

The 'Animal-Advocacy Agenda': Exploring Sociology for Nonhuman Animalsⁱ

Kay Peggs

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Abstract

This paper focuses on sociology and the study of human nonhuman animal relations. Using as a catalyst referees' comments on a previous paper about experiments using nonhuman animal subjects, in this present paper three problematics are identified and discussed. These problematics centre on the 'acceptable' content of sociological inquiry, the 'permissibility' of advocacy-oriented sociology, and the 'admissibility' of nonhuman animal-advocacy to advocacy-oriented sociology. The three problematics are explored through the lens of reflexive and critical sociology. Two central questions are raised, firstly should sociology include the study of nonhuman animals and secondly can sociology advocate for nonhuman animals? The paper concludes with the affirmative to both of these questions. The paper ends by stressing that sociology has so much to offer the study of human nonhuman animal relations. Professional sociologists have a key role to play in enabling this work to move from margins to centre in published sociology.

Keywords; Nonhuman animals, advocacy, reflexivity, oppression, critical, sociology

introduction

Sociology centres its attention on human societies, but societies are broader than the human. Humans live in relation to nonhuman animals (Bryant, 1979) and these relations are often based in the human oppression of nonhuman animals (Nibert, 2002). Although human relations with nonhuman animals are taking an increasing role in social inquiry, sociologists often see the study of these relationships as marginal to the 'proper' *human* focus of sociology (for discussion see, for example, Kruse, 2002, p. 1). Even when nonhuman animals are included, the human oppression of nonhuman animals is often overlooked. What I argue in this paper is that the marginalisation (and more usual disregarding) in sociology of the human oppression of nonhuman animals reveals problematics in the project of sociology. I focus my argument on three related threads: the 'appropriate' subject matter of sociology; the project of a value-free sociology; and the advocacy potential of sociology. In doing so I raise two key questions; firstly should sociology include the study of nonhuman animals and secondly can sociology advocate for nonhuman animals? Question one partly springs from a curiosity about why sociology should traditionally seek to limit its field of enquiry to humans alone, when it is proud to cover an otherwise wide sphere of activity (Author 2012). Question two reflects on

whether it is acceptable for sociology to advocate for oppressed groups and, where there is acceptance, whether this can be combined with a broadening of the focus to advocacy for nonhuman animals. These two central questions are thus entangled as support of advocacy in sociology does not necessarily generate support of advocacy for nonhuman animals. This is because even those who accept the role of advocacy in sociology may feel that advocacy for nonhuman animals retreats from the 'proper' focus of sociology, which they see as the human.

The impetus for this paper lies in comments made by two referees on a previous paper I submitted to this journalⁱⁱ, a paper that focussed on UK legislation associated with experiments using nonhuman animal subjectsⁱⁱⁱ. To me, the comments made by the referees reveal problematics in sociology that have implications for sociological inquiry that centres its attention on nonhuman animals, for studies that explore human relationships with nonhuman animals, and for advocacy-oriented sociology, especially as it relates to nonhuman animals. The following two comments made by one of the referees encapsulate these problematics.

'I think this article may be publishable but I do not recommend *The Sociological Review*. Given the content and the advocacy-oriented approach I suggest the author considers submitting this article to [name of a journal that centres on nonhuman animal advocacy]...'and '...Although advocacy-oriented scholarship is undoubtedly justified on the grounds of bringing to the fore, the nature of injustice and exploitation experiences, in this case, by nonhuman animals in animal experimentation, it also raises interesting questions about the role of social science and its practitioners in terms of actively pursuing an animal advocacy agenda'

In these comments the referee clearly advises that the essence of my previous paper made it better suited to a journal that employs a critical approach to human nonhuman animal relations than a mainstream sociology journal. Is this because of the approach I took or because of the subject matter itself? The comment seems to embrace both possibilities as the referee separates 'the content' from 'the advocacy-oriented approach' and suggests that both point the article to the alternative journal. All the same, the referee seems to accept advocacy-oriented work in sociology but still questions whether advocacy for nonhuman animals in sociology is appropriate. Overall, the comments raise three problematics for sociology that centre on the 'acceptable' content of sociological inquiry, the 'permissibility' of advocacy-oriented sociology, and the 'admissibility' of nonhuman animal-advocacy to advocacy-oriented sociology. In directing my discussion to these three problematics I reflect on notions of the appropriate subject matter of sociology and the purpose of sociology. I conclude by arguing that sociology is very well placed to examine human nonhuman animal relations^{iv}. Nonhuman animals are central to societies and thus are of sociological relevance even in terms of a constrained sociology that centres solely on humans. Additionally, I maintain that advocacy for nonhuman animals is in keeping with a reflexive and critical approach to sociology, an approach that has now become mainstream. Finally, I stress that professional sociologists have a key role to play in enabling work on human nonhuman animal

relations to move from margins to centre in published sociology. I begin by exploring the question of what is the 'acceptable' content of sociological inquiry.

