal rights is brought up not merely as a topic of academic discussion but in appeals for practical or

financial support, the most common form of refusal invariably brings up starving children as the more appropriate recipients of concern and aid. That the people who give this kind of answers do nothing whatsoever to relieve the plight of children in need does not matter rhetorically: what does matter is that the appeal for children “is impossible to refuse [...] this issue, like an ideological Möbius strip, only *permit[s]* one side” (Edelman 2004 2).. And any animal queer human can, from systematic and bitter personal experience, agree with Edelman that this is “oppressively political [...] insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (Edelman 2004 2). The emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions which make up the fabric of life for an animal queer person decentre the human and humanity from their positions as the taken-for granted subjects, and implicitly but powerfully question reproductive futurism. What Edelman calls the

ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity, by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of human relations (Edelman 2004: 2)

is shattered by an animal queer perspective. In its animal incarnation, more than in any other of its innumerable avatars, “[t]he queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance [...] to every social structure or form” (Edelman 2004 4)”. And the real reason why liberalism grants a place to “the queer” in its LGBT incarnation but marginalizes, ridicules, represses and murders animal queer is that the denial and repression of “the queerness of resistance to futurism and thus the queerness of the queer” (Edelman 2004 27) are perfectly compatible with a civil rights perspective on same-sex love, but utterly incompatible with animal rights. An animal queer perspective is indeed

[i]ntent on the end, not the ends, of the social, [...] insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself. (Edelman 2004: 28)

The “deliberate[...] severing of us from ourselves” that Edelman (5) mentions as the hallmark of queer is implicit in the love for an animal. Animal queer severs us from

ourselves because it decentres our perspective: suddenly, other values, other interests, other feelings, though incommensurable and unimaginable, become equivalent to our own. The queerest expression of this attitude in the animal rights field (or, for that matter, anywhere, at least as far as I know...) is VHEMT, the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, which unwittingly but appropriately takes up Edelman's challenge that "Queerness *should* and *must* redefine such notions as "civil order" through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity" (Edelman 2004 16-17) and embodies

the only oppositional status to which our queerness could ever lead [which] would depend on us taking seriously the place of the death drive [...] and insisting [...] that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of those fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. (Edelman 2004 31)

The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement Motto: "*May we live long and die out*"

VHEMT (pronounced vehement) is a movement not an organization. It's a movement advanced by people who care about life on planet Earth. [...]

As VHEMT Volunteers know, the hopeful alternative to the extinction of millions of species of plants and animals is the voluntary extinction of one species: Homo sapiens... us.[...]

When every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth's biosphere will be allowed to return to its former glory, and all remaining creatures will be free to live, die, evolve (if they believe in evolution), and will perhaps pass away, as so many of Nature's "experiments" have done throughout the eons.

It's going to take all of us going.

At first glance, some people assume that VHEMT Volunteers and Supporters must hate people and that we want everyone to commit suicide or become victims of mass murder. It's easy to forget that another way to bring about a reduction in our numbers is to simply stop making more of us. Making babies seems to be a blind spot in our outlooks on life. (<http://www.vhemt.org/>)

Instead of worshipping the Child as the guarantee of our own eternity in a future where progress will always confirm we were right, VHEMT calls for a voluntary and lucid renunciation of the Child both as a symbol and as a reality, and for restoring the beauty, glory and holiness of the planet by returning it to its rightful, non-human,

owners, the ones who kept it for half a billion years without making a mess of it. The mission of VHEMT actualizes what Edelman wrote about: “the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability” (Edelman 2004 9). In envisioning a world where no opposition to the social will be necessary, because the social will no longer be a possibility, VHEMT radically

refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child [and therefore] must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such, insofar as it threatens the order of futurism on which meaning always depends. (Edelman 2004: 11)

Because of its refusal of any “identification both of and with the Child as the pre-eminent emblem of the motivating end, though one endlessly postponed, of every political vision as a *vision of futurity*”, VHEMT is the most coherent and most radical incarnation of “a queer oppositional politics” (Edelman 2004: 13).

And VHEMT also offers the most vivid and convincing image I have ever come across of the paradoxical but vital ambiguity that Edelman places at the heart of queerness:

Queerness, therefore, is never a matter of being or becoming, but, rather, of *embodying* the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is *jouissance*, sometimes translated as “enjoyment”; a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law. (Edelman 2004: 25)

The vision of VHEMT utopia is certainly “beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, [...] beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law” but also, and more poignantly and memorably, beyond joy and sadness, beyond triumph and defeat, and certainly beyond all that being human has ever meant to any of us:

Gradual extinction of the human race will result if zygotes of *Homo sapiens* never again begin cell division.[...]

Individuals' lives could change profoundly, but all for the good. Starving people would begin finding enough to eat and resources would become more plentiful. New housing would be unnecessary.

All human technology would be scaled back but could still advance. Nuclear power plants could begin to be safely decommissioned. Dams could be removed. Technology could focus on dealing with unsolved problems such as radioactive and other toxic wastes. Healing the wounds of past exploitations could become a priority, reversing the expanding deserts and shrinking forests. Some of our influences, such as global warming, may be impossible to stop and reverse at this point, but we could ameliorate the effects somewhat. [...]

Domestic plants and animals could be phased out as farms and ranches are converted to ecosystems supporting wildlife and natural vegetation. The last humans could enjoy their final sunsets peacefully, knowing they have returned the planet to as close to the garden of Eden as possible under the circumstances.

The last one out could turn off the lights.  
(<http://www.vhemt.org/>)



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## 6. Conclusions: Species Trouble

[A] lot of the more exciting work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender or sexuality at all. [...] Queer’s denaturalising impulse may well find an articulation within precisely those contexts to which it has been judged indifferent. [...] By refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal. (Sedgwick 1994 9)

In the vision of its most enlightened and original theorists, queer is another word for Trotsky’s permanent revolution: its refusal to define itself except as a method of radical subversion means that it must constantly look for new intellectual and political territories in which to carry out its subversive mission. Queer can never be tame or predictable; the moment it becomes respectable, it will have betrayed itself and sold its soul to academic irrelevance. The reason why queer was born of homosexual critique is not because of any exclusive affinity with same-sex desire, but because initially gay liberation and lesbian feminism advocated a wholesale sexual revolution; it was only later that they consolidated themselves as civil rights movements, intent on securing equality for marginalised minority groups. In my opinion one of the most profound reasons for the pertinence of the category of queer to a radical rethinking of human-animal relations is that no such compromise is, nor ever will be, possible for animal queer, since an animal rights movement *entails* a wholesale revolution, starting from the most mundane and pervasive everyday habits (what are you going to have for dinner?) and moving to the most intimate feelings and emotions, because the very fact of having one’s deepest affective bond with an animal calls into question the foundations of human society as it has been defined since its inception.

The ultimate point of queer is a radical and uncompromising critique of the very notion of the natural, the obvious and the taken-for-granted.

The appeal to so-called ‘common sense’ reinforces the hypostatization of the ‘natural’ upon which homophobia relies and thus partakes of an ideological labour complicit with heterosexual supremacy. (Edelman 1994 xviii)

Of course, the very same appeal to “so-called ‘common sense’” is the foundation of another, even more insidious, form of “ideological labour”, that which hypostatizes a “natural” which takes for granted the slavery, torture and murder of billions of other sentient beings.

The philosophically, politically and ethically pertinent response to the ideological labour which founds heterosexual supremacy is “gender trouble”, the subversive proliferation of genders calling into question naturalized categories of identity and their patterning of possibilities and impossibilities. Analogously, the philosophically, politically and ethically pertinent response to the ideological labour on which speciesism and humannormativity rest is “species trouble”, the mobilization of emotional, pragmatic and political alternatives which are not contemplated by the hegemonic discourse on the relations between species with a view not only to fighting violence and oppression but to making violence and oppression unthinkable, by questioning their foundations in an obsolete and fraudulent model of interspecies relations. In this light, it is far from being a coincidence that, of the five epigraphs to the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, which mark the intellectual genealogy of Butler’s enterprise, four are self-evidently relevant to its development into animal queer.

“*One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one*” (Simone de Beauvoir) points to the *constructedness* of our human identity through an ever-present and never acknowledged distancing and repression of our bond with animals.

“*Strictly speaking, ‘women’ cannot be said to exist*” (Julia Kristeva) acknowledges the fraudulent essentialism implicit in the dominant discourse about humans and animals.

“*The deployment of sexuality [...] established this notion of sex*” (Michel Foucault) shows how the practices and performances through which we establish our relationship with non-human animals are the actual foundation of the human-animal divide.

“*The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual*” (Monique Wittig) unmasks the human-animal construct as the ontological, ethical and political foundation of speciesism.



Just as “if desire could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with the preliminary marking by sexes” (Wittig 1979 114), if love could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with species distinctions. As every being who ever felt love intuitively knows, love is an intrinsically revolutionary force because it refuses to follow established lines of loyalty and carves out queer and unpredictable ones on the basis of attraction, empathy and desire. In and of itself, love is intrinsically queer. And the coherent and radical acceptance of the love of animals, of animal queer, with all that it entails in emotional, ethical, political, identitarian and ontological terms, is the next step towards the asymptotic goal of direct experience of a world of which the only thing we can know for sure is that it is indeed, as Haldane put it, “queerer than we can suppose”.

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## Endnotes

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i This will be the subject of sections 3 and 4.

ii To love you with the most total abandon is to feel suddenly your absolute strangeness, I desire you because your body astonishes me, its most usual features become for me faraway meteors whose configuration upsets. I yearn for you because we have nothing in common.

iii The radical questioning of identity which is implicit in animal queer is so widespread as to hardly warrant a mention among people who do volunteer work with animals, to whom I owe most of my lived awareness of the issue and of its infinite ramifications, and who have done as much for my development as all of my formal education, and all of my professional activity in academia. (I prefer not call them “animal rights activists” because some of the best of them lack the theoretical sophistication necessary to make sense of the label; most of them would not be able to read this article – even in translation – and even those who would – including some of the colleagues I most admire and cherish – would probably find it beside the point – “Is this what you have been busy doing instead of trapping strays for spaying?”; I have tried hard not to think of their reactions while writing this; the attempt has not generally been successful, and this is hardly surprising, since I know in my heart that they are right.)

This questioning is, however, conspicuously absent from quite a few instances of (would-be) theoretical engagement with animal issues; one example (which I feel compelled to mention only because of its prominent position in animal studies discourse), is that of Donna Haraway. Even though her *Companion Species Manifesto* heavily capitalizes on the transgressive value of the opening image of the author and her dog kissing (Haraway 2003 1), one would look in vain for instances of more substantial – theoretical – transgression both in the *Manifesto* and in its much more verbose and narcissistic sequel *When Species Meet*, where the reader is treated to a number of insufferably lengthy forays into the technicalities of the genetics of Australian shepherd dogs (Haraway 2008 95-143) and of agility (Haraway 2008 205-246) (as well as into Haraway’s father’s biography, Haraway 2008 161-179), which lack any conceivable justification other than that Haraway (in addition to loving her father) is a passionate practitioner of agility, and that the dog she uses to indulge her passion is an Australian shepherd. Haraway’s self-indulgent egocentricism as an author would hardly warrant a mention if it were not for the fact that this painfully obvious inability to decentre herself (which reaches grotesque proportions in the unforgettable scene of her “play[ing] videos of the USDAA (United States Dog Agility Association) Nationals” to her terminally ill father “wild with pain and hallucinating on opiates”, Haraway 2008 176) shapes both her whole relationship to animals (including her beloved agility champion, who needs regular chiropractic adjustments in order to keep performing, Haraway 2008 51), and her theoretical stance on animal issues: when she became interested in agility she started looking for a dog designed to excel in the activity (“a high-drive, purpose-bred puppy athlete” Haraway 2008 96), much as a tennis player would start shopping for the best racket or footwear; and her inability

to conceive of an ethical stance which would make it problematic for her to indulge in her tastes, from agility to hamburgers (Haraway 2003 40) to scientific experiments, and her consequent self-serving need to manufacture “theoretical” justifications for the world as it is (that is, as she likes it – and as the animals don’t), is reflected in the frankly offensive language with which she refers to the most repulsive forms of animal exploitation: “meat- and hide- [...] producing working animals” (Haraway 2008 319) and “[animals] labor[ing] as research models” “in laboratories” (Haraway 2008 58), who of course (just in case anybody was naïve enough to think that supporters of animal rights were the ones most prone to commit the heinous intellectual sin of anthropomorphism...) come complete with “working hours” (Haraway 2008 69). These Orwellian formulations are an extreme (both typologically and – one would like to hope – chronologically) example of the kind of brazen word-mongering which should have become impresentable, if not after the publication of “Politics and the English Language”, then at least after Adams exposed it first cursorily (“To justify meat-eating, we refer to animals wanting to die, desiring to become meat. [...] One of the mythologies of rape is that women not only ask for rape, they also enjoy it; that they are continually seeking out the butcher’s knife. Similarly, advertisements and popular culture tell us that animals like Charlie the Tuna and Al Capp Shmoo wish to be eaten. The implication is that women and animals willingly participate in the process that renders them absent.” Adams 1990-2000 p.66), and then systematically, in *The Pornography of Meat* and in her *Sexual Politics of Meat Slide Show*, which denounce anthropornography (the term was coined by Amie Hamlin), the depiction of non-humans as prostitute-animals who desire to be eaten. Whatever Haraway would like (us) to think, animals murdered for food do not “work in meat production” and animal tortured to death in experiments do not “work in laboratories” any more than rape victims are “sex workers”. That this last instance of Doublespeak would not be tolerated by any reader, no matter what her political or theoretical orientation, while the other two (among many others) have not made a dent in Haraway’s reputation as a theorist “to be reckoned with” in animal studies is, to my mind, depressing evidence of the problematic state of both social and theoretical discourse on animal issues.

iv That some humans love animals (not “their” “pets” but animals in general, with no regard for the speciesistic categories of “domestic”, “farm” or “wild”) is obvious; that society is unwilling to grant this fundamental aspect of their identity social existence, except insofar as it can be conveniently subsumed under the hegemonic identity of “consumer”, is just as obvious: I am free to purchase for the animals in my care both extravagant objects of consumption manufactured by the burgeoning “pet industry” (which won’t make any difference to their well-being) and state-of-the-art medical care (which might); but the law does not afford to their lives (again, with no distinction between “categories”) anything like the protection it affords to inanimate items of property (it is much more expedient to harm a disliked human by killing her companion animals than by damaging her property, since this is very likely to lead to a police investigation, while any attempt to interest the police in the violent death of an animal is sure to be met by condescendingly raised highbrows, or worse): throughout the world animals (of any “category”) are poisoned, shot, trapped, run over; some of these animals have humans who love them, who anxiously wait for them to come back, who grieve for them:

that love, that anxiety, that grief has no place in social discourse except as an object of ridicule. And, of course, that someone should display shock and outrage at the violent death of an animal with whom she was unacquainted like she would for a human is simply inconceivable. To me, one point of affirming animal queer is to provide some form of recognition and support to the innumerable humans who feel completely alienated and alone in a society which does not grant their most heartfelt values and emotions any recognition.

It is just as relevant, both politically and theoretically, that, even when some animals' needs are given precedence over those of some humans (some companion animals undoubtedly have access to better nutrition and medical care than most of the human population in the Third World), it is always humans who decide this, and their decision is always both arbitrary and final: of three puppies or kittens from the same litter, one might grow up to be the cherished companion of an affluent animal-rights activist, one to be tortured to death in a research facility, and one to be "euthanized" in a "shelter". Because animal queer is not about the narcissistic investment in one "pet" but about identification with, and love for, animals in general, this state of things is incompatible with animal queer.

v "Are queer without realizing it" (the reference is to M. Jourdain, Molière's character in *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* who had always spoken in prose without realizing it).

vi The sexual aspect of animal-human relations has been the object of a frankly disproportionate amount of attention (see, among others, Dekker 1992, Beirne 1997, Singer 2001, Miletski 2002, Levy 2003, Beetz 2004, Podberscek & Beetz 2005) which has had the effect (and probably the purpose) of focusing the debate on an extreme and unrepresentative aspect of human love for other animals, deviating it from the less evidently controversial, but potentially much more radical (and therefore more threatening) issue of the emotional, ideological and political identification with animals independent of any sexual interest.

While (to the dismay of those whose interest in the topic is primarily prurient) "sex" is entirely absent from these relationships, attraction is a fundamental and much valued component; we all know people who, while shying away from physical contact with other humans, even in social situations, cannot pass a cat or dog in the street without stopping to pet her and play with her, and whose interest is enthusiastically reciprocated by the most aloof and intractable animals, even though they have never met before. I am one of these people: to someone like me, the world looks different from what it does to other humans: the direction and order of my gaze is shaped by the emotional primacy of nonhuman individuals and needs. In public places, I may look more or less idly at people of either sex whom I find attractive, but the moment an animal enters my perceptual field she becomes the sole focus of my attention; my eyes follow her about, always taking care not to make her feel overwhelmed; I try to gradually reduce the distance between us; if she too comes towards me, sooner or later we will touch. Depending on her mood and tastes, this may inaugurate a session of gentle fondling or of wild play, or

a more distant acquaintanceship that she will lead as far as it feels comfortable to her, and will interrupt when she will.

vii And which is in dire need of reconstruction anyway. An additional reason of interest of animal queer is that the feelings, habits and practices which coagulate around it resonate in unforeseen but profound ways with the critiques of heteronormativity and genitocentricity proposed by some French authors of the Seventies, whose cosmogonic radicality has not been matched in any subsequent analysis that I know of. I am thinking of Monique Wittig, who envisions an economy of pleasures, alternative to genitally organized sexuality, in which “polymorphously perverse” features and practices play a central role as a way to enact and experience a form of sexuality chronologically and ontologically prior to the binary dichotomy of sex (Wittig 1973), and of the even more rigorous and radical critique of genitality in its emotional, perceptual, ontological, narrative and political aspects envisioned by Bruckner and Finkelkraut in *Le nouveau désordre amoureux*, whose most visionary pronouncements read like a faithful description of the kind of tactile rapture which makes up such a large part of a happy relationship with an animal: “Le corps est à la fois entièrement dégenitalisé et totalement érotisé, sexué partout parce que ayant noyé l’acuité proprement sexuelle dans une masse de sensations affluentes” (“The body is at once entirely degenitalized and totally erotized, sexed overall as a consequence of having drowned sexual acuity proper in a mass of inflowing sensations” Bruckner & Finkelkraut 1977 265); and, even more poignantly, and more to the point: “nous voulons joyeusement le non-sens, la maladresse, l’incongruité de nos amours. De vos voluptés surgelées, harmonisées, savonnées, nous nous détacherons comme de toutes les autres croyances” (“We joyously desire the senselessness, the awkwardness, the incongruity of our loves. From your deep-frozen, harmonized, soaped-up enjoyments we will detach ourselves as from all other beliefs.” Bruckner & Finkelkraut 1977 259).

viii The enlightening and productive definition of meat-eating as “something you do to someone else’s body without their consent” is attributed to Patrice Jones of the Eastern Shore Chicken Sanctuary (<http://www.bravebirds.org/>). The locus classicus of the analysis of the relationship between the oppression of animals and that of women is of course Adams 1990-2000, particularly Chapter 2, “The Rape of Animals, the Butchering of Women”.

ix Fouts 1997 tells their story in heartbreaking detail.

x I am of course referring to mirror neurons. An impressive amount of specialist literature can be downloaded from the websites of the two discoverers, Giacomo Rizzolatti (<http://www.unipr.it/arpa/mirror/english/staff/rizzolat.htm>) and Vittorio Gallese (<http://www.unipr.it/arpa/mirror/english/staff/gallese.htm>); Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia 2006 offers a useful introduction for the lay reader.



xi The role of killing and, in general, of “danger” in the discourse of speciesism exactly parallels its use in racist discourse. Just as the ethnicity of minority criminals is prominently displayed in the media while the much more serious and numerous aggressions which victimize minorities are granted little or no visibility, a great many animal species are represented as fierce or dangerous even though the number and seriousness of their attacks on humans bear no comparison to those of human attacks against them, as should be clear at least from the fact that all these species are now on the brink of extinction while ours is multiplying beyond reason. The point is, of course, that in racist or speciesist discourse minorities and animals respectively are “natural victims”; therefore, their victimization is not newsworthy but is, quite simply, the way things should work, while their, no matter how rare and reasonable, attempts at retaliation or self-defense must be savagely stigmatized, and used to justify further victimization. The social function of animals in this capacity will be explored in greater depth in section 4 below.

xii “As a child, I had a duck that seemed to think I was its mother. It followed me everywhere. When we went on vacation, a neighbor offered to care for it. On our return, I eagerly asked how my duck was and he replied, “Delicious.” I became a vegetarian that day. I still cannot bear to eat anything with eyes. The reproach is too deep” (Masson 1996:13).

xiii Much of what constitutes us as humans has the hidden but fundamental function of differentiating us from animals, and this need for differentiation sometimes appears to reach so deep as to question the boundaries between culture and physiology. An example that, however far-fetched it may appear, I personally find deeply intriguing is that of bipedism: feral children, who grow up outside human society, invariably evolve a form of locomotion which makes use of all four limbs (Singh and Zingg 1942) but which – despite being highly functional – is not paralleled in any human culture; I cannot help wondering whether one major reason behind the exclusive diffusion of bipedism in all human societies might not be the purely cultural need to stress and deepen the divide separating humans from animals. In his book *Children who Run on all Fours and Other Animal-Like Behaviors in the Human Child* (1931), physical anthropologist Ales Hrdlicka documents that this form of locomotion may be present in children reared in normal conditions, and persist – or even appear – after the children have learned to walk upright, and even in adult life; Hrdlicka believes that the phenomenon would be extremely common if parents did not systematically attempt to suppress it and to train the child in other forms of locomotion.

xiv Extensively and memorably documented in both written and visual form; at least Singer 1975 chapter 3 and PETA 2003 should be consulted.

xv Which are of course harder to document, but which have been exposed by several impressive undercover investigations. The most accessible source is the website of the SHAC (Stop Huntingdon

Animal Cruelty) campaign, from which a number of reports can be downloaded (<http://www.shac.net/HLS/exposed.html>). Singer 1975 chapter 2 is a useful primer.

xvi It is less apparent but no less true that even the “natures” of animals belonging to species which manage to precariously survive in the wild are produced by practices of enslavement which take place in zoos and circuses, but which are supported and justified (and, indeed, made thinkable) by a discourse that reduces the bewildering social, perceptual, ecological, cognitive and emotional complexity of a sentient being’s relationship to its natural environment to the satisfaction of a small number of basic physiological needs: in popular representation of life in the wild like the major BBC production *Planet Earth* (Fothergill 2006) animals are invariably shown either looking for food or trying to escape predators, and this crude and simplistic representation yields “documentary” support to the thesis that, if wild animals are provided with sufficient food and kept safe from harm (as is doubtless the case in zoos), all their needs will have been met.

xvii It is meaningful and revealing that the discovery of its own “name” “delights” the Fawn, just as clearly as the discovery of Alice’s “alarms” it. It is impossible not to see in an animal who is not disfigured and maimed by human-imposed slavery a delight in its own being which is very rare in humans, and this goes a long way in explaining human cruelty towards them: just as (as Simone de Beauvoir wrote) “women have been burnt as witches simply because they were beautiful”, one major reason animals are imprisoned, tortured and murdered is simply because we envy them.

xviii “A critical uneasiness will persist [...] aimed in the first place [...] at the usage, in the singular, of a notion as general as “the Animal”, as if all nonhuman living things could be grouped without the common sense of this “commonplace”, the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate, in the very essence of their being, all “animals”, a name that we would therefore be advised, to begin with, to keep within quotation marks. Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals”), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm or the hedgehog from the echidna. I interrupt my nomenclature and call Noah to insure that no one gets left on the ark.” (Derrida 1999 402)

xix This is shown in the most extreme and unmistakable way in a forgotten chapter in the history of biological taxonomy, the monogenism-polygenism debate. While monogenism maintained a common origin for all mankind, polygenism contradicted the Biblical account and claimed that the various

human “races” were actually different biological species, and that only whites could properly be considered human, while the various non-white groups were “animals” of different kinds (a reliable and detailed history of this highly interesting controversy is to be found in Stanton 1960). On the other hand, for some two decades now leading primatologists have been supporting the inclusion of bonobos and chimpanzees in the same genus as humans: “there are not one but three species of genus *Homo* on Earth today: the common chimpanzee, *Homo troglodytes*; the pygmy chimpanzee, *Homo paniscus*; and the third chimpanzee or human chimpanzee, *Homo sapiens*” (Diamond 1991:21).

xx One example among many: Italy has had a law regulating animal experiments since 1992; even though transgressions are explicitly sanctioned, none have ever been documented, and no jurisprudence involving that law exists to this day.

xxi In the US this has given rise to a new helping profession, that of “animal grief counselor”: one professional’s website (<http://www.petloss.org/petloss.htm>) reassures prospective clients that “If you are grieving over an animal that is sick, one that is dying, or one that has died, **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**. Some people grieve more over the loss of an animal than the loss of a human. [...] Many of my clients tell me that they grieve alone because they have no one to talk to, and some are afraid that people will think that they are stupid or crazy. These people suffer in silence. They go through the grief stages alone, even though **IT IS NORMAL TO BE SAD AND SHOW GRIEF** over the loss of an animal” (capitals in the original); but it should be evident that what the bereaved need is not reassurance about the normalcy of their grief from a paid stranger but spontaneous empathy and emotional support from their existing social network.

xxii This “forgetting” is considerably facilitated by the veil of secrecy and concealment which shrouds the violent practices which constitute animal identities and ensure the enslavement of animals; insensitivity to the suffering of others is achieved at considerable neurological and psychological cost, and can never be complete: just as the Nazis, because of the devastating impact the systematic killings of civilians were having on the morale of their troops, had to settle for a system of mass murder in which the psychologically most stressful tasks were executed by prisoners, so today we can maintain the system of animal exploitation and murder on which we subsist only by “farming out” the most violent and most repulsive tasks to a class of disenfranchised and exploited marginals who, like the Nazi *Sonderkommandos*, are in no position to rebel; Eisnitz 2006 is one of the few places in which their voices, and their unique perspective on their grueling situation, can be heard.

xxiii “The instant of survival is the instant of power. The horror upon the sighting of death dissolves into satisfaction, since one is not oneself the dead. He lies, the survivor stands. It is as though a struggle had taken place and one had killed the dead oneself. In survival each is the enemy of the other [...]. [...]

