

Humans and Other Animals: Sociology's Moral and Intellectual Challenge

by David Nibert, Department of Sociology, Wittenberg University

Abstract

Sociology, narrowly defined and almost universally practiced as the study of human society, is limited in its benefits to human animals because it ignores how hegemonically crafted and unjust human social arrangements are intertwined with the oppressive treatment of other animals. This article promotes a wider definition of sociology and its practice, one that includes the lives and experiences of other species. The analysis uses a recrafted minority group theory that highlights the entangled oppression of humans and other animals. A historical-materialist reflection on relationships between humans and other animals demonstrates the efficacy of this more inclusive theory. Sociologists must become aware of and engage this wider approach to the study of society in order to understand how social arrangements create oppressive conditions for both humans and other animals and to increase the possibility for the discipline to have substantive impact on deteriorating societal and global conditions.

Introduction

Anthropology is profoundly anthropocentric, as Barbara Noske has observed.

[A]nimals tend to be portrayed as passive objects that are dealt with and thought and felt about. Far from being considered agents or subjects in their own right, the animals themselves are virtually overlooked by anthropologists. They and their relations with humans tend to be considered unworthy of anthropological interest. Most anthropologists would think it perfectly natural to pay little or no attention to the way things look, smell, feel, taste or sound to the animals involved. Consequently, questions pertaining to animal welfare in the West or in the Third World rarely figure in anthropological thought (1993:185).

The same can be said of sociology, particularly in the United States. While many sociologists bring the power of sociological analysis to a range of social issues and to different forms of oppression,

challenging tradition, convention and existing political-economic arrangements, as a rule most sociologists in the U.S. accept human treatment of other animals¹ as normal and natural. The reluctance of most sociologists to recognize the elite-driven arrangements that oppress other animals and to bring them into scholarly and public focus highlights the question asked by Alfred McClung Lee: “Sociology for Whom?” (Lee 1978). Sociological acquiescence in the socially constructed perception and treatment of other animals only perpetuates the grotesque consequences for countless numbers of both humans and other animals and does little to challenge an unjust and unsustainable global political economy — one that is decidedly *dysfunctional*. This paper will suggest a theoretical device to further the development of a more inclusive sociology — one that advances the study of *society*, not just *human* society — and will use this device to make a case for including other animals as subjects in the realm of sociological inquiry.

Linkages of Racism, Sexism and Speciesism

Most social scientists, and many liberation activists around the world, promote the idea that the oppression of various groups is deeply grounded in the institutional arrangements and belief systems of human societies. This is to say that oppressive treatment of groups of humans is not natural or inevitable; rather, it is part of the cultural practices that are deeply established in social arrangements. Daniel Rossides summarizes the findings and perspectives of such scholars and activists when he writes that discrimination against devalued groups is “socially induced and maintained” (1997: 19).

Many sociologists now accept the idea that the oppression of various devalued groups in human societies is not independent and unrelated; rather, the arrangements that lead to various forms of oppression are intricately woven together in such a way that the exploitation of one group frequently augments and compounds the mistreatment of others. Margaret Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins are at the forefront of a rapidly growing number of sociologists who regard race, class and gender as “interlocking” and “interactive systems” that should be ana-

lyzed in the context of “social institutions and belief systems” (1992: xii). Social activist and writer Suzanne Pharr puts it this way:

It is virtually impossible to view one oppression . . . in isolation because they are all connected . . . They are linked by a common origin — economic power and control — and by common methods of limiting, controlling and destroying lives. There is no hierarchy of oppressions. Each is terrible and destructive. To eliminate one oppression successfully, a movement has to include work to eliminate them all or else success will always be limited and incomplete (Pharr 1988: 53).

Over the past three decades a number of scholars and activists have denounced “speciesism” and compared it explicitly to racism and sexism (Singer 1990; Regan 1982, Spiegel 1996). The application of sociological ideas furthers an examination of the legitimacy of such comparisons. First, though, a challenge to the customary definition of two important terms is necessary. The appropriateness of the term *minority group* must be reconsidered; a more accurate and inclusive term is recommended in its place. Then, the term *speciesism* will be interpreted from a sociological vantage point.

