

**Book Review: *Confronting Cruelty: Moral orthodoxy and the Challenge of the Animal Rights Movement*, Munro, Lyle (Brill Academic 2005)**

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According to Lyle Munro, the aim of *Confronting Cruelty* is to address ‘why and how do people campaign on behalf of a species which is not their own’ (and I will return to the inherent anthropocentrism of this question later in the review) utilizing both New Social Movement Theory (NSM) and Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT). Following Stephen Clark, Munro points out that animal protection movements often challenge the ‘moral orthodoxy’ of moderate concern for animals and thus the second aim of the book is to address how social movements achieve their objectives. The book focuses on both grassroots activists/activism and organizational advocacy in Australia, the UK and the US because, according to the author, the animal protection movement has historically been strongest there.

Chapter one locates the study theoretically as utilizing a ‘social construction of social problems/social movements approach’ as this, unlike approaches taken in the few existing studies of animal activists, resonates with the testimonies of the interviewees. Munro points out that he uses both RMT and NSM because the former prioritizes organizational aspects of SM’s and thus allows an analysis of strategy and the latter focuses on ideas and cultural processes facilitating an analysis of identity-oriented issues. Munro then turns to the perennial problems of defining the animal protection movement. He points out that this study includes animal protectionists from the entire spectrum of welfare, liberation and rights and whilst noble in his aims to represent all aspect of the animal protection movements, the author deals with internal differences simplistically. For example, he argues that liberationists espouse Singer’s philosophy whilst rights proponents are linked to Tom Regan’s philosophy. Not only does such an overly simplistic characterization allow no room for maneuver but no acknowledgment of ‘hybrid’ positions, nor any discussion of the current - posthumanist - debate regarding animal protection, is offered. This is an oversight as much of these modern debates are moving toward a position espoused by activists themselves rather than imposed by academics.

The remainder of chapter one forces the reader to confront a number of worrying assumptions about the role/place of animals which underpin this work. For example, on p. 23, Munro in discussing his use of the social constructionist perspective points out that ‘social problems are understood as being formed by the power of certain groups to define a particular issue as a problem that needs to be remedied’ and that all social problems are ‘socially constructed rather than being objective phenomena.’ This seems awfully close to suggesting that the ‘animal problem’ (i.e. the way human beings oppress animals as identified by activists) is not a problem until defined as such by a group with the power to do so. Whilst this may remain faithful to the sociology of social movements it certainly does not remain faithful to a significant body of literature which argues animal oppression is problematic per se or to the motivations espoused by animal activists elsewhere (e.g. see Mann, 2007). In fact, such a substitutive argument has echoes of the often vilified work of Keith Tester who, as Munro himself points out, ‘seriously misrepresented the movement as experienced by activists, advocates and supporters’ by arguing that the animal protection movement was symbolic only in that it was not about animals at all

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but, rather, was a project to classify and define humanity. The second discordant note in this chapter comes on p. 27 when Munro discusses the inherent paternalism of the animal protection movement. He believes that animal protection is 'necessarily paternalistic' as animal activists believe that paternalism is a lesser evil than moral apathy. To be paternalistic is to start from the assumption that the objects of protection/paternalism (e.g. animals, children) can be governed. Notwithstanding feminist objections to this characterization, it is an approach which seems to be based upon the very assumptions that animal activists themselves are trying to refute: that of human superiority (and right to govern) over animals. Finally, this chapter puts forth the idea that animal protection work is actually 'social problems work' wherein individuals concerned for animals aim to transform their individual concern into a public issue. This again has similarities to Tester in that the very things that animal activists do are explained away as a substitution for something else. This seems to be in contrast to the author's novel aim of addressing the 'how' of animal protection work. In effect Munro approaches the 'how' of animal protection work as a structural issue, i.e. how do organizations go about their work, and the 'why' of animal protection work as an individual issue, i.e. why do individuals go about animal protection work. It would have been far more faithful to activists everywhere to look at the 'how' and the 'why' of both organizations and individuals with an acknowledgment that individuals themselves constitute organisations. Taken together these three examples seem to offer an insight to the intellectual foundation for this work which is one still firmly steeped in modernist dualisms. As such it contributes more firmly to the 'us vs. them' explanations of human oppression of animals than it does to a deeper understanding of animal activists themselves.