The lowest form of survival is that of *killing*. Just as one has killed the animal one eats, just as it lies defenceless in front of one, and one can cut it into pieces and distribute it, as booty that he and his own will consume, so one also wants to kill the human who stands in one's way, who stands up against one, who stands against one as an enemy. One wants to lay him down in order to feel that one still exists, and he no longer does."

xxiv Haraway's specious distinction between killing and "making killable" (Haraway 2008 80-81 and 105-106) shows itself to be particularly untenable in this context; unless a class of beings is "made killable", killing is not only attended by grave sanctions but is performed only for reasons which are perceived (however misguidedly) to be serious: if humans (including Burger King patron Haraway) did not implicitly and unproblematically consider animals "killable" it would not occur to them to kill them purely in order to consume their corpses any more than it occurs to them to kill other humans in order to consume their corpses. This issue can be illuminated by observing that the systematic spoliation of corpses in order to obtain raw materials is a far from negligible part of the horror we feel for the mass murders in Nazi concentration camps, and the reason is that this act, because of its instrumentality and ultimate frivolity, redefines murder as killing, and its victims as *killable*, that is, as non-human. All the dead are not equally dead. The dead who have been murdered by having been first designed as killable are vastly more dead than others, since their peculiar fate is to become, in Carol Adams' words, "absent referents":

Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The "absent referent" is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our "meat" separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, [...] to keep *something* from being seen as having been *someone*. Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that "meat", meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image [...]. (Adams 1990-2000 14)

Butchering is the quintessential enabling act for meat eating. It enacts a literal dismemberment upon animals while proclaiming our intellectual and emotional separation from the animals' desire to live. [...] Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent as *animals* for meat to exist. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food. (Adams 1990-2000 51)

It is extremely telling that Günther Anders should make exactly this same point in his discussion of the dead of Auschwitz, who are only still present in the *things* to which their *personhood* has been reduced:

“Und dabei haben wir doch keinen einzigen Toten gesehen”, flüsterte sie.

“Eben”, flüsterte ich zurück, “So tot sind sie.”

“Wie meinst Du das?”

“Daß ja sogar Tote irgendwie noch da sind. Aber was wir gesehen haben, ist bloß ihr Nichtdasein. Freilich in der Form von Dingen, die noch da sind. In Form ihrer Koffer, ihrer Berge von Koffern, ihrer Brillen, ihrer Berge von Brillen, ihrer Haare, ihrer Berge von Haaren, ihrer Schuhe, ihrer Berge von Schuhen. Gesehen haben wir also, daß unsere Dinge, wenn sie noch verwendet werden können, begnadigt werden, wir dagegen nicht. Und das gesehen zu haben, ist viel schlimmer, als wenn du Leichname gesehen hättest.” (Anders 1967 7-8)

(“And yet we did not see a single dead”, whispered she.

“Exactly”, I whispered back, “So dead are they.”

“What do you mean?”

“That even the dead somehow still exist. But what we have seen is only their non-existence. Of course in the form of things which still exist. In the form of their luggage, of their mountains of luggage, of their eyeglasses, of their mountains of eyeglasses, of their hair, of their mountains of hair, of their shoes, of their mountains of shoes. What we have seen is that that our things, if they can still be used, are spared, while we are not. And to have seen this is a lot worse than to have seen corpses.”)

xxv Even human cultures which idealize animals in theory (as do, for instance, all those in which shamanism is practiced, where the encounter with one's “power animal” is the core event of initiation) routinely exploit, torture and kill real animals. In all cultures, violence against a human exposes the wrongdoer to risks of retaliation, or to weighty social sanctions; violence against animals hardly ever even registers as violence. To illustrate this point analytically with an amount of evidence commensurate with its generality would take a book-long foray into the anthropological literature which would ultimately only laboriously and eruditely restate the obvious.

xxvi It is far from coincidental that the use of animals as instruments of production and reproduction can easily be recognized as the paradigm for the two crucial forms of intraspecific oppression, slavery and the abuse of women. This disturbing connection reveals the human-animal construct as the archetype of two other constructs which have been at the centre of queer analysis, those of sex and race. So far, relatively few individual examples have been researched in depth: Patterson 2002 offers a fascinating analysis of the historical relationship between the techniques of mass murder in Nazi

concentration camps and the slaughtering and processing practices of the American meatpacking industry in the early 20th century.

xxvii Seidman's account (Seidman 1993) is useful in its clear differentiation between "liberation theory" and the subsequent emphasis on "civil rights": "Liberation theory presupposed a notion of an innate polymorphous, androgynous human nature. Liberation theory aimed at freeing individuals from the constraints of a sex/gender system that locked them into mutually exclusive homo/hetero and feminine/masculine roles" (Seidman 1993:110); "From a broadly conceived sexual and gender liberation movement, the dominant agenda of the male-dominated gay culture became community building and winning civil rights. [This] found a parallel in the lesbian feminist culture, with its emphasis on unique female values and building a womans-culture" (Seidman 1993:117).

xxviii "To love the other is to preserve his strangeness, to recognize that he exists beside me, far from me, not with me."

## **Animal Absolutes: Liberation Sociology's Missing Links**

### **Part II of II essays on animals and normative sociology**

**David Sztybel<sup>1</sup>**

Even if we were to admit that there might exist, in fact in moral life a law which is more general than any others of which these latter are no more than different forms and particular applications, it would still be necessary, in order to discover it, to follow the conventional scientific method.

— Emile Durkheim

...formerly metaphysical ideas of liberation may become the proper object of science.

— Herbert Marcuse

While the natural sciences and the humanities are able to live side by side, in mutual indifference if not in mutual admiration, the social sciences must resolve the tension between the two approaches and bring them under one roof.

— Jurgen Habermas

*Abstract:* It is understandable that the prospects for a “scientific” ethic should be dismissed, but the real test seems to be whether ethics can at least to some extent be articulated through citing evidence for hypotheses without relying on intuitions (fundamental beliefs thought by intuitionists not to require any justification). The case against intuitionism is spelled out with no fewer than nine major objections to such a methodology. Part I demonstrated that positive normative sociology (which asserts moral norms and values such as sympathy or justice) is mired in intuitionism, but need this be the case? Best caring sociology is sketched using not only a rigorous justification of hypotheses, but a system whose general ideas logically flow from a single normative imperative: the best caring principle. The key to the success of best caring is animal absolutes, e.g., that for all sentient beings, pain feels bad, and this affords affective cognition of bad in sentient beings’ lives. Best caring forms a kind of liberation sociology (which is argued to be a better global label than critical theory among other possibilities), but without the moral relativity and total animal neglect of Feagin and Vera, and with a better explication as to why a holistic descriptive focus is most salutary for social science. Best caring promotes individual rights, a firm commitment to nonharming, and anti-exploitation including for animals. Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> David Sztybel received his doctorate in animal ethics in 2000. C.V. and writings appear on his website at <http://sztybel.tripod.com/home.html> . Contact: david.sztybel@gmail.com

commitments of the positive normative sociologists considered in Part 1 are often vindicated by the logic of the best caring principle, which is justified including with reference to various important background hypotheses or beliefs. Best caring claims to further broad-based sociological values better than ethical relativism. These values include scientific justification, pragmatic efficiency, anti-oppression, not getting lost in “free-floating” abstractions, attention to cultural context, honoring diverse voices, and anti-ethnocentrism as well as anti-authoritarianism. Furthermore, best caring provides the theoretical resources to rebut negative normative sociologists’ objections such as the alleged logical “gap” between facts and values, and the supposedly nonempirical nature of ethics. Two kinds of neutrality are distinguished, and best caring is shown to exemplify scientific neutrality whereas animal-oppressive views involve a prejudiced, strictly denial-based form of “neutrality.” 14 key advantages of best caring social science over previous versions of normative sociology are outlined by way of conclusion.

## **Introduction**

Many will dismiss right away the idea that normative ethics could ever be “scientific.” Such a proposal may immediately be cast aside, through a reflex action, as *pseudo-science*. However, such a reaction is prejudicial, and prejudice posing as (social) scientific judgment truly *is* pseudo-scientific. As Laurence Peter once penned: “Prejudice is one of the world’s greatest labor-saving devices; it enables you to form an opinion without having to dig up the facts.” (Peter, in Robbins, 1987, p. 155) I need to insist on sociologists keeping an open mind, since many thinkers have become more or less closed to normative sociology, even though, as I showed in Part 1, normative sociology has been a silent partner of sociology since the beginning, waiting in the wings to be theoretically developed from various standpoints. Moreover, skeptics of universal norms cannot rightly evade normative sociology: positive normative sociologists need to justify their *assertion* of rationalistic norms, and negative normative sociologists need to justify their *denial* of such norms.

Now the version of the scientific method that I use is evaluating hypotheses in terms of evidence. For someone to say *in scientific terms* that my ethics is unscientific, they would have to substantiate the hypothesis that I myself do not transact my ethics in terms of hypotheses supported by evidence. It would be impossible to substantiate this nay-sayer’s hypothesis, I argue, since I do indeed apply exactly this scientific method to ethics. If I were to fail to establish an ethic that rational people ought to



agree with, though, we would still need a scientific approach to ethics. A rationalist ethic is supportable by the evidence—or not. So far from it being “strange” to apply the scientific method to ethics, it is in some ways hard to escape such a methodology, whether one’s results be negative or positive in the relevant sense of “no” or “yes.”

I am not urging that every sociologist needs to investigate normative sociology, only that the discipline of sociology as a whole requires such studies (which already exist in some form as we have seen in Part 1) and sociologists, to have complete systems of thought, would at the very minimum need to “sign on” with someone else’s normative sociology work. Sociologists are sometimes allergic to what they call “grand theory,” such as Talcott Parsons’ views. I am not setting out to do “grand” theory but only as little or as much as the evidence warrants. Indeed, *justification* of normative views in sociology is crucial. For example, Marxist sociology takes a normative stance of advocating a proletarian revolution. However, we cannot just *assume* that we need globalized violence—the *justifications* for competing visions of liberation are crucial.

### **Scientific Method**

I mentioned that the scientific method I am using is evaluating evidence for competing hypotheses. I will not digress into an extensive discussion of the scientific method. However, I will note that hypotheses can be validated as certainly true, probable, improbable, or clearly false. One could refer to the *rigorous* justification of hypotheses, but that would be redundant since I am speaking of what is truly justified, not to what some wrongly consider to be justified. One does not need absolutely to prove a hypothesis to provide it with support (a fact that we saw in Part 1 is exploited by sociologist Raymond Boudon (2004, pp. 37, 38, 51; 2001, p. 112) in his offering of a loosely defended conception of ethics). At the same time, I like many others call for rigorous standards of justification.

The scientific method is *at least* considering evidence in support of hypotheses, since any practice that did not do this would obviously fail to be scientific. There might be add-ons, such as the principle of parsimony (or keeping one’s assumptions to a minimum, and generally preferring theoretical simplicity to complication). Actually,

it is becoming to exercise parsimony in formulating the scientific method itself. My own normative ethic seems to accord well with the parsimony ideal, since best caring, we will see, is reasoned based on the primary normative principle that I call the best caring principle (see below). Science does not require *oversimplification* though. Consider even the holy grail of science, a unified field theory. While such a sought-for system might be “simple” in some sense, it would also have to embrace all of the complexities that exist. In seeking rigorous justification I will try to provide evidence in support of my statements as true, and arguments in which the premises logically entail the conclusion(s) given. Every competing theory is a set of ideas that constitutes a counter-hypothesis (which may systematize numerous subhypotheses), and objections are also counter-hypotheses that need to be considered.

I refuse the validity of “defining” ethics out of science by “essentializing” science as value-neutral, or as *traditionally* nonevaluative, or as only investigating the material world, or as the result of *only* applying the five senses—such dogmas should be treated as hypotheses which I will find are not supportable by the best reasons in the end. Is there good evidence that we should eschew the Weberian tradition of value-neutrality? I argue in the affirmative. Or that we should go beyond the five senses as Weber himself did in imaginatively seeking to understand social action from agents’ “internal” points of view? (Weber, 1962, p. 29) At worst my approach is *quasi*-scientific, I contend, rather than *pseudo*-scientific, since I doubt that anyone will be able to show that I do not proceed on the basis of supporting hypotheses with reference to rigorously interpreted evidence. If it were impossible to justify an ethic using such a scientific method, then we would have to make the world better by dimmer lights than such a method. For example, we saw in Part 1 that sociologist Bryan Turner (2006) emphasizes that no matter what the moral skeptics say, we are all vulnerable, and that, combined with some sympathy, may be enough on which to base a conception of rights.

### **The Actual, the Possible, and the Ideal**

Society can be investigated at the level of the actual, the possible, and the ideal. What I am stressing in this paper is the ideal, although it goes without saying that

investigating social actualities and possibilities is of core relevance to sociology. It is usually assumed by sociologists that the ideal is purely (inter)subjectively determined, and is as irreducibly varied as are opinions on the matter. While that is a plausible view, I do not think it is the best or even most scientific view. I realize such a claim will be startling, or perhaps even offensive, to some. I merely ask that my claims not be prejudicially dismissed.

It is not controversial that science can investigate certain questions of ethics: (1) surveys to determine who subscribes to what ethical norms; (2) determining the most effective or efficient means to certain ethical ends. What is really controversial is whether there are absolute values or norms that apply cross-culturally. Some anthropologists, such as May and Abraham Edel, do find a universal deploring of murder, rape, incest, some kind of valuing of loyalty, control of aggression, expecting truth in certain cases such as oaths and meeting obligations in return for goods and services. (Edel and Edel, 1968, p. 28) Also, they allege that there is a common overarching goal of satisfaction or fulfillment. (*Ibid.*) Others, however, might find that no universal agreement in ethics is possible, even among so-called “reasonable” people. Hence anthropologist Ruth Benedict writes: “...all our local conventions of moral behavior...are without absolute validity.” (Benedict, 1985, p. 473) We need to be careful, however, to distinguish that we are not necessarily looking for norms that are now in fact globally subscribed to—the actual. What is important to determine is whether there are norms that everyone *should* agree with as reasonable people—the ideal. But that would be partly because intrinsic goods and bads for sentient beings are actual, as is the preferability of the best out of all possible choices, as I will substantiate below.

### **The Sense of Moral Absolutism**

This discussion raises issues of terminology. There are several proposed dualities that are commonly used by English-speakers in the context of ethics: absolutism versus relativity, universalism versus nonuniversalism, objectivity versus subjectivity, cognitivism versus noncognitivism, and moral realism versus moral anti-realism. I will defend why I generally prefer the first pair. The real issue is whether rational

agents should find absolutes that should hold cross-culturally. If there are no such absolutes, then what are *called* moral absolutes only exist relative to different cultures or individual points of view. Moral considerations might be absolute in a limited sense for a given society or a given person's life, but if ethical relativism is true, there would be no reason to think that proposed absolutes should be applied across all of humanity. I speak in terms of absolutes pertaining to life on Earth as we know it. I do not necessarily speak of "universals" in terms of what should apply across the whole *universe*, even as far as other star systems or in other dimensions that some scientists postulate. It seems to me that our awareness does not extend that far, so I do not choose to speak of *universals* in the literal sense. (We can speak loosely, poetically, or politically of universal rights, though, since that is a rhetoric which does indeed fire the popular imagination.)

What about objectivity versus subjectivity? The subjective seems to refer to the mind, but why cannot there be absolutes about the mind? For example, the perceptual capacity of any given human being is absolutely limited, whatever exactly that limit might happen to be. I will argue that we can speak of absolutes that are true of subjective states, for example, that all forms of pleasure feel good. The next diad, cognitivism versus noncognitivism, refers to states of knowledge or awareness. But knowledge of what? We could *perhaps* know or find to the best of our awareness that ethics is strictly *relative*. The real question is whether we can have knowledge of *absolutes*, so I will use the more fundamental term of absolutism. Finally, there is moral realism versus anti-realism. Yet if moral relativism is true, moral views or moral values are still *real*. Again, the underlying question is whether moral *absolutes* are real, hence my choice of terminology.

### **Liberation Sociology**

Joe Feagin's and Hernan Vera's book, *Liberation Sociology* (2001), as with the founders of critical theory (Horkheimer and Adorno), is indebted to Marx (Feagin and Vera, 2001, p. 264) and calls for an end to sociology's flight from moral and ethical issues. (*Ibid.*, p. 25) Coincidentally, I independently formulated the concept, "liberation sociology," before discovering their work. The authors, partly out of

empathy with the victims of oppression, (*Ibid.*) “unabashedly” draw from Enlightenment, modernist, postmodernist, feminist, neo-Marxist, and anarchist sources. (*Ibid.*, p. 2) Do they not perceive any contradiction between the *rationalism* of the Enlightenment and modernism on the one hand, and the *anti-rationalism* of postmodernism on the other (also, many versions of feminism rebel against rationalism as “patriarchal”)? The *statism* of Marxism and *anti-statism* of anarchism? They claim that “[l]iberation sociology does not seek to establish certainty for all time,” (*Ibid.*, p. 23) thus disowning absolutism, although they should not presume to speak for all liberation sociologists. (That said, neither do I make claims for all eternity—see below.) They seem to dismiss ethical absolutism in any form as “abstract or doctrinaire,” (*Ibid.*, p. 2) and as “grand theory.” (*Ibid.*, p. 196) In the poverty of theory that they offer, they do not shore up liberation but rather undermine it. (See Part 1 for an explication of how ethical relativism undermines commitments to liberation.)

Feagin and Vera do not even *mention* animals in their book. I have argued elsewhere that speciesism exists. (Szybel, 2006b, pp. 1-6) Animal liberation at least needs to be an open *question* for liberation sociology, and animal rights can be justified to be a part of acceptable answers too, as I argue. Human liberation is concerned with insults to: (1) liberty; (2) autonomy; (3) well-being; (4) length of life; (5) freedom to die with dignity; (6) having a healthy environment; and (7) treating females as other than reproductive engines, among other issues. The fact is, all of these considerations apply to and are desirable for nonhuman animals. To deny animal liberation, then, is to deny the importance of these factors in a way. If the deniers were to be consistent, they would rule out concern for *human animals* in these respects too. Human liberation, then, might not even be fully intelligible if we sincerely deny animal liberation. That is also true because humans need to be liberated not only as *recipients* of goods, but as moral *agents* who seek liberation—including I argue animal liberation. Otherwise, liberation could not occur without agents to create it. Racists are not fully “liberated” either. However, I would rather say “liberation sociology” than “animal liberation sociology” since the latter term might suggest a more or less exclusive focus on nonhuman animals.

Is animal liberation at odds with liberation for Aboriginal peoples who hunt? Such hunting is often contextually different from killing largely for pleasure. Natives should have no less freedom to choose to eat meat than urbanites. As well, Native self-government would mean that if other governments outlaw animal oppression, Natives would not necessarily have to follow suit right away. Such governmental arrangements might be entailed by a general respect for cultural preferences (see below). These remarks, of course, do not constitute an endorsement of hunting.

Unlike Feagin and Vera, I argue that liberation sociology is a better label than critical theory, social justice theory, or *general-orientation* labels such as Marxist, feminist, or ecofeminist (although I am indeed a feminist, it is not my *overall* identifier-label). *Critical theory* is amorphous and states that one opposes other views (which are *also* inevitably “critical” by the way) rather than specifying what one *stands* for. Critical thinking skills are important, but they still constitute too basic and ubiquitous a skill-set to be the object of an overriding, distinctively focused movement. We also saw that actual critical theory succumbs to a variety of important objections. People need to be most assertive about liberation for it to enjoy the most possible success. Advocates of liberation should certainly be comfortable with the label of liberation sociology, and anti-liberationists of various sorts should be happy at least to debate liberation sociology with respect for others’ intellectual freedoms. As for *social justice*, all justice is social: equity is never asocial let alone anti-social. Also, many conceptions of “justice” are hidebound conservative rather than liberationist. Feminism as a *global* label (that describes one’s entire stance) explicitly points only to liberation of the female sex; Marxism only announces concern with proletarians above all; and ecofeminism (perhaps the broadest other label since it embodies *two* concerns) is only explicit about the environment and feminism. Part of the point of liberation is avoiding the injustice of arbitrary favoritism or domination by special-interest-groups. However, that is precisely what the narrower labels seem to be guilty of. Now many who adhere to these blinkered global labels advocate an end to *all* oppression, typically, but we need to fix the way we talk as well as the way we walk so that we can be more aptly holistic. Liberation sociology includes all of the concerns of these other global labels and much more: anti-ageism, anti-ableism, anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, anti-transphobia, and so on. Whether or not my best caring framework is accepted, it is part of a desirable liberation sociology discourse.

## Anti-Intuitionism

Intuitions in ethics are rock-bottom beliefs that are thought by intuitionists not to admit of any justification, and furthermore, no justification is required by these thinkers. Skeptics might agree that intuitions lie at the bottom of moral theories, but point out that the lack of justification is inadequate. An example is that a utilitarian will intuit that we ought to maximize the good and minimize the bad overall. Why do I argue that we must rigorously reject intuitionism, even though I am not a moral skeptic?

- (1) I contend that it is pseudo-scientific to depend on intuitions, since the scientific method above all seeks to determine which hypotheses are shown to be true strictly by appeal to *evidence*. Intuitions are held even if no evidence for them can be produced, and even if it is unconvincing to maintain that they are self-evidently true.
- (2) Intuitions are essentially personal judgments, which vary across individuals, and so they cannot dictate what is impersonally true, even though intuitive statements such as those of the utilitarians pose as absolutely right. Intuitions are thus disguised appeals to personal prejudice, as Peter Singer among others have argued. (Singer, 1980, p. 327) They are arbitrarily asserted dogmas.
- (3) The plurality of theoretical intuitions makes intuitionism utterly indecisive as a method, but if intuitions are appealed to in order to settle *conflicts* of intuitions, that is even more hopelessly circular, biased or prejudicial, and at best calls upon people to be irrational conformists.
- (4) Intuitionism is like jumping to a conclusion to start off one's moral theory, and then carefully deducing conclusions from the intuitions in order to make it *seem* as though one is not jumping to conclusions after all.
- (5) Intuitions provide *evidence of* beliefs but not *reasons for* beliefs. They fail to be logically articulate, which is one of the chief goals of theory in general.

- (6) Since intuitions are not demonstrably grounded in reality, they are “free-floating abstractions” in the undesirable sense.
- (7) Sometimes people refer to abstract theories as “irrefutable hypotheses” and “with an answer for everything,” but that could only be the case if one allows *ad hoc* intuitions to answer problems, or else intuited assumptions are said to have a logical implication for every question. If intuitions are disallowed in social scientific ethics, then intuitionists ethics go from having answers to everything to a lack of worthwhile answers. Best caring does not claim to have answers to everything, by the way, but only enough to be substantially guiding.
- (8) Max Weber refers to a rational-legal basis for authority in contrast to traditionalism and charismatic leadership, (Weber, 1947, p. 328) but if intuition is all there is, then perhaps there is no fully rational basis for laws to be had.
- (9) Battles between intuitions may not be settled peaceably, and can lead to fighting or even warfare, without any “force of reason” to end deep or intuitive disputes.

What would intuitionism look like in the sciences? Let us say one wished to study the effect of air-resistance on the speed of projectiles. One might just “intuit” how much the air will retard the progress of moving objects, which would be absurd. Or an “intuitive” social scientist might “intuit” that only a minority of society’s members are authoritarian in personality, although that would be a question requiring evidence based on observation, and also a rigorous examination of concepts. It may be fine and well initially to form hypotheses intuitively. That is because quantitatively, the brain often works more swiftly than by painstakingly rendering explicit all inferences and evidence, and qualitatively, the mind often works subconsciously or preconsciously. However, intuited information can only retain theoretical pride of place insofar as such ideas can be *justified*.



In my findings, all ethical theories thus far rely on intuitions. For example:

	<b>Ethical Theory Type</b>	<b>Sample Intuitions (varies with particular type)</b>
(1)	act utilitarianism	1. Pleasure is good and pain is bad 2. We ought to maximize pleasure and minimize pain overall (Williams, 1985, p. 105)
(2)	rights views	1. Individuals have a dignity which even the good of society cannot override 2. Everyone has a right, say, to life, liberty, and well-being (overt intuitionists include Regan, 1983 and Nussbaum, 2001)
(3)	ethical egoism	1. People are not obliged to find it overall desirable to act ultimately for anyone else than themselves. 2. It is in everyone's self-interest always to observe certain rules such as not killing, breaking promises, lying, etc. (Hobbes, 2008; Gauthier, 1986)
(4)	moral relativity	1. There are no moral absolutes. 2. We should respect all the variety of ethical views that there are.

These are merely examples. Rights views need not be *explicitly* based on intuitions. They can appeal to tradition or common-sense (Sapontzis, 1987; Rollin, 1981), but since there are a variety of traditions, an intuitive choice among them can be detected. If rights are supposed to be based on compassion—Dunayer (2004) for her part, bases rights on compassion and justice—it is possible to have compassion for others and to be a utilitarian or even an ethical egoist, so one must then *intuitively* favor rights in the end. Kant's theory of rights is based on intuitions since he declares the test of a moral principle to be its universalizability, but since one can universalize *any* ethical

principle, one must intuitively choose amongst them. (Kant, 1956; Franklin, 2005) Gewirth's theory of rights is subtly intuitionist in that he claims that each individual must declare *rights* to well-being and freedom for oneself, even though such a move is not strictly necessary. In other words, such a move seems intuitively right to Gewirth. Additionally, Gewirth states that "the principle of generic consistency" requires awarding rights to others. However, that principle vacuously means only being consistent about kinds of things. All major theories are so consistent, so one must intuitively select among the theories. (Gewirth, 1978; Pluhar, 1995; Cavalieri, 2000) Rawls' theory of rights is also covertly intuitive. He maintains that we should imagine ourselves not yet born, as free spirits. We do not know, in the "original position," if we will be born rich or poor, "black or white," very intelligent or not, male or female, etc. So that would presumably cause us to formulate principles of justice or rights that are not racist, sexist, classist, etc. (Rawls, 1971; Rowlands, 1998; Rowlands, 2002; Bernstein, 1998) However, *any* principles technically can be formulated in the original position, including utilitarian ones for example, so there is intuitive selection in the original position too. There is anti-oppressive and anti-utilitarian intuition also in rigging the theorist's position as Rawls does to encourage a kind of individualistic equality. Therefore, all prominent human and animal rights views are either overtly or covertly intuitionist.