The term minority group was coined early in the 20th century to refer to groups that differed from the one that controlled society. Initially used to refer to *ethnic* minorities, sociologists now commonly use the term to refer to any group in human society whose members differ from the controlling group (Sagarin 1971). Unfortunately, for many years most sociologists portrayed controlling group members as normative or typical members of society, while minority group members have been viewed as “alien” or “special” (Nibert 1996). What is more, traditional academic definitions of minority group have largely soft-pedaled the causes, consequences and realities of the frequently oppressive social arrangements imposed on minority groups, often making them appear to be both natural and inevitable. As a result, the term minority group has been used extensively because it does not imply a critique of basic social arrangements.

Not surprisingly, due in part to the widespread use of the euphemistic term minority group, most who benefit from the privilege that

stems from the exploitation of such groups seldom are motivated or encouraged to become aware of and reflect on their material and psychological stake in oppressive social arrangements. Consequently, the ostensibly objective term minority groups should be replaced with one that is more accurate and straightforward — “oppressed groups.”

The following definition of “oppressed group” is derived in large part from an analysis of oppression developed by Iris Young (1990). *An oppressed group shares physical, cultural or economic characteristics and is subjected, for the economic, political and social gain of a privileged group, to a social system that institutionalizes its exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, deprivation or vulnerability to violence.* This term is more forthright than “minority group,” its euphemistic counterpart, and is inclusive of humans of color, humans living in poverty, women, humans who are older, humans with disabilities and humans with different sexual orientations and also can include *other animals*. The term “oppressed group” not only is more appropriate and honest but also avoids the human-centered concept of minority groups and helps examine the prevailing view that human use and mistreatment of other animals lies in the realm of the “natural affairs.”

The second theoretical adjustment needed for examination of the comparison of racism, sexism and speciesism is a clear conceptualization of the term *speciesism*. The view that speciesism is prejudice or discrimination, a view promoted by many advocates and defenders of other animals, impedes an examination of the social structural causes of oppression of other animals. Sociologists tend to use the suffix “ism” in a more specific way than what is generally meant by those talking about speciesism. Most sociologists consider racism, as well as sexism, classism and other “isms,” to be ideologies. That is, they are neither prejudice nor mistreatment. Rather, an ideology is *a set of socially shared beliefs that legitimates an existing or desired social order*. Treatment of the term speciesism as ideology will thus assist in furthering an understanding of the causes of human mistreatment of

other animals and in comparing their treatment with that of other devalued groups.

The application of the sociological perspective in general, then, and selected minority group theory in particular, to the oppression of other animals holds a great deal of promise for expanding the understanding of the causes of speciesism and its relationship to, and entanglement with, the oppression of devalued groups of humans.

In exploring the parallels and entanglements of racism, sexism and speciesism it is helpful to turn to Donald Noel's 1968 theoretical framework to explain the origin of ethnic stratification (Noel 1968). Noel maintained that ethnic stratification was the product of three interactive forces: (1) competition for resources, or some form of exploitation of one group by another, (2) unequal power and (3) ethnocentrism — "the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (Sumner 1906: 13). While his theory made room for social-psychological considerations, they were placed in the context of structural forces. The value of Noel's theory is not just its close linking of material motivation with issues of power and belief systems but also its distillation of complex and interdependent social forces into a compact and readily understood model.

Noel's model will be revised somewhat in this analysis of the comparison of the oppression of humans and other animals into a three-pronged theoretical device that accentuates the economic context of most episodes of competition and exploitation. Moreover, the consideration of unequal power will be focused largely on the use of the various powers that are vested in those who control the state. Finally, the concept of ethnocentrism will be regarded here as a process primarily fueled by a larger system of ideological control.

This modified version of Noel's theory of ethnic stratification, which the author has referred to previously as the *Theory of Oppression* (Nibert 2002), has substantial application to an analysis of the oppression of other animals. The motivating factor — the pursuit of economic self-interest — is easily applied to humans' displacement,

exploitation and extermination of other animals as human society expands. First, humans compete with other animals for economic resources, including the use of land. Second, exploitation of other animals serves numerous economic ends for human animals, providing sources of food, power, clothing, furniture, entertainment and research tools.

This theory also points to the importance of power. One important aspect of power is the ability of one group to exert its will over another, regardless of resistance. Abuses of power are seen throughout history as various human groups have devised weapons and techniques to dominate other animals and to displace, control, capture, exploit or exterminate them. The most concentrated form of power for most of the past 10,000 years has been the *state*.