the subject matter of sociology: sociology of nonhuman animals

Nonhuman animals are more often than not excluded from the field of 'traditional' sociology. Accordingly, Barbara Noske observes that 'the social sciences tend to present themselves pre-eminently as the sciences of discontinuity between humans and animals' (cited in Kruse, 2002, p. 1) and Janet Alger and Steven Alger refer to 'the hard line that sociology has always drawn between humans and other species' (2003, p. 69). Certainly there have been changes. For instance, The British Sociological Association and the American Sociological Association^v now have study groups that centre on human nonhuman animal relations. Moreover, there is a growing sociological literature in the field. Despite the increasing sociological interest in human nonhuman animal relations it remains that, in the sociological tradition, nonhuman animals continue to be viewed as at best marginal or at worst irrelevant (Arluke, 2002, p. 1). Of course, sociology includes theories of history and systematic theoretical reflections on, and empirical studies about, contemporary societies thus, as C. Wright Mills warns, 'to interpret the variety [in sociology] as A Tradition is in itself audacious' (1970 [1959], pp. 29-30). Taking his point, as broad as this sociological sweep is, it is curious that the sociological 'tradition' (if I might call it that) is largely confined to a narrow focus on humans.

In the 1970s Clifton Bryant (1979) called on sociologists to recognise the significant roles that nonhuman animals have in human societies as, he observed 'Our social enterprise is not composed of humans alone' (1979, p. 417). Because human societies are suffused with nonhuman animals, Bryant argues that sociology could gain a great deal from investigating this observable reality. For example, often humans eat the flesh of nonhuman animals and wear their skins and hair as clothing. Humans capture and enchain nonhuman animals. Nonhuman animals live with humans in their homes and work for humans in myriad ways. Human entertainment often involves nonhuman animals and human speech frequently invokes nonhuman animal imagery. Bryant uses the term 'the zoological connection' to encapsulate the influence of nonhuman animals in human societies and this zoological connection, he argues, has been for the most part neglected by sociologists (1979, p. 399). In his words,

'In spite of the evident prominence of zoological influences in our culture and the subsequent import for our social lives, the sociological literature is largely silent on animal-related human behaviour. This is an unfortunate oversight which handicaps our acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of our social enterprise.' (Bryant, 1979, p. 404).

Consequently, Bryant calls on sociologists to pay attention to this neglected area for the reason that this might yield insights 'concerning the interactional process, social motivation, the influence of value systems on perception, socialization and personality development, human violence and its sublimation, and the social dynamics of anthropomorphism' (1979, pp. 404-5). Despite this call, study that includes nonhuman animals remains marginal (at best) and resisted (at worst) in sociology. This is curious because human relationships with nonhuman animals are grounded in the institutional arrangements and systems of belief that comprise human societies (Nibert, 2003, p. 6), arrangements and systems that are central features of sociological inquiry. Yet, unlike anthropology, which has 'run with the ball' with the study of human nonhuman animal relations (Arluke, 2002, p. 1), sociologists have seemed rather anxious about sociological inquiry of human relations with nonhuman animals (Kruse, 2002). But, even if some sociologists find it difficult to imagine a sociology in which nonhuman animals are studied in relation to humans (Nibert, 2003, p. 21), others such as Bryant (1979), Adrian Franklin (1996), and Rhoda Wilkie (2010) have focused their attention on the sociology of nonhuman animals. This sociological attention is part of the broad field of Animal Studies. Richard Twine observes that Animal Studies is a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary development that has emerged from the humanities and social sciences, which focuses attention on a re-evaluation of the 'the role and presence of nonhuman animals' (2010, p. 1). Despite the social scientific origins of Animal Studies, study of nonhuman animals is treated as marginal in sociology. Why is this? The reason seems to lie in the traditional sociological acceptance of categorical differences between humans and nonhuman animals which, Alger and Alger observe, 'misconstruct[s] animals as inferior, in order to construct humans as superior' (2003, pp. 74). A most obvious proponent of this approach is George Herbert Mead.