I could hardly blame any sociologist who sets aside all previous ethical theories on the grounds that they are intuitionist. Such systems perhaps *need* to be swept aside as not guaranteeing any moral absolutes, but merely as unconvincingly *declaring* them to be the case. There is something profoundly alienating about everyone believing in their various intuitions, meanwhile more or less expecting that all others should agree. That is called dogmatism, the very opposite of science. Is not *justification* what science affirms above all in its traditional flight from superstition for example? Intuitionism is a hat out of which any moral rabbit can be pulled. So sociology has evolved as it has, scrupulously excluding ethics from social science, for very good reason. Ethical theories as they "intuitively" exist do not qualify as scientifically defensible. However, I will argue that ethical theory need not at all rely on intuitions, but rather on alternative modes of cognition that we all engage in, but do not always accept in our theorizing for a variety of unconvincing reasons. I will contend that the best form of liberation sociology is also liberated from the dogmatism of intuitionism.

However, as we have seen, ethical theory as it exists in both sociology and philosophy is rife with intuitionism, both declared and undeclared.

Rejecting intuitionism has consequences not only for those who assert ethical norms. It also means that one cannot *reject* ethical absolutism merely intuitively. The fact that there is a variety of ethics in different cultures, as Lukes indicated in Part 1, does not logically entail that there are no moral absolutes. To come to that conclusion based on such insufficient evidence would be intuitionist, however covert. Also, separating is and ought (or the actual/possible and the ideal) does not prove that the ideal is impossible; that must be intuited if all that is premised is this distinction which is common in both absolutist and relativistic discourse. (That said, lack of evidence for moral absolutism would be highly favorable to negative normative sociology.)

### **Best Caring**

My moral theory, best caring, is absolutist, or maintains that many aspects of the moral life are evidently determined by impersonal truths. That is, we can systematically formulate ethics as a series of hypotheses for which we can find convincing evidence, and rebut objections compellingly, just as is the case with scientific hypotheses. This is part of the Enlightenment Project, which saw that not only physics but the moral life can be governed by reason, although such a stance by no means implies affective insensitivity. Moral absolutes are tempting since without them, one can say that there really is no such thing as oppression. I have been working on an original theory of ethics for some 21 years now, and in my hard search for non-intuitively based moral absolutes, I will not say that I have come up with nothing.

We must not declare *anything* absolutely without sufficient evidence, but rather judge among competing hypotheses on the basis of warrant. Accordingly, we cannot intuitively adjudicate between the hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1: There are absolute values or norms.*

versus

*Hypothesis 2: There are no absolute values or norms.*

Simply choosing between Hypotheses 1 and 2 does not, so far, turn on any *argument* providing *evidence* for absolute values or norms. There are absolutes that we accept in science: all mammals need oxygen to survive, and all triangles' internal angles total 180 degrees in a Euclidean system. I will argue that there are other absolutes too, including indispensable *animal absolutes*.

Best caring starts from the best caring principle as the primary normative principle. All other normative principles flow logically from the best caring principle. That first principle runs as follows:

*Hypothesis 3: We should pursue, promote and protect what is **best**.*

(See also Sztybel, 2006b, p. 13) Do I just affirm this hypothesis intuitively? No. It is *logically* true that anything other than the best is either greater or lesser. Yet greater than the best is logically impossible, and less than the best is logically less desirable. Preferring something because it has more good or less bad is not merely preferring something "intuitively." It is preferring on the basis of what is better or worse. This is not to say that there is *no reason* to do other than the best, only that the best logically has the *best reasons* on its side. I think that this hypothesis therefore satisfies the critique from anti-intuitionism. The best is really about being as *effective* as possible in promoting good and avoiding bad. Thus, these insights about Hypothesis 3 are based in "effective cognition," or awareness (in this case, of what is better or worse) in terms of cause-and-effect. The best *must* mean promoting the most good and least bad since having less good or more bad would logically disqualify something from being considered truly best. However, promoting what is "best" would be a hollow or purely formal endeavor if good and bad are unreal, as skeptics maintain, or if values are only intelligible relative to different individuals or cultures. So the best caring principle needs some background hypotheses to be justified as right

if it is to be meaningful, and in fact still other background hypotheses are needed to better clarify the meaning that it has. These background hypotheses, we will see, crucially include *animal absolutes*.

One set of background hypotheses for the best caring principle is that intrinsic good and bad are real. There are at least two kinds of intrinsic good or bad that I find to be real: ones based in feelings and ones based in desires.

Consider the following competing hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4: We can be aware of pleasure as an absolute intrinsic good.*

and

*Hypothesis 5: We cannot be aware of pleasure as an absolute intrinsic good.*

If we judged among these hypotheses intuitively, that would be utterly inconclusive. Therefore we will investigate by using a mode of cognition or awareness by which we can judge good or bad. I propose that there is such a thing as *feeling cognition*. (Szybel, 2006b, p. 18) That is, we are aware of our feelings not through the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, but simply by *feeling*. Feeling cognition allows us to consciously feel—period—and also to know *how* we feel. Based on feeling cognition, I propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 6: Pleasure feels good.*

Now a competing hypotheses that I would decisively rule out:

*Hypothesis 7: Pleasure feels other-than-good—that is, bad or indifferent.*

I put it to the reader that pleasure never feels bad or indifferent. I assert that Hypothesis 6 is overwhelmingly evident: pleasure feels good. Everything in our experience accords with such an idea and nothing tells against it. That is why we can

formulate a clear concept of pleasure in the first place. In this awareness there is straightforward cognition of goodness, and it is not intuited, but rather based on feeling cognition. Similarly, it is overwhelmingly evident that blue is a color. Again, this is true not merely conceptually but categorically describes any of our actual and possible life *experiences* that we may deem relevant. Similarly, I can confirm another animal absolute:

*Hypothesis 8: Pain feels bad.*

Through feeling cognition, I can affirm this overwhelmingly evident hypothesis. It is odd that science accepts that the sense of *smell* is a form of cognition that is admissible, but not how one *feels*. Or the sense of feeling through touch is allowed, but mysteriously, not our sense of feeling that is more psychological. And no real reason is ever given for these essentially arbitrary inconsistencies. How scientific is that? Awareness of good and bad, nonintuitively, however, is no mean thing. It is a *partial* basis for saying that some things are absolutely good or absolutely bad, and that some things are really better or worse.

What about masochists? First, the masochist does not disprove that pleasure feels good and pain feels bad. Masochists never “torture” themselves with pleasures, such as if they enjoy eating certain desserts. They always inflict pain on themselves since they want to feel badly, either out of self-hatred or enjoyment of the idea of “discipline” or whatever. So they reveal no instability in what I have hypothesized.

The closest thing to acknowledging feeling cognition in sociology, that I am aware of, occurs in a book edited by sociologist Jack Barbalet, *Emotions and Sociology*, but he only emphasizes emotions as *motivating* and thus providing “...a necessary link between social structure and social action.” (Barbalet, 2002, p. 4) However it is typical that in Barbalet’s collection, Mabel Berezin refers to the emotions as “noncognitive” (p. 33) and Charlotte Bloch notes how emotions are usually thought of as impeding scientific cognition, (p. 113) but without elaborating on this idea.

I have pointed to nonintuitive awareness of intrinsic good and bad. *I am not saying that all pleasures count morally.* They merely feel good to the individuals who have

them. We will see that the primary normative principle (with which, I argue, all ethical findings should cohere) actually *rules out* many pleasures, but more on that below. There is another nonintuitive basis for value judgments:

*Hypothesis 9: Desire-satisfaction is of positive interest or value to the desirer.*

If we were to dispute this, it would be pretending that things are of neutral value in relation to desires, which is false. To desire something *is* to value it in a pro-active way, and to wish to realize the thing in question, unless that is overruled by, e.g., what is possible, ethics, or competing desires. Denying such value would be denuding the world of the positive value that sentient beings experience when their desires are satisfied, no more and no less. Then there is a related hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 10: Desire-frustration is of negative interest or value to the desirer.*

Similar remarks apply. Frustration is a reaction to a thwarting of what is valued. Discounting the importance of desire-frustration would also tend to add to the real frustrations of this world without as much reliable or principled relief. Again it is not “intuition” that reveals a negative experience for frustrated desirers, but the experience of frustration itself. To maintain that desires are of *neutral* value, it would have to be asserted that the will is neutral in relation to different objects, which is patently false. Please note that desires as indicators of value were not endorsed in Sztybel 2006b, and also that I am not saying that everything desired is of *ethical* or normative value—again, do the given desires cohere with the primary normative principle?

*Sentient beings* have both feeling and desiring cognition. Sentience just refers to being able to sense, and while it is often defined in terms of the ability to experience pleasure and pain, (e.g., Singer, 1993) it can just as well refer to sensing what it is to have one’s desires met or frustrated too. Perhaps “sentience” prefigures a cultural need to go beyond the five senses with affective cognition, since affect is also *sensed*.

These background hypotheses in relation to the best caring principle are justifiable independently of that principle itself. However, the background hypotheses are not normative principles, and so do not occur directly in a system of normative principles, except, as we have here, in the capacity of background or ancillary hypotheses. It can be argued to be *practically* “best” to advocate the truth of all of the background hypotheses, but they are still justifiable independently as I have argued.

Another background hypothesis in relation to the best caring principle is:

*Hypothesis 11: Intrinsic (dis)values are separately significant to each and every sentient being.*

This idea also can be independently justified. What is pleasant for one person is not necessarily so for another. Even if two are pleased by a show, the pleasure of each is separate and indeed different. We are all unique. This separateness is based simply in the separate *minds* of moral recipients (i.e., those who are on the receiving end of actions by moral agents). This is a reckoning using effective cognition because it is simply the observation that good and bad have effects on individuals *separately*. This background hypothesis is utterly crucial for understanding the best caring principle. For it means that promoting what is best in general means not promoting the best for everyone at once, since it is not the case that everyone is affected as a unity. Rather, the best in general must mean, irreducibly, what is best for you, best for me, best for this individual, that individual, etc., up to and including all of the individual sentient beings involved. This background hypothesis is not acknowledged, let alone respected, by utilitarianism, which judges the best overall to be the addition of everyone’s units of pleasure, say, subtracting everyone’s units of pain. Best caring, by contrast, while not egoistic, is individualistic in emphasizing everyone’s separate share of justice. And this finding is rooted in the justifiability of Hypothesis 11.

Note also another, related hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 12: Values are ultimately significant in relation to sentient beings rather than mindless things.*



This is related to 11. Nothing matters to any mere thing, be it material or mental, e.g., an idea. This is rooted in effective cognition too since in terms of things being significant to recipients, there is simply no such effect on mindless things. This helps to dignify sentient beings as ends in themselves, to use a Kantian term. Does this mean, then, that sentient beings are the ultimate “principle” of ethics, if we ultimately act for them? I do not think so. Sentient beings are not *principles*. All ethical significance is in relation to sentient beings (including the primary normative principle itself), but we have to figure out what that significance is, since *anything at all* can be significant to sentient beings, for better or worse. Merely determining that things matter only to sentient beings does not tell us how to act normatively. The *best* significance for sentient beings, by contrast, seems to be rationally required by the best caring principle. Therefore, sentient beings as ultimate ends in themselves—acting ultimately for them—is quite consistent with best caring as an ultimate normative principle. We must not confuse what is ultimate in terms of different kinds of reality: where significance ultimately ends up in the universe, and which normative principle for ideally ordering situations is ultimate.

I have already commented somewhat on the justificatory role of background beliefs. Again, they are not themselves normative principles but help to justify or constitute the categorical imperative: the fundamental normative principle in favor of best caring. The best caring principle is not a one-thought wonder. Considerable thinking is required to understand and analyze this rule in the fuller context of reality. The background beliefs, then, are not separate from or completely “external” to the best caring principle, fully understood, but are “analytic” in relation to it. They help to constitute its very sense. However, I am not referring to linguistic analysis (which formally permits any ethics whatsoever), but to the justified analysis of experienced reality, which is more substantive than just the allowances of language. So the background beliefs play a justificatory role in the form of “internal” justification, more or less, although they are based too on reference to “external” reality. It is true that the background beliefs can be independently justified, apart from the principle. It is also *best* to affirm the background beliefs as well as *right*, since they are the best beliefs we can arrive at perhaps, both epistemically, and in terms of creating consequences that are beneficial or not harmful for sentient beings.

A secondary normative principle, after the primary principle of best caring, is:

*Hypothesis 13: Promote nonharming in general, and only minimal harming when nonharming is impossible.*

(See also Sztybel 2006b, p. 15) This hypothesized normative principle depends on background beliefs as well. One background belief is:

*Hypothesis 14: The best is ideally all-good.*

(*Ibid.*) This is true because it is always preferable to have a scenario of only good things than it is to have a scenario with bad mixed in, for any individual sentient being. This is yet another finding of effective cognition (how to effectively realize the best or most good/least bad). Even if it is best in a given case to accept a bad thing, as in pain at the dentist, it is still better at other times when dentistry is painless. This justifies a rigorous avoiding of harm as best for any individual. And this nonharming principle will be generalized for *all* sentient beings as part of securing the best in general, or the best for each and every individual.

Now best caring will be further spelled out, more briefly and informally than above (in order to avoid excessive length and tedium). For example, the normative principle to be equitable or just flows from upholding the best in general. Since the latter means promoting what is best for *all* of the sentient beings involved, this means the best for each will be *equally* advocated as part of the best in general. (*Ibid.*, p. 14) Again, this is effective cognition of just what it takes to be most effective or best. Justice though needs a principle of nonharming first, since harmful pleasures or desires will be ruled out as contrary to what is best, (*Ibid.*, p. 19) or at variance with the logical corollary (argued above) of nonharming/minimal harming. A best caring agent would only be interested in fairly distributing goods that embody nonharming, rather than exploitive or sadistic goods, for example.

After the normative principle of justice comes a principle that we should be sympathetic towards others. It is possible to act out a moral code without sympathy, but since things are only significant to sentient beings (nothing matters to mere things—see discussion of Hypothesis 12), we should ultimately direct our actions towards sentient beings, and being *unsympathetic* towards them jeopardizes acting for their good and against what is bad for them. This is effective cognition in the realization that we cannot best promote the best itself except with all key parts of our being, including our own affect. Merely acting ultimately for a principle is fallible because senseless—one cannot do anything for or against a principle or idea any more than one can benefit a book in itself (although one can care for books on behalf of sentient beings who are interested in them). I say that sympathy comes after, since we should best sympathize with moral agents who not only subscribe to nonharming but also equitable values. That said, we should sympathize with what is best for moral incompetents too, and detectives can use empathy with vicious desires of criminals to proper advantage.

Still further normative principles such as rights, duties, and virtues can be justified, also flowing from the primary principle together with relevant background beliefs. These are all arguably effective in promoting the best for each and every sentient being. Someone who did not respect a *duty* not to harm might be more dangerous or thoughtless; someone who refused to acknowledge a *right* to life or who manifests the *vice* of impatience might be less reinforced in terms of ethical conduct than someone fully committed to rights and virtues. That said, some cultures might only have duties but not rights, and in that case, rights might only apply in a cosmopolitan rather than a parochial sense. Friendship and love, which respect moral normative principles flowing from best caring, can also be justified since it is better to have a life with these things, and so such relationships are a part of what is best for all sociable sentient beings. I have kept this account quite brief, but with sufficient remarks to indicate how the best caring framework can be justified nonintuitively—which is not to say *counterintuitively*.

We can keep an open mind that a better first principle may present itself than the best caring principle, but we can be confident with some justification that this will not occur, just because logically, nothing can be better than the best. Now there are

competing background beliefs about intrinsic values. I have effectively ruled out intuited intrinsic values. What about preference-based values? Preferences, in my understanding, are just general *desires* for some things over others in cases in which two or more things might be choices. So a desire-based intrinsic value theory will also rigorously respect preferences. I reject hedonistic intrinsic values for ethics, unlike many forms of utilitarianism, since some pleasures are sadistic or aggressive, and that is contrary to nonharming. Any nonharming goods also need to be considered in an *equitable* way. This rules out honoring just *any* good that one finds to be good, regardless of whether it leads to anything further, since some might value cruelty in precisely that way. Those who deny the role of the good in ethics altogether often advocate duties, such as promise-keeping, but such principles can only be “justified” intuitively if they do not flow from promoting good and avoiding bad. If no justification is given, then we have to assume that intuitionism might be at work. Lists of activities are not viable as contenders for intrinsic value since some will find more worth in, say, artistic endeavours than others, and if one contemplates *any* activities without desires or feelings, one ceases to care about them altogether (as anyone who has experienced or empathized with severe depression knows). So intrinsic value seems linked to feelings and desires quite inextricably. We cannot find things to be good in themselves without also being interested in them through feeling and/or desire. Being utterly uninterested is not a stance for finding *anything* to be good intrinsically. Marx’s materialistic values are ruled out as primary since money or property mean nothing without some kind of interest in them.

There are several advantages for being able to base ethics in a single first principle, as utilitarians do (only differently) as it is easier to reason, focus, communicate, educate, appeal to a broader public, debate, and characterize ethics as scientific since the basic principle elegantly adheres to the principle of parsimony. Indeed, elegance is better for the cause of liberation. Not only does everything flow from the primary principle, which simplifies greatly, but the adherence to the best—as a normative concept—is also a relatively simple idea in terms of content. That said, we have seen that the full meaning of this normative principle involves a number of detailed and clearly specifiable background ideas. There is a sense in which the normative principle stands, and the rest (at the level of generalizations anyway) is commentary—in terms of explication, implications, refutation of contrary views, answering of objections, and

so forth. It is also easier to distinguish what seems most fundamental to ethics using such a stratagem, while being able subsequently to appeal to virtually any dimension of ethics such as rights, duties, virtues, etc.

Single-principle ethics, at least at base, have long been the most attractive to many thinkers. Utilitarianism is the classic example. It is no accident that utilitarians emphasize what is best, after a fashion. Kant claims to affirm only one categorical imperative, although no one has been able to demonstrate how his three alleged “versions” are really the same imperative, i.e., roughly: (1) Act so that your will may be universalizable; (2) Act so that you treat humanity never solely as a means but at the same time as an end in himself/herself; (3) Act according to a possible “kingdom of ends.” (Kant, 1956) Anything can be universalized of course, and merely not using someone as a mere means is scarcely guiding either. The ethics of care vaguely urges the one idea of “caring” overall (although not generally as a *principle*), even though *everyone* cares about something; one can have excessive sympathetic empathy with an axe murderer; and someone might care about some other(s) insufficiently to treat those other(s) justly—among other objections. (cf. Sztybel, 2006b, p. 12) In a way, the best caring principle *vaguely* combines the wisdom of all three single-idea traditions, aiming for the best as in utilitarianism (although in a different way), emphasizing nonharming as Kant in effect does with universalized duties *never* to lie, break promises, kill, steal, etc. (although best caring is not so exceptionless), and of course the best caring principle is fully caring. I said “vaguely” since best caring is not the same as these other views. Also, equivalence of principles need not be impossible on the best caring framework. In a way, the best caring principle, fully articulated, is logically equivalent to all of the principles that can be derived from it as I have indicated. Kant and others were right, I believe, to seek a fundamental normative principle.

Note that my system of ethics is organized around normative principles, rather than “values” (as *axiological* systems are). Axiology is just the study of fundamental values. Now values play a role, which is specified, in best caring. However, any good is not what is ethically promoted *unless* it is a part of what is best for sentient beings. That is because any good may be an unjust benefit from oppression, or something avoidably connected to harming, or selfish and inequitable, the result of

exploitation, and so on. Therefore making the good ultimate seems inappropriate, or indeed not-best, if such a commitment does not further what is best in a way that is compatible with apparently true background beliefs. Also, the best itself is not purely a “good,” except loosely in the sense that it is *valued*, for the best involves not only reference to good *and* bad, but also, unavoidably, a normative principle of action: maximizing good and minimizing bad. So best caring involves no axiology with the best as the basic “value,” strictly speaking.

Given that best caring is rooted in *hypotheses*, does that mean the first principle is not a *categorical imperative* as Kant would have it? This worry confuses two different senses of “hypothetical.” Kant said a hypothetical imperative is of the form: *If* you wish to be well respected *then* you will exercise politeness. These imperatives are about the best means to an end *if* one happens to be committed to the end. We can see how Horkheimer’s contrast between objective and subjective reason (Horkheimer, 1947, pp. 7, 62—see Part 1) resembles Kant’s distinction here. Another sense of “hypothetical” is supporting a *hypothesis* with evidence. My own hypotheses above are social scientific with attention to evidence, but the primary principle proposes a *categorical imperative* that holds not just *if* one aims for the best, but absolutely for all rational agents in a sense. Moreover, the primary principle can be categorical in two senses. Hypotheses can be certainly or categorically true or justified, as an epistemic consideration. Furthermore, if a normative principle is applicable in all situations, then it is categorical in a different sense, i.e., in terms of scope of application. I believe I have found a categorical imperative in the way that Kant himself means, especially in the second sense.

To refuse feeling and desiring cognition as bases for values is unsympathetic towards sentient beings, literally denying them things that figure into what they care about the most. Trying to tell people what they “should” care about an impersonal standard that is intuited would try to make one ultimately act for the principle *itself*, which is impossible and senseless. If instead one “should” care about a standard that *another* sentient being values most, that could well be unjust, or valuing what one sentient being cares about but not another. To deny value altogether through “neutrality” is considered below.

It can be objected that not all affective states present absolutes. Someone might want a football team to win, others might want them to lose, and still others might not care. That is true. But I am not saying anything about all affective states, but only that pleasure feels good and pain feels bad. Furthermore, our affect is part of the world of nature, or a component of the facts of reality, and so is a proper object of scientific investigation and comment. Our feelings and desires cannot be dismissed as nonexistent, insignificant, or in some other dimension. True or false things can be stated about these phenomena based on evidence, even if we do not have direct cognitive access to the minds of others. Affect also has practical implications for the world, including conduct. That is as real as reality gets.

Part of my method in ethics is not just relying on non-intuitive cognition, but also rejecting other normative sociologies insofar as they depend on intuition. An ethical egoist who claims that his view is best is deluded, since the best means the most good and the least bad, and stating that the good is real or significant for oneself alone makes no sense, let alone that such a paltry value constitutes “the most good” in reality. Not only do I sweep aside utilitarian intuitions, but I hold that the best is not just the most pleasure and the least pain overall, which might be used as a utilitarian consideration to rationalize medical vivisection. The harm to the victims is often said to be “outweighed” by harm prevented through treatments and cures developed through such research. Rather, the best is individualized as I have justified, and it is not best for *anyone* to be vivisected. I defend this position elsewhere (Szybel, 2006b) and aim to elaborate still more in forthcoming books on ethics. If what I argue is correct, then in contrast to intuitionist views, best caring is a special theory in the history of thought for being able to withstand the critique from anti-intuitionism.

Not all impersonal truths determine our actions. The weather is real impersonally, but it does not necessarily cause us to go on a walk or not, although that factor may at least influence such a decision. That best caring pleasures are ethically good also does not determine our actions, although that helps us to decide. And avoiding bad that can be avoided also helps us decisively rule out routinely harmful practices, for example. Indeed, all forms of oppression would be negated on a fully nonharming approach. Moreover, anti-oppression goes a good bit of the way—though not entirely—towards *liberation*, the ideal of liberation sociology.

I am not saying there are no areas of moral disagreement just because science may have a role in ethics. Everyone's life is decided not only by impersonal truths but personal decisions are often made that are not dictated by what can be judged to be impersonally best. Some would say that the opposite of science is art, and so leap to the conclusion that whatever cannot be decided scientifically must be "arty." However, I am not pretentiously stating that all personal choices need be works of art, only that such decisions occur in the realm of personal freedom. For instance one can choose to appreciate something, which generally requires slowing down, or to be productive, which might imply speeding things up. It is a personal choice whichever one decides, although it is impersonally true that different speeds may help one's given end-goal. We cannot always quantify good and bad, so thoughtful contemplation and open *discussion* are often very helpful in aiming for "the best." Here we take a leaf from the views of Habermas considered in Part 1.

Liberation sociology that is absolutist, as I defend it, would liberate nonhuman animals from being used for food, clothing, science experiments, entertainment, hunting, etc. As for the top human moral issues, they are all, I find, also related to liberation. There are the usual controversies over anti-liberation or oppression: including racism, sexism, and homophobia. However, capital punishment is a liberation issue too. As with the question of torture, executions concern liberation from excessive punitiveness. The nonharming aspect of best caring ethics is incompatible with capital punishment. Anyone who tells you that punishment by death is compatible with what is best in general, or what is best for everyone as agents and recipients, is not telling the truth, since it is never best for someone to be avoidably killed, other things being equal. On the other hand, it can be best (the most good and the least bad) to be given the freedom to die, in euthanasia cases in which the alternative to that harm is suffering terminally. That said, involuntary (or counter-preferential) killing is murder and that is not best for anyone either. Liberation of speech does not mean allowing inciting to hatred, any more than liberation from violence rules out defense. Sometimes one must choose the least of unavoidable harms. Affirmative action may be needed to get a liberationist society to not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. The welfare state is similarly needed to see that best caring is brought into action and not merely talked about. That said, taxpayers should



not be exploited to sustain others. Conservatism tends to be inimical to a social safety net (which should include environmental protections), and socialism alone seems to guarantee full protection of rights, since even liberal governments, notoriously, can swing either way and validate laws that force citizens, as a commonplace, to choose between buying groceries or paying the rent. Abortion liberates women from reproductive servitude to embryos. In other works, I will argue that not all sentient beings are equal in dilemmas when considering the worth and significance that each being finds in life, and that this is a decisive factor in favor of women's liberation in the abortion issue. That said, I defend equality in normal situations since that is best for all when it can be managed. Anti-infanticide however is about sentient babies' liberation from being murdered. Issues pertaining to the environment, such as curbing excessive resource-consumption and production of pollution, is about liberating current sentient beings and those of future generations from an oppressive physical and aesthetic environment. Spiritual liberation means that one should be respected as an agnostic, atheist, pantheist, animist, polytheist, or monotheist. Thus I find that all the key human moral issues are liberation issues (which I have only loosely commented on here), and the same goes for the most pressing problems pertaining to nonhuman animals.