Chapter three opens with a discussion of animals as social problems and briefly addresses the criminological literature and then moves into a discussion of campaigns against cruelty, which are categorized as a social problem. The sparsity of sociological work in these areas is lamented, yet no real effort is made to assess contributions from other disciplines which would certainly set the scene more effectively. The rest of the chapter, barring a brief discussion of animal exploitation as a social problem, is given over to a discussion of differences between approaches to animal protection, whether they be rights, abolition or 'fundamentalist extremists who use violence.' Again, the simplistic view taken offers little insight, for example, no analysis of 'fundamentalism' or of individual strategies (violent or otherwise) is undertaken. This leaves the reader feeling as though the author is deliberately fence-sitting (in the name of objectivity?) which feels somewhat misplaced in a study which claims to be investigating the 'how' and 'why' of animal activists.

Chapter four starts with a discussion of the motivations given by interviewees for joining animal protection movements and is divided into three areas – intellectual, emotional and practical. This is the first time that a significant amount of data from the study is presented (p. 68). This segues into a discussion on cruelty and speciesism which is not related back to the data gathered from participants until p. 77 when an 'index of speciesism' for the USA and Australia is presented. Whilst of interest, this is a little confusing to the reader as it is not altogether clear that this is drawn from the current study and it is even more unclear how this statistical data collection fits with the overall study aims (how and why people campaign for other species) and methods which at the outset were acknowledged as being based on an interview schedule. The next few pages involve a discussion of activist statements regarding issues such as caring for animals and

commitment to animals which is much closer to the stated aims of the book and presents an illuminating insight into activist motivations.

Chapter five moves to address vivisection, blood sports and factory farming as three main campaign areas of organizational activism. Accordingly, the data this chapter is based on is taken from interviews with those working amongst prominent animal protection agencies. Here organizational strategy, as opposed to individual motivation, is discussed. The chapter presents an interesting overview but does not, in my opinion, offer enough detailed analysis (or even presentation) of what the participants had to say. This holds true for chapter six as well. This is a shame as these two chapters represent the most interesting heart of the book. Had the author presented participants views more often and analyzed them in more depth these chapters would have been much more interesting and would have offered much more insight into the animal protection movement from the perspective of those within it. As it currently stands, however, it feels as though the participants' contribution (which is the most interesting and salient part of any book aiming to address why and how individuals campaign on behalf of species not their own) has been 'intellectualized away'. Chapter seven offers a discussion of emotion within the animal protection movement at an organizational level through the open manipulation of public emotion by organized animal activism and at the individual level by addressing the emotional labour of individual activists.

Ultimately, however, despite being an interesting read and one which raises some important issues - particularly when utilizing the rich data drawn from animal activists - this book does not do what it sets out to do, namely, to analyze why and how people campaign on behalf of a species not their own. Nor does the book have, again as it claims to have, enough focus on the individual activists who make up the movement. In adopting a structural approach to the analysis, (RMT and/or NSM) which sees the power of structures over, as opposed to being constituted by, individuals it was always bound to fail at this latter aim. Similarly one feels as though the 'challenge to moral orthodoxy' that the author claims the animal protection movement (or at least parts of it) offers is never really analyzed. Finally there is an unforgivable anthropocentrism and eurocentrism embedded in the book which it is hard to overlook. This ensures that the analysis throughout the book, as well as its starting point, actually contributes to the mainstream orthodoxy of dualist western thought which underpins current oppressions of nonhumans. For this alone those interested in animal protection issues per se will find the book a challenge to read.