Mead's (1934) assertion that nonhuman animals are outside the realm of sociological inquiry because of their professed lack of perception, imagination, and language presents a considerable barrier to the development of what Arluke calls 'sociological other animals studies' (2002, p. 1). Mead argues that the human use of language is especially important in the development of shared meanings and the sense of self, which he contends are the proper subject matter of sociology (1934, p. 135). Shared meanings are essential to communication and interaction, and Mead claims that such shared meanings are the distinctive feature of humans in societies. Although Mead accepts that nonhuman animals can carry out meaningful actions (such as collecting wood) that are designed to attain goals (such as building a shelter), he maintains that their behaviour 'lacks the premeditation and shared meanings that characterize human behaviour' (Irvine, 2003, p. 46). Mead (1934) distinguishes between the 'conversation of gestures' that he sees as characterizing the instinctive acts in which both humans and nonhuman animals engage, and social acts of communication via 'significant symbols' (i.e. language), which he views as uniquely human. For Mead, the conversation of gestures is unconscious and hence is not significant for sociology; it is communication through language that, he concludes, is the proper subject matter of sociology. This is because he views language as enabling humans, and only humans, to anticipate the consequences of

their actions, evaluate alternatives, and organize their actions with others (Irvine, 2003, p. 46). Mead accepts this as evidence of the unique human ability to imagine. This is central to Mead's sociology because it is this ability that allows humans to view themselves as if they are external objects and, for him, this human attribute 'demonstrates our evolutionary advancement on animals' (1934, p. note 1).

Mead's notion of the 'generalized other' is essential to his position on the human self. Via the generalized other, humans within a particular society have a view of the expectations about actions that others have and, in consequence, they try to behave in ways that are expected of them (Mead, 1934, p. 155). For Mead, taking into account the attitudes of others is essential to acting 'intelligently' or 'rationally' (1934, p. 137) which, again, he sees as the province of humans alone. Intelligent or rational action is not founded in instinct because, he argues, intelligent action is based in choice, and the ability to choose is rooted in having a sense of the past. So, in sum, it is the purportedly unique social capacities of humans that Mead understands to be the subject matter of sociology and thus 'sociologists...are supposed to study people, not other creatures' (Kruse, 2002, p. 375). Alger and Alger's examination of sociology textbooks shows the extent of the conformity to this traditional sociological point of view; for example textbook authors often employ 'distancing concepts' (such as 'instinct') that are used to distinguish humans (who are constructed as uniquely without instincts) from nonhuman animals (who are constructed as being controlled by instincts) (2003, p. 81).

Sociologists working in the field of Animal Studies have contested the traditional sociological contention that nonhuman animals are merely instinctual biological entities who do not display social complexity. For instance, with reference to studies of both dog training and of cat negotiations over territory, Leslie Irvine challenges the notion that there is a purely instinctual root to nonhuman animal behaviour by noting the ways in which nonhuman animals modify their actions (2007, pp. 7- 8). There is much scepticism in broader sociology (and beyond) about such studies, based in suggestions that the results are no more than anthropomorphic projections as humans can only project human meanings onto nonhuman animals (for discussion see Arluke and Sanders 1996, pp. 48-52). Mead would concur because, in his opinion, nonhuman animals have 'no mind, no thought, and hence there is no meaning [in their behaviour] in the significant or self-conscious sense' (in Strauss, 1964, p. 168). Nevertheless, Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders point to a wealth of research that refutes views such as Mead's. They refer to studies, for example of dogs' interactions with their human guardians, that indicate that nonhuman animals are 'minded social actors'. They conclude that work such as this provides evidence of the mindfulness of nonhuman animals, which can help sociologists to examine and understand 'interspecies interaction' (Arluke and Sanders, 1996, p. 81).