Liberation sociology of the absolutist type does not necessarily take away anything from descriptive sociology as practiced except dogmatic denials of moral absolutes. I provide evidence for my hypotheses. Everyone can judge for themselves whether they can replicate my findings, and indeed several have already found that they can. I hypothesize that the reason why we have not decided questions of ethics partly on the basis of feeling and desiring cognition is that cultures of speciesism encourage us to be callous, and statements that animals are mindless—whether wholly or by degrees—are in keeping with denying that animals can be *cognitive* through feeling and desiring. Also, sexism is a factor. The stereotype of the stoic male who is unemotional and can controllingly deny all of his desires has influenced what is dominantly valued in sexist cultures around the world. A scientific approach to goodness is also impossible unless we take into account *all* that is good, including for other sentient beings. It might be objected that my good-oriented (but normatively based) ethic begs the question against other forms of ethics, such as rule-based ethics. However, anyone who asserts a rule apart from upholding the best, such as “Do not

kill,” is merely making an intuitive assumption. Intuitionist rule-based ethics cannot be scientific and therefore do not effectively compete with best caring. By contrast, the rule “Do not kill” can be generally supported by best caring and the need to avoid harming quite rigorously. The best caring principle itself is a kind of rule, but it is not a stand-alone one: its very sense is dependent on many independently justifiable background propositions.

Social science has made a great deal of progress but it needs to foster much more. We need seriously to investigate and debate whether ethics of various forms should be added to social science. Moral norms are already examined by sociologists and, as we have seen, asserted by them as well, and what I am doing merely expands the scientific scrutiny of moral norms to a much fuller extent. It is actually unscientific to make the scientific commitment to logic and reliable awareness stop short when investigating whether (and how) we ought to advocate moral norms. Indeed, deeper *descriptions* of moral norms require delving into their ascribed *justifications*, and the logical properties of same, which is also required by the practices of ethics and of course normative sociology. My ethics is still philosophy, but given my rejection of intuitionism (which infects the vast majority of ethics advocated by philosophers, sociologists, and others), intellectual geography places me squarely in social science, which systematically should have no truck with intuitionism. My findings actually go beyond social science to natural science more generally in some respects since affective values naturally exist, regardless of whatever happens to be asserted or denied socially.

My role as a philosopher—and now a writer in social science—teaching sociology at Brock University (at the time of this writing) has forced me to rethink disciplinary boundaries in ways that I have reflected here. However, even if I am wrong in my absolutist version of liberation sociology, that does not eliminate liberation sociology itself. At worst, I would have to revert to a type of liberation sociology that may hinge on little more than sympathy and social democracy, and I would have to concede that ethics is not scientific but merely philosophical after all. However, someone would have to refute my reasoning above (and indeed my full case which I do not have room to broach here) before I would be prepared to concede any such negation of what I have argued. I would suggest that such a refutation is not so easily

done, any more than it is easy to prove that pleasure feels bad or indifferent. After all, knowing the good through feeling and desiring cognition is *part* of the basis of ethics, it seems to me, and without this reference to animal absolutes (or more precisely, sentient absolutes), talk of the “best” would be merely illusory in a sense. Just as sociologists would not have their whole study denied to be “real science” by “hard science” advocates, so ethics itself should not be placed outside of social science without sound *reasoning* to that effect. That might not even be possible, as I argued in Part 1.

### **Putting Superiorism in Its Lowly Place**

In Part 1 I referred to the theory of superiorism as a possible threat to animal rights. According to this theory, one of the goals of ethics is to prefer to realize what is good. It can be argued that it is more worth favoring beings with more goods in their lives who also realize more goods for others. These goods can be quite various, such as autonomy, communication, freedom, moral agency, political participation, rationality, and sociability. Is it best, therefore, to favor those whose lives are richest in goods? I do not have space to treat this idea at length, which is required for a more thorough discussion. (Szybel, 2000) However, superiorism may superficially seem attractive since it is not obviously selfish, allows for a rejection of racism and sexism while apparently discriminating on the basis of goodness (which seems morally relevant) rather than species, and the view has its own theory of justice and animal “welfarist” compassion.

Superiorism is actually inferior in its promotion of the best. There are two possible senses in which beings richer in goods might result in more “worthiness” of being benefited: (1) creating more good consequences (which need not involve merit or desert, although a combined view is possible); and (2) individually deserving or meriting more good. As for (1), best caring creates more good consequences since it realizes more goods for more beings, rather than using a hazardously ranked hierarchy of goodness to *negate* the realization of goodness. It is generally better to benefit *two* people in a given context rather than to benefit only one or the other, as in a dilemma. It would be a *false dilemma* to claim that one “needs” to benefit only one person

because there is more good in that person's life. Likewise avoiding a similar (nameless) fallacy, it is *better* to avoid hierarchy of benefiting when possible in promoting good consequences. Such hierarchy would needlessly negate good just as in the dilemma example.

What about merit? No one can take *credit* for the capacity to have more autonomy, communication, rationality, etc. That is a function of nature. Therefore, it would be illogical to claim that one has more merit based on such capacities. It is best or realizes the most good to say that beings deserve good just for being the kinds of entity who *appreciate* good and bad. Now consider moral agents who *do* virtuously bring about more good in the lives of others. Altruistic people do not get rights and others are denied them in the human realm, and so it would be speciesist—as well as unaltruistic—to deny rights to animals on such grounds. Virtue is its own reward, and people should not necessarily receive selfish “perks” for doing altruistic moral duties. It is simply best to act for the sake of all, not just for ego. That said, economic rewards may be indispensable for society's goals, but those not able to earn money such as the disabled and animals will best have rights too. Punishment may be appropriate for selfish, immature people who fail their duty as an “incentive” to do their part, since moral considerations then prove not enough. Even *if* animals were somehow “punishable,” *no one* should be “punished” by negating all rights—or at least that is not best punishment, realizing the most good and least bad. It is still *best* to respect the basic dignity of immoral agents, *and* of mere recipients who are incapable of moral agency—be they human or other. More to the point, animals seem morally punishable *not at all* (though they may be trained—best *kindly*) since punishment relates to blame or moral responsibility. Even if punishment were applicable, it only applies to isolated “mischievous” actions anyway, not to one's whole *life*. The “merit” (and/or demerit) version of superiorism is thus of no real merit whatsoever. Combining the failed ideas (1) and (2) is no more promising.

### **Sociological Values and Best Caring**

As a form of sociology, best caring embodies certain values embraced by sociologists listed in Part 1, and, I argue, promotes such values better than the ethical relativists:

(1) *Science as a privileged form of knowing.* Social science obviously uses a variant of the scientific method, but so does best caring. Views contrary to best caring may have less scientific merit if they are not rigorously justified hypotheses, e.g., intuitionist views. Best caring is also parsimonious, logically flowing at the general level from the primary principle. As well, this system can progressively change over time, as scientific findings do, in response to better ideas or technology. Ethical relativism by contrast permits anti-scientific cultures or the corruption of scientific practices if that is a favored way to act relative to certain points of view. Such relativists unscientifically allow ethical beliefs to be accepted simply because they *are* accepted.

(2) *Beginning with skepticism.* Best caring reflects this principle too by only accepting hypotheses insofar as they can be strictly justified. Relativists, by contrast, recognize a principle as right for a culture if people in the culture *dogmatically* believe in the idea. One can always be skeptical *in context*, doubting any hypothesis to the extent that it is not rigorously supported by evidence. Skepticism does not need to be all-or-nothing, or perpetual, and in its most credible forms, will not be.

(3) *Not getting lost in abstractions.* All generalizations are based on concrete ideas. The good is no mere abstraction but refers to the realities of feelings and desires (the affective), and what is causally potent, especially in the best degree (the effective). By contrast, ethical relativists admit *whatever abstractions are put forward* so long as they are *believed* in. Intuitionists seem to “reify” ideals since these thinkers cannot base their fundamental notions in reasoning, making ideals seem more baseless or “free-floating” than need be. All important ethical ideas, I have tried to suggest, can be shown to flow from the best caring principle, which, fully articulated, provides “roots” for ethics.

It is also important to realize that ethics is applied in concrete circumstances. Specific details are relevant in ethical decision-making, and salient facts are quite as much premises leading to ethical conclusions just as much as general ideals. The two kinds of premises can be listed in arguments in no particular order of priority. Indeed, facts often need to be known before one can judge which normative principles (chiefly)

apply and in what manner. Irrelevant facts often need to be considered too in order to rule them out as irrelevant, at least for the time being, after due consideration. This paper emphasizes general principles, although the crucial relevance of particular facts could be illustrated using any number of case studies, and are also involved in the next value.

(4) *Pragmatic efficiency.* We can forge a useful distinction between extreme and moderate pragmatism. Traditional philosophy is hardly pragmatic at all in being simply concerned with being good, virtuous, just, and doing one's duty. Nonpragmatist philosophers do not necessarily require being *effective* in a scientific manner. An *extreme pragmatist* only adopts ideals that "work," but this could mean anything, including Nazism and what most effectively realizes its "ideals." *Moderate pragmatism* does not leave the norms of ethics entirely to whatever happens to be expedient, but at the same time, is concerned not just with rationally defending ideals, but also empirically verifying when ideals are (best) met. Part of normative sociology determines what is normative by studying and experimenting with what is most efficient, or what causes and conditions (or variables) are most conducive to particular ends. Such sociological studies are crucial for guiding us. The goods of best caring sociology—things involving pleasure and pain, and desire-satisfaction and -frustration—can be measured to some extent. Techniques, technologies and policies can all be evaluated for effectiveness. Also, ideal forms of life are often unavailable and we must resolve dilemmas, manage scarce goods/resources, and mediate among unavoidable harms and risks. A pragmatic approach is key in such cases. Pragmatism is America's chief contribution to philosophy and sociology, but its extreme form certainly does not safeguard liberation in any way. Pragmatist sociology dominates in North America, and more theoretical approaches are more prominent in Europe, but there is no need for just one or the other—on the contrary. Now ethical relativists can be extreme pragmatists, but their efficiency studies can help to promote egregious practices, for example, and so are not necessarily desirable.

(5) *Anti-oppression.* Many sociologists are opposed to oppression, but ethical relativism equally privileges oppressive views so long as they are *believed*. Best caring is unequivocally anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-speciesist, anti-homophobic, anti-biphobic, anti-transphobic, anti-ableist, anti-ageist, and so on. It is also anti-

ethnocentric (see below) and opposed to cultural imperialism in a postcolonial world. Consider best caring's respect for preferences or wishes. Customs can be regarded as cultural habits, or cemented group preferences (although they can change over time and interpenetrate cross-culturally). Nonharming and equitable cultural preferences have to be respected on best caring, although ethical relativists must equally respect intolerant and empire-expanding cultural beliefs, according to the logic of that doctrine.

(6) *There is no single best way to live.* The fact that best caring shows that things are significant in relation to each and every individual, and honours various individual preferences and feelings attendant to diverse personalities, entails that there is no generic best way to live as part of promoting what is best in general, but best *ways* for different individuals and groups. Different abilities, disabilities, interests, relationships, cultures, species, and environmental niches are all relevant in contemplating ethical diversity. By contrast, ethical relativists can say that bulldozing everything in the wake of an American empire might be right for Americans who happen to believe along those lines.

(7) *Ethics is only fully intelligible in cultural contexts.* Best caring accepts this dictum, acknowledging the role of custom, language, environment, and other factors. At the same time, along with cultural constructions such as language, there are animal absolutes that we have in common. Suffering, though, is partly cultural, e.g., frustration at a custom being breached such as burping which is valorized in Turkey though not generally in North America. The lack of cultural consensus over ethics is also acknowledged, and again, much diversity is honored. It is also understandable that relativism can *seem* to be true if all one has in one's analysis are competing moral intuitions. On such a framework, right and wrong will only be intelligible relative to specific intuitive standpoints. However, such ethical relativism is not necessarily viable in a post-intuitionist understanding. Ironically, ethical relativists are not strictly committed to respecting cultural contexts with sensitivity in any absolute sense whatsoever.

(8) *Honoring diverse voices.* This accords with respect for cultural preferences and individuality that are parts of best caring, although relativists can offer no guarantees

in this or any other respect. I speak on my own behalf in this paper, but I welcome discourses that have been iterated and ones to come from divergent (inter)personal standpoints. I have already exhibited more attention to diverse voices in normative sociology in Part 1 than I have seen in any other work. Subjective meanings are important as preferred or personal ways of interpreting the world, and deserve to be treated with empathy, respect and open debate. No one's findings are "positionless."

(9) *Respecting the contextual and being suspicious of the "transcendental."* Best caring does not transcend contexts. Desires and feelings are alive in any number of contexts, which makes best caring an ethic of sweeping relevance. But best caring does not claim to be eternal. Not only did it develop historically, but sentient life on Earth will have a limited time-space span before, say, our sun becomes a red giant. Although some things are true of all Earth's sentient creatures, e.g., pain feeling bad, is this "universal"? We do not have knowledge of the whole universe—do sentient beings exist elsewhere? Is best caring "transhistorical"? Again, best caring tries to speak truths pertaining to the history of sentient beings, and is also historically specific in terms of honoring cultural or individual preferences for example.

(10) *Anti-authoritarianism.* It is perhaps arrogant to pose an opinion without justifying it at all. It is generally authoritarian to say what "must" be the case based on someone's say-so, yet that is the tactic of both intuitionists and also ethical relativists. Best caring rejects such authoritarian dogmatism and aims instead for comprehensive justifications.

(11) *Anti-ethnocentrism.* I argue, in what may be a surprising move, that best caring is far less ethnocentric than ethical relativism. First, there is a sense in which ethical relativism furthers ethnocentrism in the world. Ethnocentrists are "buried" and centered in their own cultures. Yet considering moral right and wrong to be whatever one's culture states is a practice that centers right and wrong solidly in various ethnicities. True, respect for other cultures *may* somewhat mitigate this ethnocentric tendency, but unfortunately, such respect is a logically and empirically dispensable part of ethical relativism, since many cultures are in fact intolerant of other cultures and there is no *absolute* favoring of respect for all cultures if one assumes moral relativity. Cultures that are or will become intolerant would be fully supported by



ethical relativism, whereas tolerant cultures are of course not even an issue. The situation therefore could hardly be worse. No single philosophy could *maximize* ethnocentric views more than ethical relativism. After all, generally, the ethnocentric alternative to moral relativity is just a given single cultural view that is ethnocentric. Relativity though favors the most possible ethnocentric views. By contrast, best caring does not reckon moral rightness ethnocentrically, but rather in a cosmopolitan fashion, and is not logically open to cultural tyranny. Second, people do not often hold that their cultural ethics are purely relative: most cultures have believed there is something absolute about cultural ethical belief systems. Peter Jones astutely points out that people in different cultures believe that their ethics are simply true, *universally*, not valid for their respective cultures alone. (Jones, 1994, p. 219) So in light of this common absolutism, it might be ethnocentric rather to impose a model of ethical relativism on different cultures since *most societies* do not actually function in such a manner. They typically embrace values that are part of an absolutist religious fabric, for example, or that fit into systems of laws that reflect absolutist moral tendencies such as universal human rights. So absolutes in ethics are not necessarily “ethnocentric,” although absolutes need to be defended rather than merely taken for granted at the same time. Best caring is highly pluralistic and respectful of other cultures in any case since it respects preferences that are generally non-aggressive (aiming for nonharming and justice). Cultural norms tend to become what is *preferred* by people who live by those norms, and so would tend to be respected much more rigorously by best caring advocates than on a culturally relative framework that dignifies the old jingoistic imperial ethic of British colonialists just as much as, say, a Buddhist ethic that intentionally respects many different cultures. People in a given culture might not like to view their own principles as mere “preferences.” However, in many cases, people operating from a cosmopolitan standpoint will view such cherished principles as preferences, since not everyone will agree on such ideals. Third, let us spell out the logical implications of stating that (a) advocating the best or (b) finding that pain feels bad are “ethnocentric” ideas. Taken literally, this would imply that for an “in-group” such as North Americans, the best is a worthy ideal, but not for the rest of the world. Thus others must logically end up advocating what is *inferior* to the best. That is ethnocentric by being too self-congratulatory and implicitly inferiorizing or condemning other cultures. If one argues that pain feels bad for North Americans, but not for people of other cultures, that is positively racist,

and reminiscent of pro-slavery beliefs that blacks do not feel (as much). We can speak of anti-ethnocentrism in terms of respecting a variety of cultures, however, the fact remains that things feel good or bad for sentient beings—a truth that cuts across *all* cultures. Exaggerating how much truth is rooted in cultures is perhaps in a very different sense “ethnocentric.”

The above shows how best caring strips ethical absolutism of a lot of its objectionable manifestations: ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, claims to the eternal, ahistorical content, etc. Ethical relativism, by contrast, fares not so well.

### **Best Caring Sociology = Normative Component + Holistic-Descriptive Component**

In the above I have defended best caring as a suitable component of that part of sociological theory which is normative. We have pointed to the rational necessity of either positive or negative normative sociology, since otherwise one fails to take a stand on normative absolutes, or else fails to provide sound reasons for one’s stance. However, by far, there is more to sociology than its normative component. Some have said there *is* no normative component, but I suggest that we lay such dogmatism safely to rest: there must be, in positive or negative form. However, given that sociology obviously has a descriptive component, how do we describe society and its component parts, and ongoing social phenomena? How do we describe the evolution of social forms? I hold that a best caring sociology model would take most care to describe all aspects of society by maintaining a holistic focus, as Feagin and Vera impute to liberation sociology in general. (Feagin and Vera, 2001, p. 257) As with the term “liberation sociology,” I came to think of a holistic focus independently as well. However, I provide an elaboration of this idea, unlike these authors’ passing mention of this topic in *Liberation Sociology*.

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Traditional sociological theories typically have a biased descriptive focus:

<b>sociological theory</b>	<b>focus</b>	<b>opposite focus</b>
structural-functionalism	interrelating and orderly structures and their corresponding functions	social chaos
symbolic interactionism	social representations in particular contexts of interrelation	factors that are not as socially contingent such as biology or the environment
conflict theory/Marxism	class struggle	cross-societal cooperation, e.g., the international postal system
feminism	patriarchy	females as oppressive alongside males, e.g., females as speciesists in their own right
postmodernism	skepticism, deconstruction	what can be truly justified using reasoning

Best caring sociology strives to be liberated from descriptive bias—as part of *best description*, or being the most descriptive—and requires nothing less than exploring *all* aspects of society with interest, respect, and qualitative data. The table above shows that the opposites of the given descriptive theories may provide interesting foci, as can any of the foci of these and other theories themselves. Best caring sociology, a variant of liberation sociology, is multi-pronged in its descriptive focus, taking care not to exclude anything from vision nor to render aspects of the social world (relatively) invisible. After all, I ask: science in general is not formulated with a descriptive bias, so why should *social* science be any different? What is “insignificant” to one person in society (e.g., stamps or even dirt) is very important to others. I thus include all of the foci of previous descriptively biased theories and then some. The only thing I would add is not a bias: sociology would be remiss if it does

not serve the goals of liberation in the way that it describes the world. That is not to say that all sociology need be *applied*, however, or of a practical bent. Best caring respects desires and preferences, and human curiosity is indeed generally part of a powerful preference-set. The exploration of social issues for curiosity, then, is also significant for best caring sociology, and such pursuits may or may not happen to have practical implications beyond the exploration of the social world itself. Can it be objected that holistic descriptive sociology *lacks* focus? On the contrary, it permits the greatest possible abundance of unblinkered and topical foci.

## **Objections and Replies**

### **Objection A: Best caring is in violation of “scientific neutrality.”**

**Reply:** It is necessary to distinguish between different types of neutrality:

- (1) Neutrality between hypotheses that are equally (non)evident, or insufficiently evident;
- (2) Neutralizing feelings or desires in relation to some or all sentient beings.

To escape bias, normative sociology must approach all competing hypotheses impartially, or with strict attention to evidence. Consider, for example, the finding that pain feels bad. It is far from *equally* evident that pain feels good or neutral. So best caring is not in violation of the first kind of neutrality which is indeed relevant to science. Best caring begins impartially and ends up on the side with the best evidence.

What about the second mode of neutrality? True, if you neutralize your feelings, or cast them aside as irrelevant, then your cognition of “bad” in relation to pain might seem to disappear. However, science is oriented towards *cognition* of reality as a means of acquiring evidence to test hypotheses. That is why scientists pay such close attention to the five senses when investigating the physical world. Neutralizing one’s feelings, while possible, would not be answering my findings about feeling cognition with *more* cognition, especially the *relevant* form of feeling cognition. Rather, imposing such “neutrality,” which I emphasize does not logically relate to the scientific method unlike neutrality form (1), would simply *get rid of our feeling*

*cognition*. A neutral view of pain is not scientifically neutral at all but the sense of the pain itself is merely neutralized.

Thus, the second kind of neutrality is a *threat* to scientific investigation rather than an aid. It is like trying to study what a ball looks like by blindfolding oneself. It is an illogical and irrelevant, even intellectually perverse approach to the issue. It hides from the truth and safeguards ignorance. It is a holding-pattern of denial. My claims about feeling cognition must be investigated by verifying if what I claim about our awareness of feelings in general is accurate or not. Am I right to say that pleasure feels good? In science we are not neutral about facts, once they are known, and we are also not neutral about whether to pay attention to the reality that we are supposed to be studying. It would seem that the second kind of neutrality illogically insinuates itself into “scientific” discourse by loose word-association, since the other kind of neutrality is indeed important.

The kind of callousness that sometimes masquerades as scientific neutrality is really something else: *oppressive*. Neutrality is supposed to eliminate bias, but this second kind institutes prejudice and ignorance systematically, thus exhibiting extreme bias. We cannot decide scientific questions by ignoring the evidence. Such practices must be deemed pseudo-scientific. Scientists who advocate the second kind of neutrality are affectively challenged not just personally, but institutionally. A kind person would never fail to consider that pain feels bad and pleasure feels good. I am inclined to conclude that the second kind of neutralism is not an indifferent matter, nor even merely unkind, but makes people *cruel* (if only passively), or personally disposed to conduce towards bad events. Refusing to acknowledge someone’s pain as “really” a bad thing for them is not only false but callous—which is not the best attitude in that it fails to lead to the most good and least bad.

**Objection B: This social scientific ethic asserts that we need to guide ourselves with reference to impersonal truths. However, such truths should not cause us to act like puppets.**

**Reply:** I am not arguing that they ought to. Rather, when we seek to choose what is best, impersonal truths are *relevant* to such determinations. Actually, some

sociologists sometimes accept ideologies that make people seem like impersonal puppets. To make social science appear like the hard sciences, social scientists sometimes state that social phenomena can be predicted in principle just like all physical events. Such a belief imposes a highly deterministic theory of human nature. However, liberation sociology holds that we can reasonably *choose* the future, as ethics would have us do, and that we are not puppets of, say, Hegelian or Marxist historicism.

**Objection C:** Value judgments are contrary to “empirical knowledge,” (Weber, 1962, p. 48) although we can assess the value of means and techniques using empirical studies. (Weber, 1947, pp. 160-161) Herbert Blumer, the founder of symbolic-interactionism, in a related vein of thought, calls a priori theoretical schemes “sets of unverified concepts.” (Blumer, 1969, p. 33)

**Reply:** Empirical knowledge refers to knowledge based on experience. If we advocated what is “best” but nothing we experienced could reasonably be described as good or bad, our commitment would be hollow. However, Weber is assuming that the only legitimate forms of “experience” are the five senses that are used in response to physical objects: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. *Affective cognition is experienced too.* And we can know not only when we have a headache using such cognition, but also that pain feels bad.

**Objection D:** Values not only do not rely on what is empirically observable, but also, they do not pertain to what is logically demonstrable. (Weber, 1978, p. 69)

**Reply:** Can it not be logically demonstrated that nothing could be better than the best, or that something with inferior goodness cannot be best? Weber and Blumer assume logic to be more alien to ethics than it actually is.

**Objection E:** There is, as philosopher David Hume wrote, a “fact-value distinction.” (Weber, 1978, p. 74; Mills, 1959, p. 77) This point is implicitly echoed by Randall Collins, who wrote *The Sociology of*

***Philosophies*, and concluded from his lengthy survey that we can be assured of several items of reality (or fact) as sociologists: thinking, language, other people, time and space, and material bodies. (Collins, 1998, p. 860) His implication seems to be that, unlike thinking, we cannot be sure of values or feelings for example.**

**Reply:** That we have feelings and desires is a fact. That pain feels bad is also a fact. So if we find a kind of bad for sentient beings in that kind of feeling, that also seems to occur in the realm of facts. If a firm wedge is driven between values and facts, then moral absolutes may *seem* to be more in the domain of pretence or fiction, or dogmatism, rather than in the realm of what we in fact find to be of positive or negative value as sentient beings, sensing the world in relation to our own and others' feelings and desires. However, such a wedge should be rejected in light of the affective as well as the effective being quite factual.

**Objection F: Emotions are an “irrational factor.” (Weber, 1962, p. 32)**

**Reply:** If emotions (or more broadly, feelings) are a kind of overlooked fact, they can serve in our reasoning by assisting evaluative inferences in particular. *Emotions* such as anger can cause people to be biased against individuals, but so can *ideas* such as racist stereotypes. There is nothing inherent to all emotions that is anti-rational any more than the same is true of ideas. Sometimes feelings and ideas disrupt logical flow, other times not, and still other times they play indispensable roles in reasoning.

**Objection G: There is “no scientific procedure” to decide ethical cases. (Weber, 1978, p. 85)**

**Reply:** The same scientific method of accepting hypotheses supported by evidence, and rejecting hypotheses that are not supported by evidence (e.g., intuitions) may indeed be morally useful.

**Objection H: Ethics is based on religion. (Weber, 1958, p. 27)**

**Reply:** None of the support for best caring's hypotheses are spiritual either in nature or presupposition.

**Objection I: Ethics is a profession of faith or involves "professorial prophesy." (Weber, 1978, p. 72) Philosophers who engage in scientism suggest that science is a false and pretentious Messiah. (Mills, 1959, p. 16)**

**Reply:** I do not merely have *faith* that pain feels bad, but *know* it to be the case. That is the case with other beliefs I argue for without putting stock in intuitions. Positive normative sociologists claim no special status for themselves, urging that others should believe them because they enjoy some kind of miraculous "knowing" status, but rather, best caring social scientists simply point to the evidence and invite anyone to replicate their findings.

**Objection J: Value-judgments create a "cult of personality." (Weber, 1978, p. 73)**

**Reply:** This assumes that value-judgments are merely offered by charismatic individuals. Sometimes that is the case as Weber has observed. However, best caring's reasoning is not based on such factors.

**Objection K: Even  $2 + 2 = 4$  is historically contextualized. (Mannheim, 1966, p. 72)**

**Reply:** So too are all of my claims made in the English language. But such a fact does not show that four units is ever, in effect, of another number than itself any more than it shows that pain *in itself* ever feels good, no matter one's native linguistic community.