Finally, ideological conditioning is the third essential requirement for oppressive social arrangements. Oppression requires rationalization and legitimation; it must appear as the right thing to do, both to the oppressing group and in the eyes of others. A set of ideas that devalues an entire group — an ideology such as racism, sexism or speciesism — thus is socially constructed. That ideology explains and supports the development and perpetuation of social institutions that foster the elimination or exploitation of the oppressed group. Moreover, the ideology justifying that action is promulgated throughout the social system in order to garner public acceptance and reduce dissent. Over time, these socially constructed ideas will come to be accepted as real and true, and the “lower” or “special” position of the oppressed group will be viewed as the natural order of things, promoting ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism.

Generally speaking, then, humans tend to disperse, eliminate or exploit a group they perceive to be unlike themselves (an outgroup or the “other”), particularly when it is in their economic interests to do so. Next, the oppressing group must have the power to subordinate members of the at-risk group. While physical force is the key to this subordination, such force is usually vested in part in political control. Those who exercise political control wield the power of the state, with the

ability to make and oversee the implementation of law. Finally, ideological manipulation fuels prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory acts, which help protect and maintain oppressive economic and social arrangements by making them appear natural and, thus, acceptable.

This model is based on the supposition that oppressive treatment of entire groups, including other animals, is a systemic phenomenon and cannot be explained by biological reductionism. Significantly, while this model depicts systemic oppression as occurring in a linear fashion, in reality the various aspects of the system are largely interdependent and operate more or less simultaneously. The reciprocal influences are not entirely symmetrical, due to the primary influence of material and economic considerations.

Historical Roots of Oppression

The economic factors that primarily cause the oppression of humans and other animals can be traced to the latter stages of hunting and gathering society. Systematic stalking and killing of other animals contributed to other inequalities, such as the devaluation of women. Hunting shaped relations between female and male humans largely because the bodies of other animals became a prized asset and killing them enhanced male prestige and privilege. Men achieved elevated prestige through the acquisition and distribution of resources derived from the bodies of other animals, even though women generally provided more reliable, if more mundane, forms of nourishment and resources through foraging. What is more, the decrease that hunting caused in men's participation in foraging and in caring for children and others needing assistance no doubt required women to devote more of their time to these tasks — resulting in less time for rest and leisure. Concomitantly, the increased labor and caretaking exacted from women freed males to increase the time they could devote to hunting. The developing mistreatment and exploitation of women and of other animals each was based upon and compounded by the other — a constant historical pattern.

The advent of early agricultural society brought with it opportunities for individual privilege and power — primarily for elite males

— by increasing the possibilities for systematic oppression. Countless humans were assigned to hegemonically created social positions of “slave” and “serf” that devalued them, collectively and personally. So it was with other animals, who were relegated to such social positions as “livestock” and “game” and whose exploitation greatly facilitated the development of highly stratified and oppressive agricultural societies. Untold numbers of “others” were yoked to pestles, plows, wagons and chariots for their entire lives, while countless other individuals were used as currency or devoured as victuals — primarily by the privileged. Humans and other animals were forced to fight each other to the death to amuse elites and to distract the masses from their daily experiences and from consideration of the sources of their deprivation. Similar entertainment and diversionary uses of devalued others occurred during the Middle Ages, when manorial lords and high-placed Church officials continued mass exploitation. Under such conditions, devalued others were also scapegoated for system ills, as in the case of women and cats who were scapegoated for individual or collective misfortunes and executed as witches and witches’ accomplices.

Capitalism largely continued the 10,000-year-old tradition of exploiting humans and other animals to create wealth and privilege for the few, exploitation that continued to bind the fate of devalued humans and other animals. For instance, the enclosure movements in Europe forced exploited humans out of the countryside, where the land they used was taken to raise captive sheep. The hair of sheep was taken and sent to developing urban areas where those displaced from the land, transformed into an urban proletariat, suffered in textile mills. The Irish, subjugated by the British military, were forced off their land; much of it then was used to raise cows, whose bodies were sent back to feed the elite in England. In the Western hemisphere, humans such as John Jacob Astor killed innumerable other animals — whose skin and hair was worn largely by elites to advertise their elevated social status — while exploiting indigenous humans. Meanwhile, countless other animals were massacred or “cleared” from the land so that humans of color could be forced to produce profitable cash crops there. Cattle barons accrued great wealth raising cows for slaughter while the “meat

producers” exploited workers who had the task of killing and dismembering other animals; contaminated and tainted “meat” was sold to the public and the U.S. military at inflated prices.