Arluke and Sanders observe another particularly vociferous doubt expressed by some sociologists who make the objection that glossing over any differences between humans and nonhuman animals could lead to 'ideologically and empirically questionable conclusions' about the role of instinct in human behaviour (1996, p. 52). There are, of course, unassailable sociological arguments about the rejection

of the role of instinct in humans. These are plain in sociological critiques of sociobiological theories that regard humans as one species of animal like any other whom 'just like any other species... have a set of genetically determined dispositions to behavior' (Dupre, 2004, p. 892). In proposing that there is such a thing as 'human nature' that enables and constrains human behaviour, sociobiologists point to what they claim to be natural differences among humans, for example in their degrees of intelligence. Accordingly, the sociobiological position centres on biological foundations rather than the social foundations of inequalities (for a critical discussion see, e.g., Guo (2006)). Although the most well-known sociobiologist, Edward O. Wilson (1978), is eager to point out that he is merely *describing* biological differences that he feels lead to human inequalities, it is hard to ignore the *justifications* that sociobiology provides for a range of inequalities.

Sociology has sound and compelling grounds for refuting such descriptions and justifications. But refutations need not stop there as the glossing over, and indeed outright acceptance, of assumed *hierarchical* biological distinctions between humans and nonhuman animals leaves sociologically unchallenged the inequalities associated with being nonhuman. Sociologists such as Irvine (2007) and Arluke and Sanders (1996) advocate a deconstruction of this gloss. They argue that there is a good deal of evidence that shows that many nonhuman animal species are more complex than is assumed. Of course, a focus on notions of complexity can lead to a range of problems. It could be inferred, for example, that assumptions about complexity support rather than refute notions of hierarchical relationships as it is *only* because some nonhuman animals are judged complex that they are worthy of being the subject matter of sociology, whilst those who are deemed less complex are seen as unworthy of notice. Accepting this vital point, if sociologists turn their attention to nonhuman animals as autonomous beings, sociological study could do much to enhance understanding of interactions between humans and nonhuman animals, among nonhuman animals, and among humans (Arluke and Sanders 1996. P. 57).

So, returning to problematic one, it is hard to understand why human relationships with nonhuman animals should be seen as, at best, marginal or, at worst, irrelevant to the traditional acceptable remit of sociological inquiry. Sociology can learn much from exploring the multiplicity of human nonhuman animal relationships, as Franklin (1999) (among others) has shown. However, Franklin points out that there is scope for a sociology of human nonhuman animal relations that is not solely about description of these relationships, because the sites of such relationships associated with, for example, farming, food, sport, experimentation, companion animals, and tourism have become 'increasingly contentious and conflictual' (1999, p. 2). This brings me to problematics two and three, which centre on the 'permissibility' of advocacy-oriented sociology and the 'admissibility' of nonhuman animal-advocacy to advocacy-oriented sociology. In order to consider these two problematics first I turn my attention to the purpose of sociology.

'facts', values, advocacy and the purpose of sociology

It is useful to think about the purpose of sociology as this assists in consideration of the second problematic that I have referred to, which is the 'permissibility' of advocacy-oriented sociology^{vi}. Martyn Hammersley offers a distinction between what he sees as two related purposes of sociology; the functional purpose (what purpose *does* it serve to the world) and the moral purpose (what purpose *should* it serve) (1998, p. 1.3). For Hammersley, the functional purpose is to be 'no more than a source of specialised factual knowledge about the world' (1998, p. abstract). In this regard, Hammersley acknowledges his debt to Auguste Comte (1975 [1851-54]), who described sociology as the scientific study of society *as it really is*. Comte (1975 [1851-54]) sought to distance sociology from previous studies of society that applied theological approaches (which saw society as an expression of God's will) and metaphysical approaches (which saw society as a natural phenomenon) as, he argued, such approaches tended to concentrate on how society *should be*. But Comte's plea for a straightforward approach is not as straightforward as it might sound, not least because the way in which society is conceived in the first place shapes the conclusions that might come from a study of society as it 'really' is. For example, recalling the previous discussion about the place of nonhuman animals in sociology we can see that there is dispute about what is 'society'. For Mead, the social world is inhabited by humans alone and thus, for him, a sociology of society as it is should centre on humans in the world of humans. Bryant's view of the human world contrasts with that of Mead. Bryant observes that the human world is populated by nonhuman animals and thus a sociological focus on society as it is, should make the zoological connection^{vii}. All the same, Mead and Bryant seem to see eye to eye on the notion that sociology should commit itself to studying the social world (whichever way it is conceptualized) as it is rather than on how it should be. Hammersley's approach to sociology concurs with this.