**Objection L: In ethics there are "...no rational justifications which the intellect could confront and engage in debate." (Mills, 1956, p. 356)**

**Reply:** Best caring provides many such arguments.



**Objection M: Herbert Blumer, who coined the term “symbolic interactionism” and was inspired by G. H. Mead, wrote that the meaning of things is derived from or arises out of social interaction with one’s fellows. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)**

**Reply:** Best caring has emerged in the context of a society. However, apart from *any* socializing, the Earth goes around the sun and pain feels bad.

Thorstein Veblen assumes that science “knows nothing of...better or worse.” (Veblen 1919, p. 19) Merely dogmatically, Veblen reflects Weber’s mode of thought as do many other social scientists. Karl Mannheim, in *Ideology and Utopia* (1966), allies relativism and skepticism with objectivity itself but without very much in the way of supporting arguments. Surprisingly or not, the reasoning of the negative normative sociologists *fails*. At least, that is the current state of the debate after considering relevant “evidence” for counter-hypotheses.

## **Conclusion**

I believe that best caring sociology, developed in a scientific manner, may be more sociological, in a sense, than many forms of conventional sociology at the present time. That is, best caring applies the method of rigorously justifying hypotheses more than the conventional view which excludes positive normative sociology intuitively in the end, even while implicitly relying on dubious justifications of what I term “negative normative sociology.” That is because, as it seems, best caring is a system of hypotheses that most squares with the available evidence unlike the old intuitionist arguments. Negative normative sociologists have been revealed as employing *bad arguments*, most of which are merely dismissive rhetorical gestures. Critical theory and liberation sociology as articulated by Feagin and Vera rarely refer to animals, even though animals are not only among the oppressed, but their very oppression has seemingly distorted our sense of values that are real for all sentient beings.

Science is not a finite achievement, but an exercise in aspiration. It is an ever-expanding endeavor. I predict a growing consensus in favor of the findings of feeling

and desiring cognition, and the logical defense and implications of the best caring principle. Calling an ethic “scientific” would sound pretentious at first, perhaps because of cultural conditioning, and the previous failure to establish a scientific ethical system. Even experienced normative theorists, familiar with the intuitionism that dominates philosophical ethics, would think calling intuitionism “scientific” all too much. However, ethics is not limited to intuitionism as I have shown, and should best, in keeping with science, maintain an *anti*-intuitionist stance.

The death of the Enlightenment has been greatly exaggerated, but it has *seemed* dead especially in the stalemate over ethical intuitions. Let us say that Enlightenment ethics has had a near-death experience. But it is not dead, together with its ideal of being skeptical towards the dubious, such as intuitionism, and the promise of an ability to reason about important social and other matters including ethics and rights. Our sociology of particular societies can be overlaid with a *sociology of civilization* which normative sociology affords. Civilization is a family of ideal forms of society, although as noted above, we have great cause to avoid ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism, and insisting on a culturally monolithic view. Recovering our natural “animal knowledge” is absolutely critical to our becoming civilized, ironically enough.

Best caring has another advantage besides independent justification, its ability to answer objections, and its incorporating the advantages but not the disadvantages of competing moral theories (for a substantiation of the last point, see Sztybel, 2006b, pp. 21-22). Best caring, from a theoretical evolutionary perspective of humans as animals, has a great capacity for adapting in response to constructive criticism. Since it advocates what is best in general, any suggested improvement can readily be incorporated, just as the body of science in general grows with new results in knowledge-seeking. In other words, best caring has the advantage of being progressive not only compared to the intuitionist dogmas that have gone before, but also potentially in relation to itself.

The goal of establishing liberation sociology is not merely “academic.” The environment is going to hell, the gap between rich and poor is perilously widening, animals are being swallowed in a virtual “Holocaust,” (Sztybel, 2006a) many Indigenous cultures are disappearing, and millions of women and people with darker

skin—among many others—are being stubbornly held back from fulfilling their potentials. The urgency of these concerns makes liberation sociology also of crucial relevance in its goals and questions. Morality is what is overridingly determining of society according to Durkheim. (Durkheim, 1958, p. 247) Unfortunately, ethics often does *not* carry the day, and it is rather domineering profiteers, for example, who get away with significant injustices. It would perhaps be fine for ethics to win out, but we need liberation studies to help make that happen. Without commitment—i.e., to liberation—there can be no efficient realization of goals, but only a vain hazarding of potential. We need to *decide* to let ethics determine more of social life, including social science.

One of the greatest ironies in history is that all forms of oppressors claim to be “superior.” Consider, sociologically speaking, the following facts, in terms of injustice, abuse, harm and even violence. If there is a socioeconomic class that has behaved the worst, it is the capitalist or managerial class. If there is a sex responsible for about 95% of violent crime (as is common knowledge), it is the male sex. If there is a group with a sexual preference that has members who beat and kill others it is predominantly the heterosexuals. If there are people of a skin colour who have promoted iniquity and hatred it is mostly the so-called “whites.” If there is a level of ability in actions that have blocked the potential of others less fortunate that would for the most part be without disability. It is the dominant faiths that have slain and conquered the most. If there is a species that has visited Holocaust-like conditions on other creatures it is solely humanity. This is not to say, by any means, that all members of these groups noted are oppressive. In any case, the sociological explanation for this overwhelming irony is simple. Alleged superiority was historically used as a justification for *harming, dominating and exploiting without conscience*. So it is no wonder, then, that the allegedly “superior” groups have the worst track records.

Liberation sociology is partly liberation from old and prejudiced ways of doing sociology. Even if one is a more traditional sociologist who tries to totally exclude ethics altogether from social science, this paper shows that such a person should be either doing or subscribing to *negative* normative sociology—and has a lot to answer for. Such theorists need to address sociological advocacy of norms too. Others may

find in liberation sociology the tools they need to affirm liberation in a way that is principled and perhaps even scientific. We need a new kind of globalism to compete with the ills of global corporate capitalism. Not “taking over” the world, but simply *liberating the Earth’s residents in terms of what they care about the most*. This counter-globalism would stave off harm, inequity and honor individual and collective preferences. By transcending deadlocks of intuitions we have an intellectual hope for world peace, since otherwise intuitionists only have force of charms or force of arms to settle their differences. I hope that I have articulated a vision of liberation for social science of which my murdered relatives could be proud, but to the extent that my account is wanting, I am eager for improvements.

Meanwhile, looking back on both parts of this study of animals and normative sociology, there is much evidence that best caring presents significant improvements over past offerings in relevant sociological theory, including but not only:

- (1) Using the scientific method to justify positive normative sociology, including with a parsimonious focus on the primary normative principle of best caring;
- (2) Widening the scope of experience in empirical knowledge to include feeling cognition and desiring cognition;
- (3) Offering a form of liberation sociology that does not depend on ethical relativism, with its reduction to subjectivism and equal privileging of, for example, oppression and liberation;
- (4) Going beyond unscientific and logically failed intuitionism of both positive and negative normative sociologists hitherto;
- (5) Logically entailing the ideals of previous positive normative sociology (e.g., sympathy, justice, rights, etc.) without simply *assuming* what is considered to be desirable;
- (6) Answering chief arguments of negative normative sociology including but not

only the allegedly “nonempirical” nature of ethics and the is-ought or fact-value gaps;

- (7) Providing a holistic “most descriptive” (or best description) focus unlike descriptively biased sociological theories;
- (8) Exemplifying sociological values better than ethical relativism in areas such as anti-ethnocentrism, privileging of scientific knowledge, attention to context, etc.;
- (9) Improving upon the identifier, “critical theory,” which is both too negative and also vague, and also on other global labels such as “ecofeminist”;
- (10) Showing how all sociologists need to have a positive or negative normative account, either originally articulated or at least subscribed to;
- (11) Offering a version of ethical absolutism that is stripped of disadvantages of other absolutist accounts: e.g., overabstract, speculative, faith-based, etc.;
- (12) Helping to protect animals, who are especially vulnerable not only to human oppression but also the perils of ethical relativism;
- (13) Not treating animals either wholly or by degrees as absent referents; and
- (14) Defending animal liberation in a way that may defeat utilitarian vivisection and superiorism, for example, thus adding to John Sorenson’s normative sociology account (see Part 1).

There are also many particular objections to specific normative sociologies considered in Parts 1 and 2 that are inapplicable to best caring sociology. The more that normative sociology becomes rationally articulated, the more progress can be made in this vital field of inquiry.

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## **COMMENTARY**

### **Abolition a Multi-Tactical Movement Strategy**

**Anthony J. Nocella, II**

With so many people talking about abolition in relation to animal oppression and with this year's North American Conference for Critical Animal Studies theme on the topic, it is important to understand the term and its history. To abolish, do away with, nullify, eradicate, eliminate, demolish, destroy; all simply mean to stop or end, not reform or change. The concept of abolition is most notably used regarding human race-based slavery in Europe and the Americas. Abolition does not just refer to only the Underground Railroad which was an important and dangerous tactic of the U.S. anti-slavery movement that included breaking chains, knocking down doors, emptying cages, and hiding people (often including the use of songs, art, candles in windows, and other symbols to denote places of safety). Even though the Underground Railroad was successful and a fundamental part of the abolition movement, it was not the only tactic utilized. The abolition movement was much more. It was about changing and establishing laws at which William Wilberforce had been successful in accomplishing in England and that William Lloyd Garrison had been successful in accomplishing in the United States.

Those acts of changing legislation, which many animal liberationists today might call reformist and useless, were considered courageous and revolutionary by enslaved people as well as abolitionists at that time. Abolition, then, I argue is based not only outside but also inside the government. For instance, what if the US government abolished slaughterhouses and dairy farms? Would that be reformist? Abolition is not reformist. Many in the anti-slavery abolition movement did not risk as much as some. However, The Underground Railroad and legislators both risked their lives and many found themselves attacked and/or even killed at the hands of racists and white supremacists. Abolition was not just some masked person in the night breaking chains and sending hidden, enslaved people of color on their way to a sanctuary. It was much

more complicated and diverse. Those people that hid slaves were often jailed, beaten up, or lynched side-by-side with those they had been striving to free.

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) is an underground group which takes illegal actions to free animals and destroy property (for economic sabotage and to protect animals). The ALF has been compared to the Underground Railroad and have also found themselves jailed and imprisoned. To date no one claiming to be an ALF activist has been killed, hung or tortured. The ALF are liberators but not necessarily abolitionists.

Abolitionists, in an historical context, have demanded mass systematic socio-political economic change. ALF members can be abolitionists as well as liberators, but there are many that could argue that members of the ALF are not abolitionists. While many are vegans, some may eat dairy products or wear leather. It sometimes appears that the general public opinion in the animal advocacy movement is that it does not matter if one is vegan as long as animals are liberated. The ALF, which may portend animal rights beliefs, is different than the animal rights movement as it is not dogmatic or hierarchical. Yes there are ground rules, but since there is no “organization,” there is no way to either mandate or enforce said ground rules.

The ALF is a decentralized group made up of a diversity of people with a diversity of missions. While seemingly grounded by many supporters in anarchist theory, the ALF also has supporters who love shopping and capitalism, or have a traditional family with children, and value conservative Christian beliefs. There are also those who support the ALF but fail to support other social justice causes and freedom for all. There are those who support property destruction but not arson, because they say it is hard to control a fire once set. Further, there have been significant debates about whether an ALF member should or should not be vegan. Obviously then, the ALF is comprised of people with diverse commitments and supporters.

As a Quaker, I have been taught by many fellow Quakers that abolition, specifically in the context of prisons today, is a long and difficult journey of hardships, losses, debates, multiple tactics, silence, reflection, transformation, healing, and of course a great deal of action. Prisons were created with the aid of Quakers in the U.S., sadly to

note, which is a modern-day form of slavery if you read the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution. There are few animal rights groups that work actively, not merely theoretically, on prison abolition. Other modern day abolition movements include those fighting against child-slave labor and human trafficking. Slavery, prisons, child-slave labor, human trafficking and nonhuman animal oppression are all based on economic profit motivated by capitalism, and rooted in the values of domination and control, by the elite.

There are five criteria that history gives us for abolition movements: 1) to educate the public about the need for abolition, 2) to support direct action to free those who are imprisoned, 3) to aid in passing legislation that promotes abolition and prohibits slavery/incarceration, 4) to challenge exploitative economic systems and 5) to aid in a broad creative social justice movement.

It is always beneficial when abolitionists for any cause are involved in an array of social justice movements, such as Quakers who have continually participated in movements as diverse as the Suffragette movement to anti-war stances. It cannot be forgotten that William Wiberforce cared a great deal for the protection of animals, and had a home filled with animals, while also striving for the abolition of people who were enslaved. Wiberforce learned through his struggles that it was through challenging trade tariffs that the abolition of slavery was possible. He also understood that abolition needed to be an act that must be implemented by government. It took him twenty-six years of legislative defeats before he saw the passage of the Slave Trade of 1807 that made way for the most important law, The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833.

Similar to abolitionists, anarchists are opposed to all forms of domination and authoritarianism. However, anarchists have gone one step further and noted that property (in this historical context slaves, women and nonhuman animals) is “theft” and that society should not own anything but rather should share (economic anarchists identify this as mutual aid). This is a value that Native Americans believe in as well, including the parallel of resisting State structure.

The theory of a power-driven civilization is to divide humans from nature and to use, control, and dominate nature. It was only when people were driven from nature that that nature could become property – owned and exploited for profit. Therefore, if we want to free animals we must challenge the economic system and provide an alternative (such as anarchist economics), or else someone else will end up taking the dominated place of nonhuman animals as a so-called “natural resource.”

There are those who argue that abolition means nonviolence. And we must remember there were uprisings in the slavery abolition movement such as John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. The question is, what are you striving to abolish? The exploitation of farm animals? If so, then a vegan diet and the laws that promote it are abolition-based. If one wants to liberate all animals from exploitation, from vivisection to entertainment, then veganism is necessary, but abolition must be a lot broader and more complex than veganism alone.

I agree that veganism is necessary for abolition, as Gary Francione writes, but my argument with his Six Principles of the Abolitionist Approach to Animal Rights is that he stresses that abolition is a nonviolent and non-legislative path. However, history shows us that abolition movements have included violence. That of course does not mean he must endorse it or even support it. I wish the animal rights movement was always nonviolent. As a pacifist, I hope everyone does. However, while violence is not necessarily an act that anyone wants to commit, it is part of history and it is something that some believe must be taken in order to survive. Francione’s note that animals should not be viewed as property is anarchist-based and I would not be surprised if he would support anarchism.

I would argue respectfully with Steve Best, a great scholar with whom I co-edited three books (and another on its way), that abolition is not merely based on direct action such as Underground Railroad tactics, which most of his scholarship is about, but is complex movement with legislators, educators, economists, lobbyists, and politicians. It seems that Francione and Best have a lot more in common than they have with many other scholars within other social justice movements. As both scholars and teachers at well-respected universities in the U.S. (one a lawyer and one

a philosopher) who conduct most of their activism through writing, Best and Francione seem to agree on the following points:

1. Intersectional alliance politics based movements are the way to succeed in the abolition of animal oppression
2. Veganism is a fundamental action
3. Activism is essential
4. Education is essential
5. Reform and welfare are insufficient to cause abolition
6. Nonviolent civil disobedience is an important tactic
7. Support of legal economic sabotage in the form of boycotts is useful
8. Animals should not be used period. They should not be exploited, killed, identified as property, used for entertainment, should not be dissected, vivisected, hunted, fished, beaten, worn or eaten.
9. Concepts of abolition and property are fundamental topics in the animal advocacy movement

What they seemingly do not agree on is:

1. *Violence Debate*: Best supports or sees the value in armed struggle and underground illegal direct action. Francione does not support violence and identifies armed struggle and property destruction as violence.
2. *Economic Debate*: Best critiques capitalism as a central focus a great deal, while Francione, critiques capitalism but does not make it a central point of debate. Best values property destruction as a possible tactic of economic sabotage, such as the destroying of computers in a vivisection laboratory. (Note, not all property destruction is economic sabotage, such as the breaking of the lock of a cage is not meant as a form of economic sabotage. Some property destruction is also meant to be symbolic.) I think for Best the debate on property destruction is not symbolism, but is rather based on economic sabotage. It is here that the two issues are interwoven.

So the questions for a healthy, safe and respectful debate (if ever one is established) between the two amazing scholars might be:

1. What is violence, and is it useful for social change?
2. Does the economy in fact play a direct part in oppression?

But, abolition, going back to the definition - to do away with - is a difficult task for a social movement to achieve and one that will take a diversity of strategies and tactics to accomplish. Abolition will not come any time soon. To completely do away with animal exploitation means to do away with exploitative economies, political authoritarianism and social domination. I think that this is the most important point for all animal rights activists to confront.

The work that Best is doing on the notions of total liberation and “radical abolition” is highly valuable. I also think the work Francione is conducting on promoting veganism and abolition is outstanding, but it disappoints activists, including myself, when he engages in destructive debates. To complicate issues even more, Roger Yates, an amazing activist and former ALF Press Officer and ALF political prisoner, very much supports the work of Francione. So it is obviously not an either-or, but a possible “both” as Yates has proven with his own scholarship and personal history when looking at issues, rather than the personalities (which I think much of the debate is now revolving around). It is very common within debates inside and outside of the academy that when disputing parties feel attacked, both sides begin to attack not the idea or concept being discussed (i.e., violence), but rather the person’s character. I do know why two scholars who generally agree on the same goal (animal liberation) destructively fight over how to get there (i.e., the process). I guess one could say that is what scholars do, but I do not think all scholars would agree, especially Paulo Freire.

We cannot aid in dividing this movement or allowing insults and rumors to grow. There is not one way, one tactic, one strategy, one mind, one viewpoint, or one person. It will take all of us, working together, learning from each other, respecting each other, understanding our socio-political and economic positions, our own and other’s languages and cultures. This is alliance politics, something that I have worked hard to

promote in the many conferences, books, articles, workshops, trainings, forums, demonstrations, radio shows, campaigns, organizations and other projects that I have co-organized in and outside of prisons, schools, universities, religious and community centers. In alliance politics, i.e., building friendships, one must understand that one will get into conflicts and learn about others, while especially learning about one's own self. If there is any scholar or activist in the animal rights movement who refuses to read Best or Francione's work because they do not agree with their views, personalities, or their politics, they are missing out on a great deal of valuable knowledge.

As the co-founder of the field of Critical Animal Studies, I believe that any class, article, book, forum or project that promotes animal rights/liberation/advocacy in and outside higher education (i.e., critical animal studies) that does not include Best or Francione in their conversation is leaving a great void in the dialogue. Critical Animal Studies must include many scholars – patrice jones, Richard Kahn, Lisa Kemmerer, Stephen Clark, Stephen Kaufman, Tom Regan, Peter Singer, Kim Stallwood, Mark Rowlands, Roger Yates, , Richard Twine, Richard White, Dan Lyons, Kenneth Shapiro, Julie Andrzejewski, Jodey Castricano, Karen Davis, Leesa Fawcett, Carol Gigliotti, Matthew Clarco, David Nibert, Constance Russell, Annie Potts, Philip Armstrong, Nicola Taylor, Will Tuttle, Michael Greger, Ingrid Newkirk, Joan Dunayer, John Sorenson, John Alessio, Jim Mason, Norm Phelps, Andrew Linzey, Richard Schwartz, Steven Rosen, Cary Wolf, Carl Boggs, Bill Martin, Steve Wise, Marog DeMello, Marti Kheel, Mirha-Soleil Ross, Lauren Corman, Piers Beirnes, Sherryl Vint, Amy Fitzgerald, Helena Pedersen. In addition, there are many others within the Institute for Critical Animal Studies who have published with Lantern Books, Society & Animals Journal, Columbia University's Animal Studies Books Series "Animals," Temple University Press's "Culture and Society," University of Minnesota Press's "Posthumanities," Journal for Critical Animal Studies, Journal of Applied Welfare Science, Human-Animal Studies Book Series, Critical Animal Studies Book Series, Animals & Society Institute, and other animal rights groups and activists around the world. And let's not forget historical figures who promoted animal protection such as John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, Margaret Cavendish, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Henry Salt, Mahatma Gandhi, Arthur Schopenhauer, Henry Spira, George Bernard Shaw, Cleveland Amory, Leo Tolstoy and St. Francis of Assisi.

Many of these people were not vegan, but they had and have something very important to say from which we can learn.

Critical animal studies is a viable educational field, and hopefully in the future will have departments offering a degree that could be awarded at many universities around the world that would encourage studies in theories and philosophies such as eco-feminism, animal culture, speciesism, posthumanism, animal law, ethical science, economics and exploitation, humane education, ecopedagogy, environmental ethics, critical animal sociology, green criminology, critical animal politics, disability and animals, critical animal epistemology and methodology, and race and animals, to name a few.

It is a broad field that strives to be all encompassing of human and nonhuman animals, rather than establishing a false binary such as human-animal studies or animal studies which fail to acknowledge humans under the concept of animals. Critical animal studies will need to take serious the notion of a new relationship between all living creatures and their ecological home, i.e., Earth.

In closing, I argue that we must understand the complexities of social change and that abolition includes not only liberation, passing laws, a vegan diet or challenging capitalism and global corporatization, but using all tactics and liberatory theories in engaging, active, respectful dialogues. For when one is oppressed, all are oppressed . Abolition is about being committed to a real strategic goal of abolition no matter the cause. It demands alliance politics that come from a place of respect that carries out listening projects and healing and transformative activities.



## **Healing Our Cuts**

**Anthony J Nocella II**

Over the last 16 years, I have learned a lot from my involvement in a number of intense social movement-based conflicts and from the field of conflict studies. Most of my knowledge is experience based rather than what I have read or been trained to believe. In this article, I share some of my thoughts on social movement conflicts and some methods of managing and transforming them through constructive processes.

All social movements have internal tensions, some more explicit and more entrenched than others. Quickly reading social movement history we notice many very hostile and destructive conflicts. These conflicts are often based on ideology, due to personal relations gone bad, or established strategically by paid government and corporate provocateurs. Where tensions encourage open debate and constructive dialogue, these interventions can be extremely constructive and empowering for the movement in question. However, if simmering tensions are left unchecked and unresolved these may well lead to openly destructive conflicts that not only severely compromise the impact and effective nature of the movement, but may ultimately lead to the implosion and terminal demise of the movement itself.

The animal advocacy, environmental, and anarchist movements are, of course, no stranger to divisions and critical debate around a wide range of issues from underground activism versus working within government structures to short-term goals versus longer term goals, to the concept and nature of direct action and, of course, many more. Given the desire for strategies, tactics and processes that work to harness constructive and collaborative discussion and outcomes, this short piece is based on two goals.

First, this article considers the many factors and causes of destructive behavior and, second, it highlights ways to actively transform conflict and reunite the animal advocacy movement into a solid, unified front. This does not mean that we all have to

conduct or condone the same tactics or engage in the same strategies. We need strategies and tactics across the spectrum of the movement to ensure that its presence and impact will make maximum and long-lasting positive change in the global community.

### **Causes of Conflict**

- The uniquely constructed (and partial) system of ethics and values, beliefs, opinions, perceptions, experiences, and interests of every activist can be the primary cause of division between other activists within the same movements.
- The identity and social context of the activist (such as being transgender, a person with disabilities, non-citizen, parent, poor, or a person of color) are factors that must be considered as potential sources of conflicts because of being marginalized, silenced, and/or repressed.
- The cultural and sub-cultural processes for activists handling of conflict may cause divisions when dealing with conflicts. For example, an activist from an Italian family might be raised to handle conflict differently than an activist from a Native American family.
- The various relationships outside the movement, such as relationships with family and friends, romantic relationships, and organizational membership, are factors that may cause conflict.
- The comparative lack of education or experience on a particularly important topic can contribute to conflicts. If those involved are incapable or unwilling to understand, listen, or enter into a committed constructive dialogue — that which allows not only for understanding the attitudes and beliefs of other activists, but their own positionality — this factor is difficult to overcome.
- The emotional state or well being of an activist may cause conflict within a social movement. This state might be altered or influenced to the detriment of the activist's capacity to engage with those around them because of alcohol, drugs,

medication (or lack of it), sleep deprivation, or other external factors such as work or relationships.

### **Transforming Conflict**

Within a social movement conflict must be transformed into positive and constructive outcomes wherever possible. Activists should strive to:

- Seek opportunities to engage openly, empathetic ally and respectfully with other activists. This means entering into a committed dialogue that emphasizes the willingness to listen and understand.
- Respect individual experiences due to unique identities of race, gender, economic status, sexuality, ability, culture, or spirituality.
- Recognize that activists are not perfect (or impartial) due to being raised within systems of domination that promote competition, retribution, sexism, homophobia, ableism, ageism, nationalism, classism.
- Acknowledge that corporations, security, and law enforcement infiltrate organizations and movements, in order to divide and destroy them.
- Refrain from “hanging the laundry” of the movement out for the broader public and law enforcement to see and exploit. This means not posting negative, defamatory and insulting information about those within the movement on websites, blogs, list serves, or social networking sites.
- Handle communication in person, whenever possible, rather than on the phone or via e-mail. Not only does this minimize the risk of communication being limited or tapped, it also prevents information being misread, misinterpreted, or taken out of context.
- Avoid personal debates that drain energy and resources which should be directed towards shared goals.

- Avoid talking about others behind their back when not in the position to defend or justify their point.
- Avoid supporting any scenario where someone is punished or excluded. Only support that which leads to mutually beneficial opportunity.
- Take a moment to step back and reflect rather than react negatively when faced with a provocation or challenge.
- Respect the diversity of opinions, tactics, and strategies within social movements.
- Encourage debates and arguments that can be resolved in a constructive and mutually acceptable manner.

These accessible, inclusive and hopefully useful points can help minimize the opportunities for divisive and destructive conflicts. In the long term, negative conflicts may destroy and divide the movement to such an extent that it could lose some, if not all potency and dynamism, and ultimately cause it to fall far short of achieving the ultimate goal of total liberation for humans, other animals and the Earth. It is up to each of us to be the best we can in our work for liberation. Having awareness of the causes of conflict, and how to transform them, such as committing to transform debates and arguments in a constructive and inclusive manner, waters the soil on which a social movement grows and encourages others to join in, thereby developing and strengthening the movement.