The 20th century brought corporate dominance of the economy, and millions of farmers were forced from the countryside as the capitalist imperative for growth and expansion fueled large-scale factory farming. Food, especially “meat,” is very abundant in affluent nations today, an availability supplemented by nonstop, widespread and manipulative advertisements.

Few are aware of the terrible costs associated with the food abundance in advanced capitalist nations, and of the inherent unsustainability of the affluent’s culinary opulence, particularly their consumption of “meat.” Numerous agencies and organizations, including the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Cancer Society and the American Heart Association, have linked high levels of “meat” consumption to such conditions as diabetes, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, stroke and certain forms of cancer (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1988). The increasing consumption of “meat” and “dairy” products is also linked to the growing problem of obesity in the United States. A 1999 study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control found that the number of citizens considered obese — defined as being more than 30 percent over ideal body weight — was one in five, up from one in eight in 1991 (Crossette 2000).

The U.S. hamburger culture has also taken a toll on the nation’s youth. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the number of overweight children increased more than 50 percent during the last two decades of the 20th century, and the number of extremely obese children nearly doubled during the same period (Schmidt 1999). Diets based largely on the consumption of “meat” and “dairy” products have serious effects for the young. Children’s health care providers are taking notice, particularly of the health problems associated with rising rates of obesity in children.

Due to corporate machinations in an economic system characterized by greed and an incessant drive to maximize profits, the Worldwatch Institute's 2000 report estimated that 1.2 billion humans, *the largest number it ever reported*, are "underfed and undernourished," while another 1.2 billion are "eating too much or too much of the wrong food." The United States has become the most overfed, undernourished, and overweight society in the world.

It is believed that, when humans consume the flesh or secretions of other animals, they are consuming antibiotic residues that compromise their own bodies' immune systems and increase the risk that antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria will develop. Moreover, there is a risk that new bacteria in other animals that are unresponsive to existing antibiotics could be passed on to humans. Due to factory farming practices, and the powerful presence of corporate agribusiness inside the U.S. Department of Agriculture, increasing production and consumption of tainted "meat" also is related to several food-borne illnesses, including the potentially lethal E. coli bacteria.

In a nation that is supposed to be the epitome of capitalist progress, nearly half of Americans suffer at least one chronic disease, and that number is expected to grow by 30 million within the next 20 years (Associated Press 2000). Preventive care and less refined, plant-based diets are inconsistent with the production of food under modern capitalism and with the profitable "treatment" of the diseases linked to its consumption. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the oppressed individuals defined as "food" are faceless, nameless and largely invisible.

Humans, Other Animals and the Environment

When natural scientists report on the costs of concentrated agricultural production and predict the further effects of agribusiness practices, they usually voice their warnings using such terms as "further reductions in biodiversity," "further destruction of ecosystems" and "Third World population migrations." Such abstract and arcane expressions do not make real or visible to the public the pain, suffering and death of countless humans and other animals that both underlie and result from what Vandana Shiva calls the "rotten food culture" (Shiva 1997). Pow-

erful transnational corporations use ubiquitous advertisements to exhort everyone to consume “hamburgers” and “fried chicken,” while Third World elites create poverty in their nations by taking over the land to send feed and other animals raised to be food to countries like the United States.

Feeding a privileged portion of the human population, especially under contemporary agribusiness with its emphasis on “meat” production, necessitates high levels of deforestation and desertification (the destruction of soil, rendering it infertile and desert-like), adds to air pollution (caused in no small part by the vast amounts of methane gas generated by huge populations of other animals, particularly hundreds of millions of cows), exhausts fresh water supplies and compounds already critical levels of water pollution. Few life-sustaining resources will remain for future generations of humans and other animals as long as agricultural production under capitalism exists to make profits rather than to feed the world.

A report by a panel of scientists whose work appeared in a 2001 article in the journal *Science* projects an increase in the human population from 6 billion in 2000 to 9 billion by 2050 (Tilman 2001). This increase will double the world’s food demands by mid-century, partly because people in wealthy countries will want diets rich in “meat”, which takes more resources to produce. The report suggests that, if contemporary forms of agriculture persist, by 2050 the global agricultural land base will have to increase by at least 10^9 hectares of land, resulting in the worldwide loss of forests and natural ecosystems in a total area larger than the United States. The displacement, destruction and death brought on by appropriation of so much of the remaining homeland of devalued humans and other animals would be cataclysmic. The panel writes:

Because of regional availabilities of suitable land, this expansion of agricultural land is expected to occur predominantly in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. This could lead to the loss of about a third of remaining tropical and temperate forests, savannas, and grasslands and of the services, including carbon storage, provided by these ecosystems (Tilman 2001: 283).