Hammersley sets out his twofold distinction about the purpose of sociology in critique of Gouldner's (1975) reflexive sociological project. Gouldner is critical of a factual-only sociological approach as he rejects the idea that sociology is a value-free enterprise that should disregard questions of morality (1975, p. 25). In contrast to seeing sociology as the study of society as it is, Gouldner (1970) argues that sociology can provide the basis of 'right living'. He seeks to demolish what he understands to be the myth of value-freedom in sociology, instead arguing that 'value-related work' has a long tradition in sociological study. Most fundamentally, he insists, values 'shape the sociologist's selection of problems, his (sic) preferences for certain hypotheses or conceptual schemes, and his neglect of others..... [so] in this sense, there is and can be no value-free sociology' (1964, p. 215). In terms of this paper, choosing to study nonhuman human animal relations is inherently no more or less value-related than choosing to study economic class relations or gender relations. In addition, Gouldner observes that a range of sociologists have published work that expresses their moral viewpoint. For example, he notes that members of the Chicago School focused on the degrading effects of hospitalisation in a

psychiatric hospital (1964, p. 210). Thinking about human nonhuman animal relations, sociologists working in the field of animal studies might focus on the detrimental and degrading effects of industrialized farming for nonhuman animals engaged in such places and for low paid humans employed there (e.g. see Wilkie 2010).

Gouldner's notion of the primary place of values in sociology follows the thoughts of Mills (1970 [1959]). Mills defines sociology as the study of problems and problems, he argues, are always associated with values because problems cannot be devised or expressed unless the attendant values (along with any threat to them) are made known (1970 [1959], p. 144). For Mills, the central values of freedom and reason are the nub of sociology as sociology concerns, in his words, the 'conditions and tendencies that seem to imperil these two values and the consequences of that imperilment for the nature of man (sic) and the making of history' (1970 [1959], p. 145). Obviously, Mills centres his discussion on sociology of the human, however, his points are effective when we include Bryant's zoological connection. For example, humanocentric values are invoked when sociological studies of the problems of power and the use of pharmaceuticals leave unquestioned, and indeed seem to uncritically accept, the use of nonhuman animals for testing such products (e.g. see Buswell, 2006, p. 303). Thus, problems and values are interlinked. In the study of problems, Fred H. Blum comments, for Mills 'Facts without values are meaningless. Values without facts are mere abstractions' (1964, p 164). Like Mills, Gouldner (1964) insists on a commitment to values in sociology but, warns Hammersley, this commitment could lead sociology into considerable problems.

Hammersley suggests that Gouldner's position leads him to depart from 'sociological explanatory mode' into what Hammersley describes as 'rational talk about the mission of sociology' (1998, p. 1.5) . Hammersley comments that 'What is envisaged here is a continuing dialectic between sociological theory and practice...[which Gouldner sees]... as forming part of a wider political process in which the structure of the whole society is transformed, facilitated by a strong relationship between radical sociologists and political activities; albeit with some autonomy preserved on both sides' (1998, p. 3.3). Hammersley dubs this a 'grand conception' of sociology's role that could, he warns, expose sociology to bias, because it could lead the sociologist to prioritise her or his values over truth (1998, p. 4.1). He concludes that sociologists should focus entirely on the factual and we should 'do this in a way that takes no account of whether we believe what we are studying is good or bad' (1998, p. 4.5). Perhaps Hammersley is seeing too much advocacy in Gouldner's position because, although Gouldner acknowledges the central role of values, he seems to reject advocacy-oriented sociology (Hollands and Stanley, 2009, 2). Gouldner argues that knowledge claims must be 'sociologically credible and politically transformative at the same time' (Hollands and Stanley, 2009, 2.8). Thus, sociologists can further the possibilities of emancipation through sociological study, but sociological theory should not be subordinate to advocacy.