## **PROTEST SUMMARY**

### **! For the abolition of the bullfight, the people took the streets;**

#### **Center of Abolitionist Studies for Animal Liberation<sup>1</sup>**

On February 21st the bullfight season came to an end in Bogotá Colombia, and with it, the anti-bullfighting demonstrations from the beginning of the year 2010. With these demonstrations, we do not only demonstrate the capacity to articulate the social problems from our society by highlighting the torture and enslavement of non-human animals, but we also look to communicate our message alongside several organizations that struggle for a common objective: the total abolition of all forms of animal exploitation and slavery.

With the aim of coming up with new demonstration dynamics, aside from the traditional apolitical ones, the Center of Abolitionist Studies for Animal Liberation (From the Red Libertaria Popular Mateo Kramer), convened a demonstrations the 7th, the 14th, and the 21st of February, to let our voices speak against for the abolition of speciesism, and more specifically, for the total abolition of bullfighting as an expression of a culture that undervalue the interest of other animal species. We set up a rendezvous for the demos at an emblematic place: the Vase House (Casa del Florero). This was the place where the first (but unfinished) Colombian Independence movement began almost 200 years ago. And this was to be the starting point of the abolitionist animal liberation movement that, with a compromise which cannot be postponed in the struggle for the second and total independence, carried out an indispensable liberationist rigor in the quest for the freedom of all living beings. So to speak, and with a spirit of liberation, we took the streets, men and women, boys and

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Centro de Estudios Abolicionistas por la Liberación Animal please visit their website [www.ceala.wordpress.com](http://www.ceala.wordpress.com)

girls, raising our voice up for the tortured and slavered animals that satisfy the saevitia of a minority of landlords and the rich élite.

On the protest days, we met at half past eleven at the Vase House with the banners and the words displayed in recycled papers to shout out against the injustice of speciesism and capitalism. On foot, with bikes, or even with crutches, we marched toward the Plaza de Toros la Santamaría, where the murder of innocent non-human animals was to take place. And there were several autonomous organizations present such as Activegan, Radio Caminos de Liberación (Radio Path of Liberation), Arder (Burn), Resistencia Natural (Natural Resistance) and other critical individuals full of anger and discontent. We sought to focus this strength in popular mobilization and spread this political and radical message: that respectfully but not ambiguously, we would denunciate the contradictions around the so called “fiesta brava”, i.e. the slavery and the subsequent torture and killing of the bulls; the earth degradation through producing the extensive and intensive livestock; and last but not least, the configuration of the paramilitary state financed by the big livestock farmers, those who breed and domesticate the bullfighting bulls, and the reason why millions of peasant are displaced from their land homes.



At half past twelve, by which time there were at least 30 or 40 people present, the first slogan was chanted, with a compass indicating the rebel joy of the protesters and the

revolutionary counterpoint of a movement that, with still much to learn about, was starting to take a step toward unity and organized work with other social struggles: *! Stop speciesism, bullfighting and capitalism!* the message was clear and we will not compromise it. So we started to march singing along *with* other people and not against them, having an inclusive discourse, respecting the differences and inviting passers-by to join the demo. In the search for a bridge-building message we sang, not only against the bullfighting, but against everything related to it in reference to economic, social, ethical and ecological problems urging people to do something about it. In this way we shout against McDonalds when we pass in front of it, because of the overexploitation of human, non- human and the earth of this blood-sucking corporate machine; we denounce as well the privatization of La Empresa de Teléfonos de Bogotá (Bogotá's Telecommunication Company) and its sponsorship of the bullfight. This was very important to us, because we wanted to connect everything around the speciesist and capitalist culture with the struggle of the people, and their capacity to build a new society. We wanted to politicize the animal liberation movement, as well as “veganize” the political agenda of the several gremial struggles against capitalism and imperialism. This implies a deeper and constant pedagogical and critical work, which we think, is taking place now in our country.



With this sentiment of hope, we marched until we arrive at our target at 2 o'clock in the afternoon; all the three days we were active. Being at least 80 people, we stood 100 meters near the Plaza, all guarded with police men, to tell society and the

perpetrators of this nonsense practice we were not going to give away our fight until bullfighting were abolished, while remembering our young friend Nicolás Neira, a former anti-bullfight activist, murdered by the police in 2005.

All this experience was a great step, particularly in a country where the animal liberation movement is isolated from both critical and political standpoints. Here we could join with people from all ages and perspectives and give them not only a message to question the bullfight but the whole system of species hierarchization we call speciesism in the context of a dependent capitalist society and the economic and political problems that arose from it in our particular context.



## **INTERVIEWS**

### **Interview with Anthony J. Nocella, II on Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic Industrial Complex (co-edited with Steven Best and Peter McLaren, AK Press, 2010)**

**Richard J White**

**Richard: Anthony can you tell me how this book came about?**

**Anthony:** It started from my personal experiences of being mentally disabled in school. From the first until twelfth grade I was segregated from the “normal” students. During those days I was beaten up regularly, spat on, and dragged along the cement at the school playground by the other children, and in class, I was held down by teachers in-order to sit still. In college, I was told to get with the program and stop complaining. One professor expressed her surprise that I was even allowed into graduate school because of “horrible writing,” while another professor told me that I should think about working with my hands and that higher education is not for everyone. This brought me to tears as he asked me to leave the office so he wouldn’t be late for another appointment. So, Academic repression was nothing new for me. But I suppressed my experiences for a long time and only started analyzing the concept as a graduate student, which led me to develop the book proposal. I invited my friends and fellow repressed scholars Steve Best and Peter McLaren to co-edit the book and sent the proposal off to one of the most radical presses, AK Press. Initially it was to have about ten articles, but soon I learned that more and more people wanted to share their experiences of academic repression and it grew to over 30 contributors.

**Richard: So why did you connect with Steve and Peter on this project?**

**Anthony:** I have been working for a number of reasons with Peter McLaren and Steve Best, both of whom got broadsided by academic repression. Steve, a prolific scholar, was Chair of his department until the department faculty members summarily deposed him from his position for openly supporting animal liberation politics. This is

a department, I must add that he did much to build and foster, including hiring many of those who later turned against him Brutus-like. This is a philosophy department, right? Where people are supposed to be critical thinkers, fair and impartial, just, and pluralist, not Machiavellian or Mafioso! This was politics, not philosophy, but a power play, pure and simple, and a classic case of academic repression. Unlike his "colleagues," however, Steve is someone who believes that a thinker ought to develop his or her own original insights, not endlessly debate and rehash interpretation-upon-interpretation of other theorists, be it Aristotle, Kant, Arendt, Marx, or Foucault; he also believes that in our current time of severe social and ecological crisis, philosophy ought to say something relevant to promoting social change, or have the dignity to remain silent. All I can think of is that his department could learn a thing from Voltaire who said, "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Around the same time Steve was under fire from his department (as well as being pressured to testify before a Congressional "eco-terrorist" hearing and getting banned from the UK), Peter McLaren was targeted by right-wing students (serving under the tutelage of David Horowitz and well-financed by a number of right-wing organizations) who created a hit list of the "Dirty Thirty" "radical" professors at UCLA, and listed Peter as Number 1 dangerous demagogue.

But it was obvious that what happened to Steve and Peter was not the exception, but rather the rule: the new norm of academic repression as universities increasingly succumb to the control of neoliberalism, become more and more corporatized, and financially back by or tied to a diversity of industries such as the military, medical, agriculture, and security industrial complex. (As Steve, Richard Kahn, and I will point out in an upcoming book, there are numerous such industrial complexes operating on a global scale and existing symbiotically with one another). Pressured by their right-wing financial backers and a rising storm of conservative reaction against "tenured radicals" and the "left academy," University of Colorado-Boulder fired Ward Churchill, a tenured professor, as anarchist anthropologist, David Graeber, a first-rate scholar, was denied tenure at Yale, for obvious political reasons. In the post 9/11 era, a slew of other important dissenting voices have fallen to the ax of political repression and countless others have been intimidated into silence and conformity.

With all these events erupting, all I could think is how important it is that these voices of critical academics must be heard, defended, and supported. One could speak only in relative safety if a large number of other respected critical scholars were also willing to write and speak out.

But it was also imperative to understand the big picture, the dynamics that for at least two decades have been aggressively transforming universities and colleges from institutions of "higher learning" into corporate industries, sites of social reproduction and capitalist/individualist ideologies, and factories to churn out the normalized, narcissistic, unreflective, and homogenized workforce needed for global capitalism to advance.

**Richard: Why did you decide to publish the book with AK Press?**

**Anthony:** We thought that if we went with a university press they would without a doubt tell us to tone it down, and a corporate press is one of the main institutions implementing and supporting academic repression. So we asked which press will allow us to speak truth to power without forcing us to muffle the voices we wanted people to hear loud and clear. We wanted a publisher that was very supportive of our politics, that would promote and not just publish the book, and that also was respected by activists, because this book is written by and for activists as well as academics. But we didn't have too look far, for we knew that AK Press fit the bill, and we had already established an excellent working relationship with them in the last book I edited with Steve, *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (2006). It was also very important to us that AK is an anarchist run press and puts these principles into action through its collective and daily operations.

**Richard: I must ask you Anthony how did you get all of these diverse and amazing scholars to commit the book?**

**Anthony:** We knew how important this book could be, and so it was a matter first of us believing strongly in the project and then persuading others to contribute. Because we have an excellent publication track record, because we had AK in our corner, and

because the topic was obviously important and crucial for social change, it actually was not hard to convince well-known and respected people to write for us. And so we lined up outstanding critical scholars such as Cary Nelson, Doug Kellner, Joy James, Emma Perez, Rik Scarce, Carl Boggs, Henry Giroux, and Michael Berube. I always thought that most academics were dry, esoteric, aloof, and only interested in their own careers, but this book has proven that some of the biggest names in academia are seriously willing to engage in controversial debates and issues. The people in this book all took on the challenge and no one backed down. We all realize the urgent issues at stake, and that we confront a potential historical crossroads where academics either fight for the most important values and freedoms of the education system or suffer a knock-out blow by corporatization, conservative reaction, and administrative domination.

**Richard: What was the best experience in putting this book together?**

**Anthony:** Corresponding with all these amazing academics as a young scholar still working on my Ph.D. was an amazing and humbling experience. Better still was the process of writing, revising, and exchanging ideas along the way, watching how the book grew, matured, and evolved. But perhaps most important was breaking down the walls of separation and linking people who have never worked together, yet now have common bonds as they are all part of the same path-breaking project. That is something I love to do and am happily known for.

When we are all under attack, it is crucial to form connections, build bridges, and unite, and this book is a modest beginning of bringing critical theorists together in a united front against academic repression and the neoliberal corporatization of the university. Also, whereas the academy prizes individualism, independence, and isolated research, these kinds of collaborations are inherently subversive as they bring people together to learn, support, challenge, and care for one another in a collaborative and interdependent fashion, which is truly a stimulating and empowering process.

**Richard: So what is the goal of the book?**

**Anthony:** We want to expose the current farce of "higher education" and the pervasive myth of "academic freedom." If we focused on higher education on a global scale it would be too difficult to analyze and to make sure we had a diversity of voices, thus we only focused on academic repression and the academic-industrial complex within the US, but this model is being universalized globally and academic repression exists virtually everywhere in the world.

We want to show how being a critical thinker or politically active professor-citizen is enough to provoke punitive measures or even termination. We want to demonstrate how extreme right-wing lobbies and reactionary corporate donors are dictating education policy today. We want to clarify how the neoliberal restructuring of the entire globe is also reshaping the academy, and with the same disastrous consequences everywhere.

Forget your idealistic visions of "higher learning"; today, more than ever before, the university is a corporate-controlled, profit-oriented, top-down management system, with the tenure system (and the autonomy and protections it always offered) in the process of being dismantled and academic freedom ever-more imperiled.

Some books talk about academic freedom in the abstract, as a body of formal rules and procedures as if they existed in Platonic form. This book, to be sure, defends academic freedoms, but it focuses on academic repression, on the concrete ways in which these abstract freedoms are concretely and routinely violated. We want to give a broad social, historical, and economic context for what is happening in academia; to provide numerous chilling case studies of academic repression; to relate the dynamics in theory as well as personal experience; and finally to suggest ways to take back the universities and to prevent education from becoming purely utilitarian, completely commodified, and insanely indifferent to professors, staff, and students alike. Further, we wanted to show how academic repression is different than state repression, political repression, and social repression, while there are nonetheless general similarities among them all.

Further, I would emphasize that this book is important because it is a collection of diverse voices that include or discuss queers, people of color, feminists, people with disabilities, Arab-Americans and foreign nationals, animal and Earth liberationists, and students, staff, professors, and teachers of various status positions (from tenured faculty to adjuncts, part-time instructors). This book was supposed to have only about fifteen authors, but as we came to become aware of what academic repression was, which is not merely about politics, but about scholarship and teaching, but also numerous other issues such as the marginalized status of being a student, adjunct, or staff member; as well as your appearance, gender, sexual orientation, race, religious beliefs, and political commitments and activities, we became aware of what a broad scope of issues that really needed to be addressed.

This book would never have been possible if not for the courage of so many willing to speak frankly and truthfully about academic repression in a garrison-like environment that punishes dissent, criticism, non-conformity, engaged intellectuals, and deviations from the regnant theory-for-theory's sake research paradigm. This book is certainly not the last word on these important topics, and there are many voices that have not been featured but that should and must be heard. I hope this book gives them courage to speak out against academic repression.

**Richard: Who do you think should read this book?**

**Anthony:** Everyone. Professors who feel they are alone in the alienation and repression they endure on a daily basis. Those who want to pursue an academic career and may have romantic ideals of a free and autonomous life, but should know the economic and political realities for securing and advancing in a teaching position. Students who seek a diversity of viewpoints in college, but must be aware that critical perspectives and diversity, while they still exist, are increasingly giving way to ideological homogeneity. Those who want a rich background in liberal arts who need to realize how philosophy, humanities, and the liberal arts are viewed as irrelevant in the growing domination of utilitarian imperatives favoring business, science, and technology. Activists who ought to know that being a student, faculty, and staff member on a university might not be facing political repression on the streets, but are

doing so head-on on campuses and who ought to stand in solidarity with academics rather than denounce them as pampered elitists. And the public who needs to know that one of the largest domestic industries in the US is now the academic industrial complex, and that the boundaries among universities, corporations, wealthy conservative donors, right-wing think tanks, and military institutions are increasingly blurring.

**Richard: What is the most important lesson you learned in publishing this book?**

**Anthony:** That when the universities are endangered, so is society as a whole, for universities traditionally have been the site of critical thinking, rich human development, and progressive political change. There are systemic, global forces reshaping our world in every facet, reducing everything to market imperatives and hierarchical control, and the university has lost much of the autonomy and freedom it had (never perfectly, but far more so in past decades). If we lose one of the most important spaces for fostering enlightenment, well-rounded people, and critical knowledge, the consequences for society will be incredibly grim, and dramatically advance what the Frankfurt School once referred to as the "completely administered" or "one-dimensional" society.

**Richard: Any final comments?**

**Anthony:** The book was published in March 2010, so make sure to check it out and tell everyone! Also please look at and help us network our MySpace page for the book at: [www.myspace.com/academicrepression](http://www.myspace.com/academicrepression)

## **Interview with animal liberation activist and former political prisoner Peter Young**

**March 31, 2010**

**Laura Shields**

Peter Young is a veteran animal liberation activist and former political prisoner convicted for his role in liberating thousands of animals from fur farms across the country. Emerging from a grand jury indictment, seven years of being wanted by the FBI, a federal prison sentence, and nearly fifteen years in the animal liberation movement; today Peter is an activist, lecturer at universities and events, writer on liberation movements, and unapologetic supporter of those who work outside the law to achieve human, earth, and animal liberation. Please visit his website [voiceofthevoiceless.org](http://voiceofthevoiceless.org) for more information.

**Thank you, Peter Young, for agreeing to this interview with the Journal for Critical Animal Studies. It is a privilege to speak with you. One of the purposes of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to articulate and examine the reasoning behind direct action tactics that are often left unexplained. As an animal activist that has adopted controversial and radical tactics, we thought you would be able to comment on the recent “pieing” of author Lierre Keith. First, could you tell our readers why you became a vegan?**

I became vegan when I learned this culture’s pretense of “civility” was a façade, and behind the walls of buildings all around me were the billions of tortured beings we called “food” and “research subjects”. I became vegan because there is no amount of suffering as great and severe as that which non-human animals are subjected to. As the most extreme of injustices, it deserves the most extreme of responses. The first and most basic of which is veganism.

**In your blog post, “Animal-Holocaust Denier Pied at Anarchist Book Fair,” you write that the pieing of author Lierre Keith “will undoubtedly give Keith some (vegan) ‘food for thought’ while she travels the country, promoting the consumption of animals.” Do you believe this was a good choice of direct action? Please explain.**



One would have to wonder how debatable this would be if Keith were promoting her book “The Holocaust Myth”, or “The Sexism Myth”. She would be as marginalized as any Nazi. Yet she can promote an agenda that claims more lives every day than the entire Holocaust, and somehow we find this open to friendly debate.

She got pied. That’s all. It was classic guerilla theater. Those who condemn this action would certainly be in full support if the target was a CEO or Klan leader. This is not a debate over tactics – there is no tactic more benign than a pie in the face. This is a debate over speciesism. This is a debate over people who live selfishly being confronted with their disregard for other’s lives. The role of an activist is to agitate oppressors. And the piers have done a fantastically effective job.

**While many have supported the pieing action, others call it immature. How do you understand the event?**

I don’t ask if a tactic is “mature”, I only ask if it is effective. And this was highly effective. The activists were successful at generating a tremendous amount of attention, stirring up a much needed public debate on the trend towards “humane meat” and “conscious carnivorousism”. It took only three people giving a few minutes of their time to shine the spotlight on this farce, and put every one of Keith’s followers on the defensive. You can call something immature without ever having to defeat its efficacy or necessity. The animals don’t care if it is “immature”.

It was a pie. It is comical for Keith to life herself to victim status over being attacked with a pie. She even called the police. The animals she kills don’t have the luxury of police protection. She might elicit more sympathy when she displays some of her own towards other species.

**Do you think the pieing was a sexist and ableist attack on a woman with disabilities? Why or why not?**

This is a typical application of “anarchist fallacy”, whereby you win the argument by labeling the other side one of several guilty of one or all of the worst “isms” – sexism, racism, classism, etc. Most who rely on this schoolyard-bully strategy are too

regressive to use, or give weight to, another ism: “specisism”, the ism which claims more victims than all the rest combined. The power of this rhetorical device comes from the implication that if you disagree with them, you are a sexist, racist, classism, heterosexist, or fill-in-the-blank flavor-of-the-week category of oppressor.

She was no more of a target because of her gender or disability. She was not targeted because she was in a position of weakness. She was targeted because she promotes the exploitation of the weak. Because she promotes falsehoods, and the death of every species but the one she belongs to. How incredibly disingenuous to pull the “oppressed” card, when oppression is inherent in the lifestyle she promotes. I am certain the animals who die to satisfy her taste for flesh feel “oppressed”. She is in no position to be arguing against the strong exploiting the weak. Exploiting the weak is the foundation of the lifestyle she promotes.

**Described as a radical, feminist environmentalist, Keith explains in her book that she is questioning agriculture. She argues that by examining “the power relations behind the foundational myth of our culture,” we can work toward a sustainable world. How would you respond to this claim?**

Labeling yourself a radical-anything doesn’t give you a free pass to promote speciesism and oppression. Among the “foundational myths of our culture:” is anthropocentrism, and “might makes right”. Animal agriculture is still agriculture.

**What is your take on her claim that moving away from a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle is a turn to “adult knowledge,” in which humans acknowledge that “death is embedded in every creature's sustenance”?**

This is predicated on the apathetic and self-serving belief that if you can’t do everything, you shouldn’t do anything. That if a grasshopper is injured in grain harvesting, we should just throw up our hands and stuff our mouths with the bloodied corpses of tortured animals. And this is not to mention the largest consumers of grain are animals raised for food.

The tone of Lierre's book is one of condescension. It is laden with lines like "what vegetarians don't understand is..." and "If this is hard to grasp, let me explain". Calling her speciesist position "adult knowledge" is consistent with the insulting tone that runs through the rest of her book. It is written in a bizarrely emotional way, reading at times like a temper tantrum and others like a flustered schoolteacher. Those that have a strong and defensible point, make it. Those who don't, condescend.

The people who disingenuously call flesh eating a regrettable but necessary evil, and shed fake tears while using lines like "nature is cruel" and "violence is a part of life", are never themselves the victims of the violence they excuse. It is a very easy thing to sit at the privileged throne of a podium in a university lecture hall and bemoan the cruel realities of "the circle of life", when she is not herself on death row. Were Keith to be hung up by a chain and find a knife at their throat like the animals those who pied her stood up for, she may find herself less dismissive of the "death" she fetishizes.

**Do you agree with any claims or arguments in Keith's book about the need to adopt large-scale sustainable eating habits?**

Of course. By what measure, one has to wonder, are animals more "efficient" or "sustainable" food sources than plants? It takes 16 pounds of grain to make one pound of flesh. Keith would say we shouldn't feed animals grain. But there is not enough free range land for the animals needed to feed 300 million people. And the animals she eats are not native species. She might argue for eating native species and the scaling back the human population. But that does nothing for our current situation, and in no way justifies her selfish regression from veganism. It is not surprising she begins her talks by stating she will not take questions.

It is a strange ruler to use, making the sole measure of whether a thing is good or bad its "sustainability", and placing a behavior's impact on the "biotic community" as the only factor worth consideration while disregarding its impact on sentient individuals. By this formula, the promoters of "conscious carnivorism" would have championed solar powered gas chambers at Dachau.

**What recommendations do you have for the critical animal studies movement to respond to Keith's book?**

You can argue it on her terms. If “isms” are the language she speaks, you can give her isms. Drive home that speciesism is analogous to sexism, racism, homophobia, and other social inequities. But, unlike Keith, few of the aforementioned varieties of oppressors openly advocate the killing of those weaker populations who they place below them. Remove her façade of “anti-oppression” and highlight the oppression that is inherent in what she promotes. Expose her lies of “radical feminism” and highlight the rape of animals forced to produce dairy and eggs, and that only female animals are imprisoned for these “foods”. Expose her as promoting an oppressive, violent agenda that is based on lies and moral schizophrenia.

## **Interview with author, anarchist and feminist Abbey Willis**

**March 31, 2010**

**Laura Shields**

Abbey Willis is an author, anarchist and feminist militant. She and fellow anarchist Deric Shannon have the piece "*Theoretical Polyamory: Thoughts on Loving, Thinking and Queering Anarchism*" forthcoming in *Sexualities*.

**Thank you, Abbey Willis, for agreeing to this interview with the Journal for Critical Animals Studies. One of the purposes of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to articulate and examine the reasoning behind direct action tactics that are often left unexplained. As an anarchist activist and feminist, we thought you would be able to comment on the recent “pieing” of author Lierre Keith. First, could you tell our readers a little about your background and worldview?**

I’ve been organizing as an anarchist for 7 years. I am a member of the Workers Solidarity Alliance, the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists, Queers Without Borders, Hartford Food Not Bombs and the Hartford Independent Media Collective, though I don’t speak for any of those groups. Most of my organizing is done in central Connecticut. I believe we can live differently—vastly differently. Class society and other hierarchies are constructed and maintained, not natural and inevitable. I don’t aim for a structureless and unorganized society—I aim for a differently organized and differently structured egalitarian society based on (real and universal) democracy and participation—a world free of domination, coercion and control. Not only do we need to smash the structures of our society like capitalism and the state, but we need to get rid of other hierarchies like white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableism, cissexism, etc. Although I recognize class as being a material relationship to the means of production and therefore a unique hierarchy, I ultimately believe all hierarchies work in unique and intersecting ways. To be rid of any hierarchy we need to be rid of them all. I actively fight to overthrow capitalism and the state, but I also organize to smash heterosexism, patriarchy, white supremacy, etc. I do not value one fight over the other or see one as “central” or as coming first.

That says what I'm against. What I'm for is a free, egalitarian and participatory society where folks have the freedom to fulfill their needs and desires in a way that doesn't destroy the self, others or the non-human world. Folks should make decisions in a society based on the degree to which they are affected by a given decision. I don't need politicians making decisions for me. We know what is best for ourselves, ultimately. I see my freedom as necessarily tied to the freedom of others. As the old saying goes, No One is Free Until Everyone is Free.

**Do you believe this was a good choice of direct action? Please explain why**

The pieing of Lierre Keith is not direct action—it is a direct attack. Direct action refers to people coming together and collectively taking action into their own hands rather than jumping through loopholes of bureaucracy. Direct action refers to folks acting on their own behalf instead of asking governments or centralized authorities to do it for them. A good example of direct action would be people taking what they need, whether that's food, shelter, schools, workplaces—not asking the state or capital for permission, but actively doing something to better their lives on their own behalf. The pieing of Lierre Keith has nothing to do with direct action.

**While many have supported the pieing action, others call it immature. How do you understand the event?**

Pieings, as we've seen it in the past, have been attempts to humiliate or embarrass public figures by tossing a pie plate filled with whipped cream at them. I believe this type of pieing is considered humorous and not particularly violent by most folks. The three pies tossed at Lierre Keith at the 2010 San Francisco Anarchist Book Fair were not simply filled with whipped cream. Although I realize the contents of the pies are perhaps contested, it has been reported by various sources including the Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair Organizers that the pies were filled with hot sauce and cayenne pepper—similar to ingredients in pepper spray that cops use to violently attack dissenters or folks who object to being caged. As to whether it is "immature", I'm not sure what to say about that. I do know that if folks had objected to ideas in her book *The Vegetarian Myth*, another option would have been to challenge her at her talk. Granted, pieing vs. having a conversation have different meanings and attractiveness

to them. Earlier in the day at the book fair Ward Churchill gave a talk. There were many Native Americans in the audience who challenged him as to whether or not he was an actual “Elder” or if he was even connected to the concerns and organizing that the American Indian Movement is part of in that community. Some audience members took the floor away from him in the middle of his speech to challenge his authority on Native American struggles. They advised the audience to check out their table and to speak with them about their community, as they stated they had very different feelings and conclusions from Churchill. This was an effective way to take clout away from his arguments (and contested authority), but also a way to explain why they felt this way. I am not critiquing the supposed “direct action” of the pie-ers, mainly because I don’t see their actions as direct action—it is more accurately a direct attack.

**Do you think the pieing was a sexist and ableist attack on a woman with disabilities? Why or why not?**

I have a problem that this would even be a question, or even contested. I do, indeed, find the pieing to be a sexist and ableist attack on a woman—how could it be seen any differently? Three men violently attacked an older woman with disabilities. That is not, by any means, my only critique of the incident, but none of my other critiques change that.

Described as a radical, feminist environmentalist, Keith explains in her book that she is questioning agriculture. She argues that by examining “the power relations behind the foundational myth of our culture,” we can work toward a sustainable world. How would you respond to this claim?

I think we can all learn from critiques of unsustainable agricultural practices, including Keith’s. But Keith uses junk science and sweeping claims to attack vegan diets. Vegan diets can be healthy, nutritious, and sustainable. We don’t need mass produced or processed crap. Because of that, her arguments (about veganism) are flawed and deserve to be ridiculed. Anthropocentrism is a part of our “power relations”. It’s difficult for me to understand how Keith could “examine” them and then trash, insult, and infantilize those of us who have consciously chosen to use our

diets as a cultural mechanism to demonstrate to the rest of the world that humanity needs to build new relationships with the non-human world. And animals pay every day that we go on refusing to consider this. Also, as a radical, I would like to see her critiques focus more on the ways capitalism, through factory farming practices (profit-driven, mass produced “farming”), has exacerbated the torture of animals and the degradation of the earth in ways unimaginable by early agriculturalists.

**What is your take on her claim that moving away from a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle is a turn to “adult knowledge,” in which humans acknowledge that “death is embedded in every creature's sustenance.”?**

I suppose it brings to mind two things for me:

The language is ageist and offensive. I think she mobilizes it to infantilize vegans. It's a rather common (and unfortunate) tactic in debate and is rooted in the belief that youth should be devalued and that our elders are wiser just by virtue of their age. Dick Cheney is old as fuck. I think that speaks for itself.

There is a grain of truth to death being “embedded in every creature's sustenance”. But to try to suggest similarities between eating vegetables and grains (without central nervous systems) with eating animals and their various forced excretions is nonsense. It is manifestly so.

Granted, many of her critiques are that “vegan” food is produced (and farming practices maintained) in ways that kill topsoil and various mollusks, as well as depend on animal products such as manure (this is farming-wide, whether for mass produced monocrops or small organic farms). I strongly feel like “giving up” veganism based on the notion that animals/insects/land will always be (necessarily) killed or altered “unfavorably” is an abstract point. My veganism isn't “Oh, well, non-human animals (and soil and all the creatures that live in it) will always be killed/exploited in order to grow vegetables and grains, so therefore I may as well eat meat, too.” The points she makes are valid in that we need to think about eating as locally as possible—and I think with new and developing technology that we can have healthy and sustainable vegan diets with the use of things like vertical farming. Of course, we have the ability



to invent and utilize things like vertical farms right now, but there is too much profit to be made off factory farming and monocrops as we know them. This is why the profit motive is something that needs more focus in animal/land advocacy/sustainability research. The profit motive is injury to all life. She is right that not eating animals and their “products” are not enough to stop their suffering, but Keith and I come to different conclusions based on that common understanding. Indeed, smashing capitalism to bits, along with the profit motive, must be parts of a consistent political practice that advocates for animals and the earth.

**Do you agree with any claims or arguments in Keith’s book about the need to adopt large-scale sustainable eating habits?**

Well, we would agree that we need to adopt sustainable eating habits. But I think veganism can be sustainable, as I’ve noted previously. By utilizing technology, another (sustainable) diet is possible! I think that point is important to make both to people who eat animal products AND to vegans.

**What recommendations do you have for the critical animal studies movement to respond to Keith’s book?**

Her arguments as to the “health” (or lack thereof) of folks who maintain a vegan diet are so flimsy, it’s rather easy to just refute them. It’s unnecessary to physically assault someone to point this out. We should encourage dissent, dialogue, open discussion, debate, and even questioning shibboleths of animal advocates (even poorly reasoned ones like Keith’s). And we should enter into those discussions in good faith. Acting like smug, elitist contrarians with all of the answers is a terrible way to build a movement. And, ultimately, I think it is movements that will change society and smash the hierarchical structures that we live under—not diets.

## **CONFERENCES**

### **9th Annual Conference for Critical Animal Studies, SUNY Cortland, New York, April 10th 2010.**

#### **Sarat Colling**

The Institute for Critical Animal Studies recently celebrated its 9th Annual North American Conference at SUNY Cortland, New York. Located 30 minutes south of Syracuse and north of Ithaca, the beautiful setting and excellent campus facilities were appreciated by the 220 participants from around the world.

This year's conference, "Abolition, Liberation, and the Intersections of Social Justice," opened on April 10th with a welcoming address from ICAS co-founder and SUNY Cortland teacher Anthony Nocella. He discussed how Critical Animal Studies is a rapidly growing field of study which breaks down the socially constructed human-animal binary and studies all species in order to achieve total liberation and freedom. With fifty presenters speaking on topics such as coalitional politics, animals and disability, prison abolition, eco-sustainability, LGBTQ issues, feminism, food politics, the AETA, anarchist perspectives and more, the panels and workshops provided for a full and invigorating day of learning, inspiration and community.

The sessions were broken up by a delicious lunch of Greek food and the Critical Animal Studies awards ceremony which acknowledged a number of scholars in the field (see the ICAS website for a list of award winners). During the awards ceremony we heard from William Skipper, Chair of SUNY Cortland's Sociology department, who welcomed Critical Animal Studies into the school and emphasized the importance of studying human's relationship with other animals. Throughout the day attendees browsed the booths of various organizations including The Vegan Police, Mercy for Animals, Lantern Books, peta2, Canadian Animal Liberation Movement, and Transformative Studies Institute, for educational information, books, t-shirts and other animal-friendly goodies.

Norm Phelps, an animal rights activist and author of 25 years, Andrew Jones, a Professor of Sociology researching the cultural and structural roots of the ecological crisis, and Lauren Corman, who teaches Critical Animal Studies at Brock University gave the plenary talk. Their thought provoking presentations were followed by an interesting discussion on eco-feminism and to what degree animal advocates should build coalitions with other social justice movements. It was an honor to hear from them, as well as all of the other fabulous presenters who work toward compassion for all. Finally, the day ended with a screening of the newly released documentary film *Skin Trade*.

A tour of the Watkins Glen Farm Sanctuary on April 11th served as an appropriate closing event for the ICAS conference. During the tour over 50 participants had the opportunity to connect with nonhuman animals who have been rescued from various situations of cruelty, such as factory farming. As the ICAS activists and academics work for animal liberation, it was a pleasure to spend the afternoon supporting an organization dedicated to compassionate living through rescues, education and advocacy.

The Critical Animal Studies conference is run entirely by volunteers. While previously free, this year ICAS charged a fifteen dollar registration fee to cover costs. We anticipated 100-150 attendees and were pleasantly surprised to find out that more than 220 people showed up for the conference! However, due to this year's popularity we sincerely apologize if anyone did not receive everything on the lunch menu, and appreciate your understanding. To remedy this, next year we will provide an online registration option so that everyone may register conveniently prior to the conference.

ICAS would like to express much appreciation to those who made the event happen. This includes the SUNY Cortland sponsors: Women's Studies Center for Gender and Intercultural Studies (CGIS), Anarchist Studies Initiative, Institute for Disability Studies, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology Center for Ethics, Peace, and Social Justice (CEPS), Criminology Club, Social Advocacy and Systems Change Journal, and *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*; as well as the Non-SUNY Cortland sponsors: Central New York Peace Studies Consortium, Center for Green Criminology and Security Studies,

Transformative Studies Institute, Political Media Review, Sacco and Vanzetti Foundation and Save the Kids. We would like to thank the Conference Committee: Judy K. C. Bentley, Andrew Fitz-Gibbon, Elizabeth Green, Ashley Mosgrove, Caroline Kaltefleiter, Mechthild E. Nagel, Sarat Colling and Anthony J. Nocella, II. Thanks also to the facilitators: Jackie Riehle, Doreen Nieves, Ashley Mosgrove, Anastasia Yarbrough, Brittani Mannix, Ronald Pleban, Elizabeth Green, Jamie Alvito and Timothy Rodriguez. Finally, we greatly appreciate all of the dedicated presenters, booth participants, amazing volunteers, and everyone who attended and encouraged others to join in.

Next year will be the 10th Annual Conference of Critical Animal Studies. We hope you can make it!

## **1st Annual European Conference for Critical Animal Studies, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom, April 23rd 2010**

**Jessica Groling<sup>1</sup>**

The first annual conference for Critical Animal Studies in Europe was held on Friday 23rd April 2010 at the University of Liverpool. The day was a resounding success with 48 activists and academics coming together to present papers and discuss issues within the broad theme of “*Anima(s) Matter(s): the Future of Critical Animal Studies*”. Unfortunately, three overseas delegates were unable to attend because their flights were grounded as a result of the recent eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland.

*Alastair Currie*, policy adviser for PETA UK, began proceedings with a presentation on the challenges faced by contemporary AR advocates, giving a summary of policy milestones and changing attitudes to animal issues in Britain. He used key performance indicators to make an argument for evidence-based advocacy and more research into the reasons why some people choose to become vegans while others don’t and on which tactics are most effective in generating adherence to AR principles.

*Dr. Dan Lyons* of Uncaged presented his doctoral research into the evolution of British animal research policy, tracing its relation to particular animal ‘use’, ‘welfare’, and ‘AR’ ideologies. By way of a case study on xenotransplantation experiments on primates using pig organs, Dr. Lyons suggested that despite legislative changes, and particularly the 1986 Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, the discourse very much remains one of animal ‘use’ as opposed to ‘welfare’. He concluded that the animal research lobby enjoys a large structural advantage and that the policy community only reacts symbolically to demands for greater attention to welfare issues. Dr. Lyons suggested that animal advocates ought to challenge and expose secrecy surrounding animal experiments to prevent the regulatory system from evading scrutiny.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica can be contacted at: [jsgroling@googlemail.com](mailto:jsgroling@googlemail.com)

In the presentation that followed, delegates heard from *Professor Robert Garner* of the Politics Department at the University of Leicester, who sought to explore the relationship between cognitive capacities and moral entitlements. Prof. Garner noted that the AR movement is divided along ethical lines in terms of adherence to the ‘use position’, whereby the use of animals is categorically considered wrong irrespective of how they are treated whilst being used, or the ‘sentiency position’, which holds that the infliction of suffering is the moral wrong. He holds that the use position is not necessary and requires us to accept an ethical position that is difficult to sustain with regards to the distinction between human and non-human animals’ autonomous capacities and their respective intrinsic versus instrumental interests in liberty. Prof. Garner argued that even if we accept these distinctions, and this leads us to adopt the sentiency position, many of the goals of those who hold the use position can still be met by an application of the sentiency position. He concluded that perhaps a goal of reducing suffering by engaging with public policy opportunities may be more attainable and effective than campaigning for veganism.

The fourth presentation was given by *Dr. Simon James*, Senior Lecturer in the Philosophy Department at the University of Durham. Dr. James suggested that ethology (the scientific study of animal behaviour) is as much a social science as it is a natural science by challenging the ‘objectivist model’ in ethology and juxtaposing it with a ‘hermeneutic model’. He argued that the objectivist model is an empirical impossibility because it challenges us to describe animal behaviour as a mere series of perceived movements and from there to attribute meaning to behaviour. Dr. James proposed that ethology is not about inferring meaning on naked objects, but that animals present themselves to us in meaningful ways and that the objectivist model forces us to purge animals of all their meaning.

*Dr. Anat Pick*, Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader in Film at the University of East London, presented an account of ‘creaturely ethics’ that seeks to transcend the liberal-humanist discourse of animal ‘rights’, which requires for certain criteria be met for animals to be given moral consideration. Drawing on the philosophical-theological work of Simone Weil, Dr. Pick proposed a discourse that transcends rights

reasoning and recognises the shared vulnerability and finitude of all creaturely life as the foundation of our ethical obligations to other animals.

After lunch, *Jasmijn de Boo* from Animals Count, a political party that is contesting the 2010 British general elections and aims to positively influence the outcome, presented an interesting analysis of mainstream British political parties' policies on animals. Animals Count intends to raise the profile of animal issues in politics and hold other political parties to account. Jasmijn de Boo explained how the Green Party for instance has already agreed to make animal issues more prominent within their policies and campaigns as a result of discussions with Animals Count.

The presentation that followed looked at feminism, ethical veganism and animal rights. *Dr. Karen Morgan* is a researcher at Cardiff University, a co-founder of *vegatopia.org* and school speaker for the Vegan Society. She considered the linked oppressions of women and other animals and suggested that activists advocating for ethical veganism and animal rights can learn from the success of the feminist movement in taking their issues into the mainstream and from the close and productive relationships between feminists academics and activists.

*Professor Celia Deane-Drummond*, Professor of Theology and the Biosciences at the University of Chester, gave a talk on "Taking leave of the animal: transhumanity as transanimality", and argued that transhumanity as it manifests itself in various forms of biotechnology for instance is a form of secularised eschatology that leads to a weak understanding of human beings and is ultimately dehumanizing. She suggested that by trying to create 'human perfection', biotechnology aims to transcend animality and further distances us from other animals.

The penultimate paper of the day was presented by *Dr. Richard Twine*, Lecturer in Sociology at Lancaster University and President of ICAS. His paper sought to encourage a dialogue on the scope of Critical Animal Studies (CAS). He drew on Steve Best's critique of 'mainstream' animal studies as unhelpfully abstract and suggested that CAS should seek to respond to interlinked crises and struggles, break out of the academy and build alliances with social movements, critique "theory for theory's sake", and destabilise human/animal dualisms.

The final presentation was given by *Dr. Richard White*, Senior Lecturer in Geography at Sheffield Hallam University, and Editor-in-Chief of JCAS. His presentation brought together many of the day's themes and drew directly on Dr. White's research and experience of the activist-academic divide in the city of Sheffield. He explained what possibilities there were for critical engagement and made suggestions for creating more productive spaces that would encourage mutually beneficial exchanges to occur between academics and grassroots activists. This included the suggestion of creating an on-going radical seminar series that would take place in a non-academic space, and would be tasked with addressing and responding to a range of critical themes and intersections that relate to the crises facing humans, other animals and earth.

The day ended with a question and answer session and panel discussion on the strategies of the animal rights movement and ways to build alliances between activists and academics. Thanks must go to ICAS, the Society for Applied Philosophy, the Mind Association, and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool for kindly sponsoring this conference, and especially to *Stephen Clark*, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool for organising the event and arranging for vegan buffet lunch and refreshments throughout the day.



## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Animal Encounters<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Reviewed by Amy L. Fletcher<sup>2</sup>**

*Animal Encounters*, edited by Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini offers the reader six paired sets of essays on various types of Human-Animal encounters, ranging from animal consumption to laboratory experiments to zoophilia. Unlike the majority of edited volumes, the book is well-organized and thematic. The editors provide exemplary short framing discussions prior to each set of essays. Tom Tyler also contributes a thoughtful introduction that argues in favour of agonistic and productive, as opposed to antagonistic and hostile, encounters between not only animals and humans, but also between the various humans (and their associated academic disciplines) that now congregate uneasily in this relatively new, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary arena. The authors represented (ranging from the Donna Haraway to new entrants into the field) work within a variety of academic disciplines including sociology, anthropology, art history, gender studies and feminism, history, science and technology studies, philosophy, ecocriticism and environmental studies.

Because it is so comprehensive, the book also provides an excellent opportunity for a stock-take (no pun intended) of Human-Animal Studies as an approach and as, potentially, an academic discipline in its own right. So much intellectually provocative work is taking place due to this surging interest in the animal and post-

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Tyler and Manuela Rossini, editors (2009). Leiden and Boston: Koninklijke Brill (Human-Animal Studies Series) NV. ISBN 978 90 04 16867-1

<sup>2</sup> University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

humanism; indeed, all of the essays here zing with an energy and commitment that more tapped-out research questions (and fields) currently lack. (For example, I dutifully checked the Web to ensure that Randy Malamud survived writing “Americans Do Weird Things with Animals, or Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road.” His essay rages with an invigorating—but sometimes exhausting—polemical fury against the trivialization and exploitation of animals, sufficient to do the Berkeley Free Speech Movement proud. The field of Human-Animal Studies is clearly no place for the timid.) However, the issue of animals, and Animal Studies, within the larger institutional context of (Western) academia is by no means certain. Therefore, I approach the rest of this review as a sympathetic critic, integrating themes within the book to several concerns about the future of Anthrozoology.

As the previous paragraph demonstrates, and as Tom Tyler emphasizes in his general introduction, the issue of what to call this research domain is not yet settled, hence “Animal Studies is a meeting point where different species of researcher gather” (p. 2). For those of us interested in exploring the interstices between academic disciplines, this is wholly positive. Yet for all that University rhetoric extols the virtues of interdisciplinarity, the current funding and political environment for higher education (I write with direct reference to New Zealand and the United States, with which I am most familiar) seems nevertheless to reinforce traditional disciplines and neo-positivist methodologies. While we may each be passionately interested in the question of ‘the animal,’ how can this new approach survive—and the scholars, especially the junior ones, within it thrive—in a macro-environment that seeks increasing quantitative “returns on investment” in higher education? With the study of the humanities under a constant fiscal (and ideological) shadow, perhaps it is

premature to say good-bye to all that, rush headlong into post-humanism, and create yet another fissure within the Arts. Ideally, Human-Animal Studies is a space within which humanists of a classical stripe and post-humanists can reinvigorate social and political critique of society. Yet my fear is that we are on the verge of simply repeating the disaster that befell English Departments in the 1980s and 1990s, wherein the traditionalists and the deconstructionists waged internecine battles while outside the gates the Visigoths prepared to sack the entire city.

My next point proceeds directly from the first. On the one hand, yes, a multitude of disciplines do co-exist here; but, on the other hand, not. In general, all of the approaches represented emerge from the broader category of cultural/critical studies; beneath the various standpoints, there is also quite of a lot of agreement on basic assumptions and ethical positions. Admittedly, I say this from within political science—a discipline, to be fair, that most vehemently resisted (resists) modifying its dreams of being a neo-positivist social science. We still spend much of our time arguing over whether qualitative research has merits distinct from quantitative research, so one can imagine how threatening post-humanism might prove to be, in a general/professional sense. Still, I don't see much that is overtly political here, and it is in political debates, action, legislation and regulations that much of what most concerns us about the subordinate position of animals in society will be worked out. Of course, democratic political debate means that theory and ethics is going to collide with a multitude of positions (including downright indifference) on the question of the animal. It also means compromise.

There are exceptions to this general critique, of course. For example, Haraway's essay on animal experimentation does take us provocatively beyond the (human) perpetrator and (animal) victim narrative in her analysis of laboratory research. Likewise, Pamela Banting complicates stereotyped approaches to the post-modern study of wilderness by insisting on the corporeal and material reality of nature, flora, and fauna, arguing that 'even if our ideas of nature and wilderness are as culturally conditioned as those pertaining to any other system, nevertheless nature preceded us, exceeds us, and . . . may also succeed us' (p. 29). Both of these essays evince a genuine willingness to embrace contingency, ambiguity and disagreement, and are the more persuasive because of it. Randy Malamud, as a counterexample, is angry, and perhaps rightfully so. Still, in this forceful essay (that does make a signal contribution to the volume), he veers from righteous anger to an almost apoplectic rage that will only alienate a very large proportion of the general public (and students) that might otherwise be inclined to listen (or read). To lurch from his skilful deconstruction of Avedon's famous 1955 photograph of high-fashion model Dovima, posed with elephants, to his relentless onslaught against cute blog photographs of kittens in Pop-Tart® boxes, is to experience academic vertigo. I, too, find the (alive, adorable) kittens-in-a box photos unappealing, but suspect this has more to do with my academic high-brow taste than with some genuine link between these photographs and a larger culture of animal suffering. In other words, I think a strong argument is stretched beyond credulity, and the mere fact of people innocuously interacting with their animals becomes an almost criminal affront. Living—and writing—on the edge can be exhilarating, but whether or not it does the field any good is another question.

My last concern has to do, perhaps expectedly, with the sixth section and its focus on zoophilia. The two essays in the section on Libidinal Encounters are theoretically and intellectually challenging, and I am not suggesting that they shouldn't have been written or published. My question is whether they should have been published here. In preparing this review, I first considered whether both of these articles were parodies—sly, Sokal-style jokes on the earnest reader of postmodern proclivities. However, the norms of academic reviewing require a response to the word on the page. Ergo, while acknowledging that both of these essays are intellectual high-wires acts, I must ask, what is really the point? Are these authors seriously advocating that human-animal sexual relations need to be decriminalized and purged of their taboo-status? Or are these intended as scholarly fantasias, in which art and sexuality combine into a potent, but harmless, intellectual exercise? If the former, then perhaps we should recall that, outside of fables, any human-animal 'boundary explorations' would by definition involve humans and domesticated animals. Animals in the wild are highly unlikely to do anything other than fight or flee an approaching amorous human (and if there is evidence to the contrary, then I would strongly suspect some form of human intervention, like doping, that occurred off-camera). This then leaves us with domesticated animals and animals in zoos, which means that the multifaceted politics of the animal's subordinate status cannot be ignored. How—really, how?—could a domesticated or caged animal be said to 'willingly' concede to this form of interaction? How would we know if they did? Zoophilia pushes the concept of anthropomorphism so far, that it circles back around again to enclose the human in the center of the analysis. If these two essays represent, alternatively, intellectual exercises (of however sophisticated a stripe), then we are back to the old game of *épater le bourgeois* in postmodern drag. In a world characterized by crimes against

animals, animal abandonment, the biodiversity crisis, and a multi-billion dollar illicit global industry in the illegal trafficking of endangered species, I suggest that there are much more pressing theoretical and empirical issues to foreground now than libidinal encounters between humans and animals.

Despite my reservations about the last section, I nevertheless recommend *Animal Encounters* whole-heartedly. It manages to be both a comprehensive and an eclectic introduction to a wide range of issues and will inspire many debates within seminars and across the field. This book works well on several levels, containing much to interest the established scholar while also providing a cogent and wide-ranging survey of perspectives and arguments suitable for a graduate-level course. The book is also a major contribution to the development and exploration of post-humanism in the arts and humanities.

## **Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs: An Inside Look At The Modern Poultry Industry<sup>1</sup>**

**Reviewed by Dylan Ravenfox<sup>2</sup>**

All my pretty ones?  
Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?  
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam  
At one fell  
swoop?  
~Shakespeare, Macbeth 4.3.222

Karen Davis's "Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs: An Inside Look at the Modern Poultry Industry" exhibits an exquisite assemblage of well-researched material documented with scrutiny and care, compellingly supported by compassionate, direct, and immediate experience—visual, audible, somatic, and olfactory—of the conditions affecting the animals themselves. While the writing is eloquent and, at points, profoundly poetic, it is nonetheless extremely difficult to read. The atrocities it narrates pass far beyond human understanding, even make one want to stick one's head in the oven. (If the digression may be allowed, Sylvia Plath speaks of her own intense intellectual and emotional sentiments relating to animal life, imprisonment, and digestion in "Zoo Keeper's Wife" and other poems.)

Davis aptly begins her exploration with some discussion of the metaphorical resonances of the original circular chicken-egg theme. She states of early Christian sects that, "The eggshell symbolized the tomb from which Christ had risen, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Davis (2009) *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs: An Inside Look At The Modern Poultry Industry* Book Publishing Company (TN); Revised edition ISBN: 1570672296

<sup>2</sup> Dylan Ravenfox is an animal, mixed media artist, poet, writer and activist. His temporal mediums, including film, sculpture, signage, and performance have been exhibited at the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He recently graduated from Haverford College with a degree in English and wrote his honors thesis with Kimberly Benston on the language of race, animality and pain in the hybrid science-fiction of H. G. Wells. His poem, "Canvas" has received national recognition and is featured in the anthology "Where We Are, What We See: The Best Young Artists and Writers in America." Dylan continues to create temporal and site-specific artworks as well as self-publish critical review, short fiction, and poetry at [postanimality.wordpress.com](http://postanimality.wordpress.com). He currently lives both with and as a communal group, and works at a Union labour law firm in Philadelphia, PA.

inner content of the egg symbolized the theme of resurrection and hope for eternal life" (22). By giving a Eucharistic reading of the inner and outer egg, Davis elicits a host of analogies that might be drawn between the harvested labor of layer-hens and the sacrificial logic of 'the passion', in which the figure(s) of innocence suffer(s) for the callousness, cruelty, and sin of someone else, before finally being wholly consumed by fire, other bodies, and/or mythology. Davis thus evokes the importance of considering the chicken as a totemic producer of human *nature and culture* in order to better understand the very symbolic economies used to construct our identities.

\*Inside Look\* also provides an informative and concise history of industrial poultry manufacturing and consumerism. Pithily, Davis reminds us that battery-cage egg production started in the early 40's as a response to WWII, discreetly summoning her equally important book \*The Holocaust and the Henmaid's Tale; A Case for Comparing Atrocities\*.

But then, she brings more compassionate ways of thinking with chickens to such vivid expression that we can't help but find exciting and different ways of perceiving and imagining avian life. Then, turning human culture's definitive archetype of the forgotten, neglected and ab-used back upon itself, Davis's text is able to emphasize the sentiment that it is those who are unwilling to look at--and think about for themselves--the intense degradation of the victims who are truly chicken.

Yet, the reality faced by billions of these birds every day remains the most important subject matter for Davis' book. A large portion of the text devotes itself to the seemingly endless task of listing various aspects of the modern egg and poultry industry that remain deliberately hidden from most consumers' view. In the Preface to the 2009 edition, Davis reminds us that "[t]hroughout the world, over 40 billion chickens are now being slaughtered for meat each year, and over 5 billion hens are in battery cages, many of them in egg-production complexes holding up to a million or more birds" (v). This means that for every living human egg consumer, approximately one hen is confined to a wire battery cage smaller than the inside of an oven, with 3-9 other birds, stacked in endless rows and columns, festering in the feces and urine of the birds above them, pus from their own open sores, and air saturated with ammonia and methane. Insofar as one can picture these conditions, they are beyond anything



imaginable. The circumstances that Karen Davis' text strives to both document and critique force it to struggle with the paradox of addressing subjects that, for some, can be nearly unbearable even to summon to mind {and subsequently body}, while for others, must emergently be addressed if the self-regenerating genocide of these beautiful and sensitive birds (as Davis herself demonstrates with touchingly personal turns) is ever to cease. That said, perhaps the latter suggests a false dichotomy between those groups/individuals who shudder to imagine the suffering and those who seek to ameliorate it.