It is useful to turn to Michael Burawoy at this point to try to unpick some of the issues here. Burawoy (2005) engages with concerns about advocacy-oriented sociology by referring to the more acerbic views espoused by the sociologist Irving Louis Horowitz (1993). Horowitz claims that 'Sociology has largely become a repository of discontent, a gathering of individuals who have special agendas, from gay and lesbian rights to liberation theology' (1993, p. 12). He is embittered by what he sees as the destruction of the objectivity and authority of sociology as, he laments, 'The consequence of the influx of ideologists and special interests has been the outflow of scientists' (1993, pp. 12-13). Burawoy is, perhaps, somewhat perplexed by Horowitz's complaint of the politicization of sociology (2005, p. 278). Horowitz himself argues that sociology is part of what he calls 'the continued struggle for a humane world' (1971, preface) and Burawoy (2005) sees the political direction of sociology as giving room for making a better world. This making of a better world is a characteristic of Burawoy's conceptualization of sociology as a field that takes in four ideal-typical forms; professional sociology (i.e. based in accumulated bodies of knowledge), policy-oriented sociology (i.e. in service of a goal defined by a client), public sociology (i.e. in conversation with publics), and critical sociology (i.e. that promotes new research areas and examines professional sociology with a view to making it aware of its biases and silences (2005, p. 271). Burawoy sees Gouldner's reflexive approach to sociology as central in this regard. Even though Gouldner seems to be opposed to advocacy-oriented sociology, his general support of a close relationship between sociology and values led to the development of a critical sociology that has become more radical (e.g. see Hollands and Stanley (2009)) in that it is often associated with advocacy-oriented sociology. Among the examples noted by Burawoy is the call by Dorothy Smith (1987a) for 'A Sociology for Women'.

Smith argues that claims of objectivity in sociology come from the male standpoint which, although 'appearing to view the world from no place, in fact operates from the standpoint of the patriarchal relations of ruling' (1987a, p. 221). This evident standpoint 'discredits sociology's claim to objective knowledge' (Smith 1987a, p. 221). To counter this, Smith (1987a) advocates women's standpoint, which reclaims the voice of women and all other disenfranchised members of society. In doing so Smith does not abandon objectivity, rather she refashions it. She argues for objectivity 'in the minimal sense' where 'we can "test" different accounts against the actuality' (Smith, 1987a, pp. 122-3). Donna J. Haraway refers to feminist objectivity as 'situated knowledge' (1991, p. 188), which can be held accountable because it makes clear its partiality (1991, p. 188 - 190). Although sociology such as this has been criticized (for example by Hammersley and by Horowitz), Liz Stanley observes that such advocacy-oriented sociology has become mainstream (2000, pp. 60-61). This is evidenced in its appearance as an unquestioned feature of discussion in some textbooks. For example, in his well known social research methods textbook Alan Bryman (2008) points out that women's standpoint is put into practice in feminist research. He notes that, for feminist researchers,

'to do research on women in an objective, value-neutral way would be undesirable (as well as being difficult to achieve) because it would be

incompatible with the values of feminism. Instead, many feminist researchers advocate a stance that extols the virtues of a commitment to women and to exposing the conditions of their disadvantage in a male-dominated society' (2008, p. 103).

Thus, Smith's sociology is distinct from sociology that claims a conventional notion of objectivity as her sociology reveals its standpoint and adopts an advocacy-oriented approach. Nevertheless, although advocacy-oriented sociology such as this has become mainstream, advocacy is not seen as equally acceptable or tolerable for all oppressed groups. This seems to be the essence of the view expressed by the referee (above) in their seeming acceptance of advocacy-oriented work in sociology, yet a questioning of whether advocacy for nonhuman animals in sociology is appropriate.

This calls to mind Howard S. Becker's observation that '...the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side are we on' (1967, p. 239). All understandings are partial but all understandings are not tolerated equally (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p. 11). Feminist researchers and theorists, such as Smith, have been very successful in arguing that taking the standpoint of women permits a fuller understanding of societies and of social and power relations within societies. However, Smith sees her sociological approach as being applicable to a broader spectrum of devalued groups as she suggests that sociological enquiry 'can begin from the position of any member of the society, explicating the problematic of her or his experience as a sociological problematic' (1987a, p. 99). But it seems that this can become highly contentious when it is applied to advocacy for nonhuman animals. This brings me to my third problematic, which is the admissibility of nonhuman animals to advocacy-oriented sociology.

sociology for humans and nonhuman animals

Feminist sociologists have sought to make plain their position and many have chosen an advocacy-oriented approach in their work. Thus, as Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger point out, 'many feminists want both to enable the voices of Others to be heard, and to create social and political change for or on behalf of those Others' (1996, p. 20). My focus in this paper is on sociological engagement with the material reality of the Others who are nonhuman animals. Of course, human nonhuman animal relations differ greatly cross-culturally and historically, however, it would be hard to deny that nonhuman animals are oppressed and exploited by humans, and humans benefit from this oppression and exploitation. Yet, sociology has traditionally failed to report on this oppression. Ted Benton's (1993) work is a notable exception. This early sociological work on human nonhuman animal relations focuses attention on the countless ways in which nonhuman animals are used as sources of economic profit for powerful humans (1993, p. 63). For instance, Benton's nine broad categories of exploitation include the construction of nonhuman animals as private property, the use of nonhuman animals to replace or enhance human labour and the use of nonhuman animals to meet human bodily needs (1993, p. 62 - 66). Such early critical sociological works that centre on human