(In the interest of making that end a bit less gruff,) please read this text with care and empathy, both to 'your'self and 'others'.

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## FILM REVIEWS

### The Cove (2009)

#### Reviewed by Laura Shields

Underwater cameras capture the peaceful sway of sea plants beneath the surface in Taiji, Japan. As the scene progresses, the plants become obscured by creeping wafts of dolphin blood. Rapidly, the entire screen turns crimson, the ocean water thick with the grisly evidence of slaughtered dolphins. *The Cove*, a 2009 Oceanic Preservation Society film, follows a team of activists as they expose a small Japanese fishing town's large role in the capture, trafficking and killing of thousands of wild dolphins. In an effort to document the horrific events, the team launches mission "Full Orchestra," recording dolphin captures and deaths via high-tech underwater, aerial and hidden video and sound devices. A visually stunning and emotionally taxing film results from the footage, oscillating between a heist-style suspense tale and a familiar documentary narrative of institutional dysfunction and greed. Once the activists peek behind the curtain of the Japanese dolphin industry they fall down the proverbial rabbit hole, facing larger issues of anti-captivity, Japanese government corruption, mercury poisoning, International Whaling Commission bribery and modern day imperialism. Despite problematic generalization of the Japanese and an adherence to a human-animal dichotomy, *The Cove* ultimately serves as a reminder of the power and responsibility individuals have in halting nonhuman animal atrocities.

As one of the main themes of *The Cove* is the strength of small scale activism, the film loosely frames the story around animal activist Richard O'Barry's quest to end the dolphin slaughter. After establishing O'Barry as a vigilant activist through a montage of underground dolphin rescues, the film reveals O'Barry's sinister origin as Flipper's capturer and trainer. Following a *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar*-esque plot formula, the reformed dolphin trainer awakens to his role in a system of exploitation and torture and dedicates his life to righting his wrongs. Our readers can no doubt relate to O'Barry's immediate transformation into an activist after witnessing a horrific animal event. According to O'Barry, "one day it all ended" when Kathy, the original Flipper, committed suicide. She swam into his arms, took a breath and sank

to the bottom of the tank. His remorse for his involvement in the dolphin industry is painfully palpable. O'Barry says, "I spent ten years building that industry up and I have spent the last thirty five years trying to tear it down."

O'Barry enlists Oceanic Preservation Society co-founder Louie Psihoyos, also the film's director, to help him expose the slaughter. Psihoyos witnesses Japanese fishermen hammering on metal poles underwater to create a "wall of sound" that frightens the sonically sensitive dolphins into swimming ashore. Once corralled, the dolphins are sealed in with nets overnight until dolphin trainers come the next morning to hand pick "trainable" dolphins. The film explains that Taiji is the largest supplier of dolphins to marine parks and swim with dolphin programs around the world. Captured dolphins sell for up to \$150,000. The Taiji Whale Museum arranges the dolphin sales, dividing profit between the town and fishermen. After the capture, the fishermen drive the remaining dolphins to a secret cove and kill them for meat. In an effort to discover how the mass slaughter occurs, O'Barry and Psihoyos assemble a hodge-podge special-ops crew of two free divers, a rock concert organizer and an ex-military engineering genius. Recording the Taiji slaughter involved two covert missions: the first set up underwater cameras in the cove, and the second hid cameras in the surrounding landscape. They developed faux rocks to disguise the cameras and constructed an unmanned drone to record aerial scenes. The film weaves together the dramatic mission with a series of interviews featuring other activists, Japanese fishery officials, scientists, dolphin historians, International Whaling Commission delegates and Japanese citizens. The filmmakers deliberately capture haunting images. Watching the aerial view of the ocean turning bright red with blood is one of the more memory-searing scenes of the film. Recorded sounds of the dolphins are the only accompaniment to the slaughter. Fishermen spear and knife the dolphins as they twist and struggle in the bloody sea. They drag living dolphins out of the water with hooks in their flanks, flinging their bodies into the boats.

*The Cove* enters the public discourse in the wake of the recent drowning of a SeaWorld whale trainer by Tilikum, a captive killer whale. Public interest in captivity controversies suggests that *The Cove's* message of abolishing exploitive animal practices may find a receptive audience. Perhaps due to the film's goal of reaching a mainstream viewership, it leans heavily on a human-animal dichotomy as rationale for

the eradication of cetacean captivity and slaughter. In the field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS), we work to break down the arbitrary line between humans and the nonhuman world. Through interviews with scientists and people involved with dolphins, *The Cove* exerts a substantial amount of screen time highlighting how well dolphins perform within human systems of behavior and intelligence measurement. Once O'Barry recognized that each dolphin can distinguish themselves from other dolphins, he concluded that "when you become conscious of this non-human intelligence, you realize after awhile that they don't belong in captivity." David Rastovich, a free surfer, claims his passion for dolphins originated when he witnessed a dolphin protecting another surfer from a tiger shark attack.

Arguing that dolphins have altruistic actions, self-awareness, intelligence and agency obviously supports their liberation, but should not be the criteria. Philosopher Tom Regan has articulated that since animals have awareness, the burden lies on the exploiters to defend their treatment of sentient beings (Regan, 2004). From this perspective, there is no need for the filmmakers to appeal to an anthropocentric worldview in which references to dolphins' "human-like" behavior underwrite their right to liberation. Examining dolphin captivity and slaughter in a non-anthropocentric context would better serve an overall animal liberation agenda.

The film's main promotional image immediately establishes the human-animal hierarchy. A human free diver floats underwater in the center of the image, her feet bound in a single flipper. Christian iconography abounds as the diver's outstretched arms form a cross silhouette beneath a sun beam. Below the diver, five dolphins face her in a position of worship. As a privileged species, the diver is able to put on the fin and enter the dolphin's environment as a savior, moving freely between species boundaries. As humans originally enslaved the dolphins, the Christ-like figure of the diver sends a self-congratulatory and hypocritical message about interspecies relationships. The compositional focus on the human rescuer reifies an anthropocentric understanding of animal activism. Although the activists' courage, ingenuity and fearlessness in defiance of the law should be celebrated and emulated, we need to move away from viewing liberation action on behalf of nonhuman animals as something exceptional and therefore out of reach for most people.

For scholars schooled in postcolonialist thought, the film's slightly xenophobic depiction of the Japanese may be troubling. The film's portrayal of an aggressive fisherman whom the activists dubbed "Private Space" (due to the fisherman's constant screaming of those words) may invite criticism as an Orientalist rendering of the Japanese (Said, 1978). At the film's culmination, we are presented with post-production updates on those involved in the dolphin slaughter. Next to the fisherman it reads, "Private Space has been removed from his position at the cove." By refusing to recognize the fisherman by his actual name, the film inadvertently supports a rendering-invisible tactic it seeks to oppose in the case of dolphins. In CAS, we are trained to seek out linked systems of oppression. The film needed to recognize more fully that the fishermen are completely folded into a government-pushed ideology that actively presents fabrications as authoritative truths. For example, when the activists presented the fishermen with a proposal to pay the same amount if they kept their boats docked, the fishermen responded that they were engaging in "pest control." Upon further investigation, the film exposes claims by the Japanese government that dolphins are in direct competition with humans for ocean fish. Referred to as "biological nonsense" by a delegate at the International Whaling Commission, the Japanese government has no evidence supporting such an outlandish excuse for the dolphin trade. Yet from a postcolonialist perspective, we must participate with what's at stake with other countries and engage with national issues on a global stage. In this context, the film does excellent work demonstrating how cultural histories and national identity projects should not protect against criticism, protest and direct sabotage.

The case of the Japanese fishermen aside, the film highlights how animal exploitation is never a stand-alone issue, but always entangled with other systems of oppression. The dolphin capture and slaughter is symptomatic of an entire speciesist and capitalist system dependent on institutional corruption and misinformation. For example, the International Whaling Commission excludes dolphins and porpoises from the list of protected whales. When asked about this absence, Michael Illiff of the Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies at the University of Tasmania claims "the whaling nations that set up the levels of protection afforded to cetaceans have a vested interest in leaving the smaller whales out, especially if they're eating them". The mass extermination of dolphins in the Taiji cove reveals the deadly consequences of

arbitrary cataloguing by an organization that supposedly exists for their protection. Moreover, the film exposes the practice of labeling dolphin meat as larger whale meat in Japanese stores. Many Japanese consumers avoid eating dolphin meat because it contains high levels of mercury. However, when it's packaged as a different type of whale people unknowingly ingest toxic levels of mercury. One test found mercury levels of 2000 parts per million (ppm) in dolphin meat when the recommended total maximum consumption in Japan is 0.4 ppm. Since the dolphin meat industry is completely intertwined with the political and economic systems, Japanese officials are effectively poisoning their own citizens.

The most successful aspect of the film is its encouragement of action taken on behalf of nonhuman animals. As Sea Shepherd President Captain Paul Watson, affirms, "all social change comes from the passion of individuals." What the CAS movement can take away from this film is that exposure is the first step toward the abolition of animal oppression. The film's extensive focus on pre-mission reconnaissance work emphasizes the importance of awareness and preparation for successful resistance. The film's delicate straddling between criticizing and supporting xenophobia also serves as warning to activists to be aware of the attitudes they may develop as they work to end injustice. Overall, *The Cove* reinforces an animal liberation agenda that reminds us we need to act now. Take action now: [TakePart.com/TheCove](http://TakePart.com/TheCove) or texting DOLPHIN TO 44144.

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## **Disgrace (2008)**

**Reviewed by Jacqueline Dalziell<sup>1</sup>**

*There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me.*

T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'

Winner of the International Critics (FIPRESCI) Prize for Special Presentations at the 2008 Toronto Film Festival, *Disgrace* (2008) is a faithful adaptation of the Booker Prize-winning novel by Nobel Prize-winning author J.M. Coetzee.

Most commentary on *Disgrace*, both novel and film, relegates the presence of animals within the story to a marginal position, assumes they occupy merely symbolic, allegorical roles and represent 'The Animal' in that singular, generic sense, so well critiqued by Derrida. In interpretations of the film animals have taken a theoretical back seat to the 'real', more important actions and truths of the story, namely those centred on specific humans and what are perceived as their specifically human problems. Though *Disgrace*'s nonhuman counterparts do definitely play pedagogical roles, a well-documented canonical pattern within literature and film, their presence in the story is as significant as that of their human co-stars. *Disgrace* endeavours to highlight the mutability of categories of gender, race and sexuality inasmuch as it strives to play at the unruly edges of the human/animal tautology, disrupting those imperative and familiar markers "and/or" and the slanting solidus, that ruthlessly insist on a taxonomical distinction. I hope to present an account of *Disgrace* that takes the consequence of these animals into account, to untether them from the periphery where they currently sit, unacknowledged or undervalued, in the bulk of commentary on this piece of cinema.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Dalziell is the Project Coordinator for Animal Liberation (Australia), and is in the Gender and Cultural Studies Department at Sydney University.



The plot of *Disgrace* is driven by the personal metamorphosis of David Lurie, an arrogant, libidinous professor, brilliantly played by John Malkovich. A poetry lecturer at Cape Town University, David's descent into disgrace is provoked by an affair he is having with a mixed-race student thirty years his junior. Charged with sexual harassment, he is judged by the university's disciplinary committee and indignantly refuses to repent or issue a public apology. Instead, he hands in his resignation and leaves Cape Town to visit his daughter Lucy (Jessica Haines) on her farm in a secluded area of the Eastern Cape. Lucy owns a piece of land, farming flowers and running a kennel for the guard dogs of middle-class, white South Africans, with the help of her black South African tenant Petrus (Eriq Ebouaney), who in an historically ironic twist begins encroaching on her land. Adjusting to rural life, David helps Lucy on the farm and volunteers at the local animal shelter helping Bev Shaw (Fiona Press) kill unwanted dogs. David's concerns about his daughter's safety as one of the few white farmers in the area are confirmed when three young black South African men gang rape Lucy,<sup>2</sup> burn David and shoot all the kennel dogs. The different ways in which both characters react to the incident characterize the development of the film, making the audience witness to the brutal collision of gender, race and animal/human relations in post-apartheid South Africa.

With the stock spheres of otherness superimposed upon each other in *Disgrace*, we see intersectionality at its most extreme junctures. Some of the risky ambivalence in this film, in relation to just how many of its comments are fully conscious, reflects the fine lines Coetzee often precariously draws in his works. How many of the complex political layers within the film are fully absorbed by the audience is ambiguous.

Plucked from the security of his academic Ivory Tower, the supposed pinnacle of rationality, along with the comfortable invisibility of animal suffering characteristic of urban living, David is forced to witness the dysphemistic reality of animal-human relations that rural life illuminates. Like Levinas, whose canine friend Bobby had

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<sup>2</sup> Lucy employs animalizing rhetoric in recounting the experience of the rape, claiming, "I think I am in their territory. They have marked me," and "They spur each other on. That's probably why they do it together. Like dogs in a pack." The animalization of black South Africans reoccurs throughout the film.

"neither ethics nor logos...without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives", David believes animals to be purely biologically-motivated (Levinas, 2004, p.153). Bestowing little more on animals than would Kantian logic, he uses humanist terms such as "beasts", employs hunting discourse to describe his relations with women, and uses terms like "jackal boy" and "filthy swine" in reference to black South African men. When admiring a flock of ducks on her farm Lucy remarks, "They come back every year, the same three. I feel so lucky to be visited, to be the one chosen", to which David responds, "Animals are creatures of habit." At Lucy's suggestion that he volunteer at the animal clinic David proclaims, "These animal welfare people are a bit like Christians. Everyone is so cheerful and well intentioned that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging, or kick a cat." Not only is it unnerving that David declares this only days before his daughter is brutally raped, but darkly ironic that he participates in those animalizing, racist discourses that not only paved the way for apartheid rhetoric, but also perform essential roles in designating which beings are rendered killable, rapeable or disposable.<sup>3</sup>

On David's first day at the animal shelter he is rushed in to help steady a struggling goat onto the operating table. David nervously grabs his horns, the goat kicking and bleating, and in a rare moment, looks into his eyes and murmurs, "It's okay." For the first time in the film, an animal's face occupies a full screen shot for a couple of brief moments. In the goat we see a response, not a reaction.<sup>4</sup> Rarely do the faces of animals, let alone such lowly beasts as goats, grace cinema screens; rarely, in fact, do the faces of animals appear on camera when not cute and infantilized, or vicious and bestialized. Observing the goat's maggot-infested testicles, Bev Shaw identifies a terrible case of fly blow, far beyond treatment. We are invited to observe David's gaze, affected, into the goat's face, fully knowing what his future entails. Several fleeting

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<sup>3</sup> Cary Wolfe elaborates on this process through what he terms the "symbolic economy" and the "institution of speciesism" in 'Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory'.

<sup>4</sup> Many philosophers have disputed the Cartesian view of animals that relegates them to the category of automata, whose addresses are simply biological reactions, not conscious responses. In 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', Derrida specifically engages with the question of animal response.

moments are shared between David's watchful eyes and shots of the goat's anxious gaze. Bev proclaims "They like to slaughter them their own way", after her pleas of euthanasia are refused by the goat's 'owner', a black South African woman.<sup>5</sup> David watches while the goat is hauled, dragging its hooves and bleating in pain, out of the vet clinic.

Speaking of facial expressions, for Levinas, the face-to-face relationship is where one's ontological humanity is grounded, is performed, in one's duty to be responsible to and for the other (Levinas, 2004, p.50). *Faciality is* the precursor to human citizenship, to be able to be recognizable, and thus to have others be responsive to your face, even if some faces demand more of a response than others.<sup>6</sup> For Levinas animals, i.e. all those species not lucky enough to be covered by that exclusive banner called 'human', did not have a face, could not *have* 'face'. Therefore, ethical responsibility from human to animal was deemed unnecessary. In 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', Derrida asks, "What does this bottomless gaze [of the animal other] offer my sight? What does it "say" to me, demonstrating quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, given that that truth *allows me to see and be seen* through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other?" (Derrida, 2002, p.381). This catalytic moment between David and the goat, reminiscent of Derrida's vulnerability before the gaze of a small female cat, propels David into what Deleuze and Guattari would call a "line of flight", the initial kindling of his becoming-animal, through his subsequent attribution of a Levinasian face, and thus a responsive gaze, to a being outside his human circle (Deleuze, Guattari, 1988, p.4). Prior to this moment, the animals David has had relationships with on screen have been safely euphemized; he has been digesting them. This instance marks the first in the film of David interacting with a real, living animal in a very tactile, visceral way, and sets in motion his consequent acknowledgement of nonhuman

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<sup>5</sup> This is the first instance in the film, of which there are many, of the familiar theme of animal mistreatment perpetrated by the racialized other; a stark contrast to the care for animals displayed by the white South Africans in the film.

<sup>6</sup> Bruns elaborates on this Levinasian notion in her essay 'Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)', stating, "The white European male face defines the apex from which humanity declines by degrees into the faces of women, children, nonwesterners, subalterns, aborigines, hominids, troglodytes, chimpanzees, pets, bats, flies" (Bruns, 2007, p.712).

subjectivity. Here the audience is invited to observe a transition in David, a becoming-animal, from a modern-day Descartes to a man who has become conscious of the porosity of his ontological boundaries.

Deleuze and Guattari develop a trajectory of the ontology of life as a continual, evolving process of becoming other, traversed by social, cultural and affective possibilities which launch us into metamorphoses; they write, "We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things", by "a little detail that starts to swell and carries [us] off" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1988, p.292). In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari write that "To become animal is... to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1986, p.704). A departure from dominant molar identities to new affective states, "all becoming is minoritarian", so becoming-animal is synonymous with becoming-woman, becoming-colored; with becoming-subaltern (Deleuze, Guattari, 1988, p.106). In this way, a becoming is a deterritorialization, a transformation in which a subject's ontological locale is no longer stable or meaningful, but rather transitory, nomadic, transporting one to a state of de-subjectivization, a movement from a major to a minor power. Becoming-animal can be located "in that which suddenly sweeps us up and makes us become", a mutation that renders all parties involved irreparably transformed (Deleuze, Guattari, 1988, p.279).

The onset of David's transformation begins via the destabilizing experience of the response of an other. Derrida writes, "nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself naked under the gaze of a cat" (Derrida, 2002, p.380). In the film we observe a gradual erosion of David's privileged identity, with the constant pushing of its seams, exposing all the underlying fabric of his being as seemingly futile in the complicated cross hares of gender, race and animals in post-apartheid South Africa. Outside the realm of academia and the comparative safety of Cape Town, David encounters a world in flux, where the normal governing rules seem not to apply. His dual status as an academic and as a white man in South Africa seems to hold little weight when

even he can be needlessly burned, disfigured, robbed- treated like an animal. With his professional identity shattered, sexual pride stripped, ego and body beaten by young black South African boys, and further emasculation after his helplessness during his daughter's rape, David has gone through a process of effacement. Like Derrida is vulnerable before the gaze of a cat through nudity and philosophical aphasia, David appears vulnerable, naked, disgraced, in the literal and metaphorical faces of animals. No longer impervious to suffering, death, or the returned stare of an other, David's disgrace opens him to the possibility of a recognition of what is arguably the ultimate other, the animal. It is in this state of stripped privilege, of deterritorialization, and of disgrace, that David is able to gain an insight into those subject positions that lurk in the peripheries, in the murky shadows cast by the figure of the white male.

There are several key scenes paradigmatic of David's becoming-animal, demonstrative of his revelation of the capacity of other-than-human suffering. Shaking his head, David reprimands Lucy's black South African neighbor Petrus for tying two sheep on bare dirt, asking, "Don't you think you could tie them where they could graze?" Petrus replies, "They are for the party on Saturday, we slaughter them for the party." David returns to Lucy and states, "I don't like the way he does things, bringing the beasts home to acquaint them with the people who are going to eat them", and in the next scene we see David has untied the sheep and taken them to a pond. At Saturday's party, David is given a plate and as he peers down at it, he recognizes a piece of flesh from the sheep he was earlier caring for, and commences to nervously stare at the plate, turning it around in his hands.

Another point crucial in David's transformation is when he awakens with a bloodied head in the midst of an attack on his daughter's property. The perpetrators notice him peering out of the small bathroom window in which they have locked him, and one grabs a rifle and walks toward him. David sinks into the farthest corner, breathing heavily, listening to the sound of the nearing footsteps that he believes will bring his end. Then his body convulses at the sound of gunshots and the ensuing howls of Lucy's kennel dogs crying out in pain. Cowering next to the toilet, David moans and shakes as he watches the men shoot each dog, trapped in their cages, one by one. Several scenes later, David is digging a grave and dragging the rigor mortis ridden corpses into the earth. In the killing of Lucy's guard dogs, deterrence apparatus

ensnared within the racial politics of post-apartheid instability, David is able to see an eerie reflection in that the animals are merely surrogates for his own impending death.

Killing unwanted dogs at the animal clinic, David nervously pats their heads and watches them crumple in a heap, one injection after another. We watch him shovel each individual carcass into the incinerator, staring after the flicker of the smoldering bodies.

One day, en route to the incinerator after an afternoon of killing, he pulls over and begins to sob. Soon after, David bonds with a three-legged dog on death row. One afternoon while doing the weekly killing, he drops a load of freshly killed corpses into his truck and catches the dog whimpering at him. From the placement of the camera from behind the cage, hearing the dog pant, staring at David to behind David, staring at the dog, we share their exchange. Witness to their interaction, our position shifts between David and the dog, experiencing their reciprocal seeing and being seen. Is the dog, as Derrida states, "deep within (his) eyes, (our) primary mirror"? (Derrida, 2002, p.418).<sup>7</sup> They look at one another, a shared facial recognition, a reciprocal address, and then David picks him up and takes him to the kill room. Bev asks, "I thought you would save him for another week, are you giving him up?" After his solemn "Yes", the dog licks his face, while we view the needle being administered into his leg.

Following the recognition of face comes the acknowledgement of responsibility, of the need to respond, affectively, to the gaze of the other. Julia Kristeva writes, "...as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva, 1982, p.3). In allowing the sheep corpses face, and in not only witnessing the dogs being violently shot during the attack but actually participating in killing dogs at the clinic, David is forced to truly appreciate what animals undergo at the hands of humans; those unsavory truths, best

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<sup>7</sup> The full quote of Derrida's insightful comment in 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', is "The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her eyes, my primary mirror?" (Derrida, 2002, p.418).

kept "thrust aside" if we are to continue to live, opportunistically unaware of our human privilege. Deleuze and Guattari write, "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1988, p.257). Through David's line of flight we witness him entering into composition with the affects of an(other) body, affects he had hitherto ignored. His contact with animals seems to extend his affective capabilities, providing an opportunity for an interspecific sympathy and empathy not evident in the first half of the film. Crying in his car en route to the incinerator, dog corpses in his backseat, David actually grieves animal loss.

Grief works *through* face; through the recognition of ethical subjectivity, face is attributed. Facial recognition marks the acknowledgement of, and the capacity for death, for a death that is meaningful, and thus grieveable- the mourning more painful as animal death is not deemed worthy of grief. The significance of David's bereavement cannot be underestimated; he has elevated lowly animals into the category of beings deemed grievable, a step most humans fail to make. As Haraway notes, "...patricide and fratricide are the only real murders in the logic of humanism; everybody else to whom the law applies is covered by courtesy" (Haraway, 2008, p.79). In this way, the audience is being asked emotionally to revise ontological categories, to inquire after what makes only some, but not all, corpses elicit an affective response. We are disgraced in the face of animals, in our disavowal and complicity in what Derrida terms "the unprecedented proportions of this subjection of the animal" (Derrida, 2002, p.394).

The poignancy of some of the last lines in the film, which occur after Lucy's black South African neighbor offers to marry her for protection in exchange for her land, offer a tangible example of David's metamorphosis, of his becoming-animal, his explicit identification with nonhuman others. Paraphrasing the close of Kafka's *The Trial*, David states "Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept, to start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity. Like a dog." Lucy responds, "Yes, like a dog."

In *Disgrace* we see what happens when a gaze is returned, and observe the deterritorializing potential that crises bring in destabilizing one's identity and forcing a recognition of mortality. The affective relationships David forms with various animals throughout the film, and his ensuing transformation through minoritarian becoming, provide a sliver of hope for interspecies understanding amidst a complex, shifting social, cultural and political territory. For Critical Animal Studies, the power of *Disgrace* is located in its success in identifying the common crux from which the trajectories of sexism, racism and speciesism spring, and how the unsettling of the animal/human boundary necessitates a further unsettling of all those cultural codes that designate otherness, whether animal or not.

Though incredibly confronting viewing, *Disgrace* is a superb piece of cinema. The beautifully shot South African landscapes provide an eerie juxtaposition to the violence that unfolds and the cast perform faultlessly in what are seemingly sadistically contrived circumstances. A looming disquiet is present throughout the film, and its persistence up until the very end may leave an unsavoury taste in ones' mouth. *Disgrace* is an uncomfortable film on many fronts, though its success lies in making the audience face those bleak, abject truths most turn away from.

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## JCAS: AUTHOR GUIDELINES

### Editorial Objectives

**The Journal for Critical Animal Studies is open to all** scholars and activists. The journal was established for the purpose of fostering academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies are increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker take a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy.

JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. This journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists to address the important topic of animal liberation. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal for the purpose of facilitating communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal rights movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

### Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed on any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Because a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytic thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminist, activism and academia, Continental philosophy or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention. The following are a few topic suggestions:

### The reviewing process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication. All submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

### Manuscript requirements

The manuscript should be in MS WORD format, in 1.5 line spacing and 12 point Times New Roman. Good electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should be run through an American English spell check prior to submission.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words, and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances JCAS will consider publishing extended essays (up to 15,000 words). Authors should supply a brief **abstract** of the paper (of no more than 250 words).

A brief **autobiographical** note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, e-mail address, and full contact details.

**References** to other publications must be in Harvard style and carefully checked for completeness, accuracy and consistency.

You should cite publications in the text: (Best, 2006) using the first named author's name or (Best and Nocella, 2006) citing both names of two, or (Best et al., 2006), when there are three or more authors. At the end of the paper a reference list in alphabetical order should be supplied:

*For books:* Surname, Initials (year), Title of Book, Publisher, Place of publication. e.g. Gray, J. (2002), *Straw Dogs*, Granta Books: London

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*For journals:* Surname, Initials (year), "Title of article", Journal Name, volume, number, pages. e.g. Cudworth, E. (2008), "'Most Farmers Prefer Blondes': The dynamics of anthroparchy in Animas' becoming meat", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 32-45.

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