nonhuman animal relations are few and far between. Although there are more now, still there are fewer than we might expect, given the prevalence and endurance of the oppression of nonhuman animals. Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg provide one possible explanation for this. In their discussion of feminist standpoint methodologies they argue that 'Dominant groups are especially poorly equipped to identify oppressive features of their own beliefs and practices' because 'their activities in daily life do not provide them with the intellectual and political resources necessary' (2005, p.2101). This problem of limited intellectual and political resources connects with accusations of bias which are most often levelled at sociological work that 'gives credence, in any serious way, to the perspective of the subordinate group in some hierarchical relationship' (Becker, 1967, p. 240). In contrast superordinates 'are seen as having a more inclusive picture and as having the right to define the way things are' (Becker, 1967, p. 240). Critical Animal Studies seeks to challenge the problems associated with lack of challenge to humanocentric perspectives and concerns about taking a standpoint on the human oppression of nonhuman animals by developing analyses in which understanding of the material experiences of nonhuman animals is central (Twine, 2010, p. 8).

Like the broader field of Animal Studies, Critical Animal Studies is a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary field (Cudworth, 2011, Twine 2010). However, unlike Animal Studies, which focuses on the study of nonhuman animals, sociologists working in the field of Critical Animal Studies take an explicitly *for* nonhuman animals approach. Sociological approaches in this field draw on a range of perspectives, (for example, feminist theorizing, Marxist perspectives, Gouldner's reflexive sociology, and Burawoy's critical sociological approach^{viii}), to problematise and query traditional sociological assumptions about human nonhuman animal relations. This problematizing of such relations involves advocacy for nonhuman animals. In this field, sociologists such as Erica Cudworth (2011), Leslie Irvine (2007), David Nibert (2002, 2003) and Richard Twine (2010) are explicit in their advocacy for nonhuman animals. Such work seeks to unsettle ontological frameworks (used in sociology and beyond) that divide humans and nonhuman animals along hierarchical lines; frameworks that underpin yet render invisible the human oppression of nonhuman animals. As we have seen above, advocacy-oriented sociology has become mainstream thus it could be argued that advocacy-oriented sociology has entered a newer 'tradition' of sociology, but this newer revised, reflexive and critical tradition is still largely focussed on the oppression of devalued human groups. As vital as this focus is, it leaves unquestioned the oppression of nonhuman animals. The essential work that sociology does regarding the questioning of the naturalization of the oppression of devalued groups of humans is extended by sociologists working in the field of Critical Animal Studies. The feminist concept of intersectionality is central to the Critical Animal Studies response to the oversight in the newer sociological tradition. Perspectives that centre on intersectionality provide a challenge to the disregarding of the oppression of nonhuman animals by centring on the complexities of oppressions associated with various and compound differences.

The concept of intersectionality is a crucial concept in reflexive feminist theory (Cole 2009, p. 173). The concept was honed by feminist theorists and anti-racist theorists

in response to charges that the focus of their studies had, in the past, centred on 'the most privileged members of subordinate groups' (Cole 2009, p. 172). Intersectionality is an analytic approach that recognizes and responds to multiple differences at one and the same time. In doing so it centres on the experiences of groups holding 'multiple disadvantaged statuses' and observes that 'some members of disadvantaged groups also hold privileged identities' (Cole, 2009, p. 173). In the reflexive field of Critical Animal Studies the concept of intersectionality is crucial (Twine 2010). Work in Critical Animal Studies incorporates human nonhuman animal relations as an intersectionalized juncture, which exposes the intersections between the domination of nonhuman animals and other systems of domination. Carol Adams observes that some groups of people and all nonhuman animals are cast as Others (1995, p. 78). Centring on racist discourses as one example, she argues that 'When white racism uses an animalizing discourse against black people it demonstrates the way supremacist ideology inscribes intersecting forms of otherness (races and species)' (Adams, 1995, p. 80). In addition, as we have seen, taking into account the intersectionality of oppressions involves, as Elizabeth, R. Coles (2009) makes clear, taking account of the privileged identities that some members of devalued groups can also hold. A posthumanist reading of intersectionality is fundamental here (Twine 2011, p. 12). Although a slippery concept (Cudworth, 2011), Cary Wolfe's (2010) posthumanist approach seeks to overcome humanocentric ways of looking at the world and rejects classic divisions found in sociology (and beyond) such as human and animal, self and no-self and intelligence and instinct. A posthumanist approach to intersectionality facilitates dialogue between the challenge to the humanocentric standpoint with recognition of the complexities of oppressions associated with various and compound differences associated with being human and nonhuman. As Barbara Hayles notes, 'human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity' (1999, p.5). If we move away from formulating the 'human' as 'the chief point of reference' (Philo, 1998, p. 54), sociology can tell us much about the oppression of nonhuman animals and about the intersections between the oppression of nonhuman animals and the oppression of devalued groups of humans.

Let me return to my two central questions; should sociology include the study of nonhuman animals and can sociology advocate for nonhuman animals? The answer to question one is clearly 'yes'. Our lives are infused with nonhuman animals and we are embedded in multifaceted life worlds. For sociology to be about societies in all their complexities it must recognise this. Sociology has a great deal to offer to our understanding of human relations with nonhuman animals. Thus, nonhuman animals should be essential to sociological studies. It is not easy to see why this should be controversial.

Question two seems to be more controversial. Although advocacy-oriented sociology has become more acceptable and mainstream (though still criticized by some sociologists, Hammersley among them), advocacy for nonhuman animals is largely seen as outside the remit of sociology. Arluke suggests that such a standpoint might be a symptom of 'political and psychological insecurities' among sociologists who see sociological inquiry about the oppression of nonhuman animals

as debasing the study of important human oppressions (2002, p. 1). It is a sobering thought to think that sociology could be upholding rather than questioning hierarchies of oppressions. However, there is more to it than this. Sociologists are humans and, as humans, we benefit from the privileges of being human rather than nonhuman. Nibert comments that,

‘Members of the discipline [sociology], who like most other humans in society partake in the privileges derived from entangled oppressions – such as eating and drinking substances derived from the bodies of “others”, wearing their skin and hair, and enjoying the entertainment value their exploitation provides – can do so only by accepting the self-interested realities crafted by powerful agribusiness, pharmaceutical and other industries that rely on public acquiescence in oppressive social arrangements. Privilege is not so easy to give up. Silence, denial and substantial intellectual acrobatics are necessary for oppression in all forms to continue’ (2003, pp. 20-21)

Anatol Rapoport observes that ‘the self proclaimed detached objectivity of the sociologists is not objectivity at all but a commitment to a *status quo* by people who have internalized a set of values’ (1964, p. 102). Our values inform our lives, our notions of what is sociology and our ideas about how sociology should be done. A critical approach to sociology encourages reflection upon our own standpoints; standpoints that belie the possibility of objectivity and in which the standpoint of human remains the most unchallenged of all. Sociology has so much to offer the study of human nonhuman animal relations, as is evidenced by the work that is being done in the field. Professional sociologists (for example journal referees) have a key role to play in enabling this work to move from margins to centre in published sociology.

notes

ⁱ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, London School of Economics 2011.

ⁱⁱ The name of the journal was not revealed when the paper was presented to the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, London School of Economics 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ The paper was published..... Author 2010

^{iv} Nibert adds that, in sociology, nonhuman animals ‘to the extent that they can be – [can be studied] in the absence of human imposition’ (2003, p. 21).

^v However, Corwin Kruse (2002) notes some disquiet among sociologists in the United States in reaction to the development of the ASA group.

^{vi} Especially pertinent here as a recent special issue of *The Sociological Review* was devoted to ‘imagining the political’ in sociology, (for example see Nickie Charles and Dennis Smith’s (2010) editorial introduction to the special issue).

^{vii} Sociologists such as Leslie Irvine (2007) and Arnold Arluke and Clifton Sanders (1996) argue that there is a good deal of evidence that shows, for example, that many other animal species see their selves as objects and are more complex creatures than is assumed. For this reason they can be the subject matter of sociology.

^{viii} Alvin Gouldner and Michael Burawoy overlook nonhuman animals. For example, Richard Twine identifies the problems with Burawoy’s view that sociology is about ‘defending the interests of humanity’ (2010, p. 7)

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