Pharmaceuticals and Entangled Oppressions

Economic motivation for oppression of humans and other animals can also be brought into focus by a brief look at the pharmaceutical industry. In the 1990s, the medical and biomedical-pharmaceutical industries led the successful resistance to creation of a national system of health care in the United States, leaving tens of millions in the U.S. uninsured or underinsured. At the same time, the industry staunchly defended using millions of other animals every year in horrific experiments, ostensibly for the public good. While drug companies aggressively market and promote expensive products that purport to have some therapeutic value for populations who are affluent or have health insurance, they all but ignore the tens of millions of United States citizens who are uninsured or under-insured, as well as the masses of humans around the world with few resources and little power. For example, because of the enormous demand for medicine in Africa (due in no small part to colonialist and imperialist-caused disruption and poverty), prices for drugs are higher than in the United States and Europe. According to a United Nations report, even painkillers are scarce in many Third World countries, and “many are left to die in agony from cancer and other diseases” (Crossette 2000a).

Further, while drug companies will defend research on other animals as necessary to fight diseases such as AIDS (advocates of other animals, progressive physicians and gay-rights groups like ACT-UP San Francisco dispute the efficacy of AIDS research using other animals), the companies are little interested in getting their anti-AIDS products to the millions around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, who are infected but are cash poor. Not only has the Western drug industry kept its own AIDS-related products out of reach of those in the Third World, who cannot afford them, but it also has aggressively defended patent rights to forestall Third World countries from developing generic forms of these drugs. Largely out of sight are millions of other animals whose existence and suffering is eclipsed by Madison Avenue advertising, their agony entangled with the exploitation of consumers as each form of mistreatment fuels the other.

The entangled oppression of groups of devalued humans and other animals is the material fodder for existing and emerging global disparities, exploitation and violence. What is more, structurally imposed austerity programs in debt-ridden countries have led millions of individual humans to continue, if not increase, the exploitation of other animals. They supplement their incomes by trapping, exhibiting, breeding, slaughtering, stuffing, smuggling and poaching other animals. Desperate humans sell gorillas and chimpanzees, kill elephants bearing ivory and use any other being whose exploitation and death can help them survive, or gain an edge, in the “new economic order.”

Such practices are inevitable in a selfish and profit-driven global economic system that has fostered agricultural concentration, megamergers, corporate flight, sweatshops, child labor and other problems of the new century.

The examples of the interdependent nature of oppression of humans and other animals just mentioned scarcely begin to cover the actual economic entanglement. Still, they should make clear that the treatment of devalued humans and other animals is deeply imbedded in economic arrangements and that the forms of oppression are causally connected, profoundly intertwined and reinforcing.

The State as a Primary Tool of Oppression

These economic arrangements — which are largely created by elites and which certainly facilitate their interests — have been sanctioned and protected by the various powers of the state. Military force and chauvinistic political systems have created and solidified oppression for thousands of years. From legal sanctioning of slavery to the creation of “humane” slaughter policy, the power of the state usually has been controlled by the beneficiaries of oppression. The fairly recent rise of capitalist-based globalization seeks to further reduce impediments to profit-taking as the governments of the most powerful nations package and promote trade agreements that weaken or eliminate protections for workers, consumers, other animals and the environment. They purport to “aid” less powerful and affluent nations through such international financial institutions as the International Monetary Fund

and the World Bank, which in many instances require desperation-inducing austerity plans and support the development of such land-intensive and oppressive enterprises as “cattle” ranching and “animal feed” production. In the event that indigenous peoples and displaced populations in the oppressed nations of the world resist expropriation of the land they call home and rely on for their survival, military forces of dictatorial leaders violently repress such dissent — frequently with assistance from the United States (Blum 1995).

Less obvious forms of structural violence in the economic arena result from U.S. government policies that protect agribusiness and other corporate interests through agricultural subsidies. Agribusiness in the United States receives public funds to produce “major commodities like sugar, corn, and wheat below cost” (Oxfam 2002: 3). The prices of these crops are so low that small farmers in Third World countries cannot compete or make a living and these nations become unable to be self-sufficient food providers — facilitating hunger and famine and the many diseases that follow malnutrition. Many oppressed nations have become dependent upon exports of cash crops to pay increasing debts to banking institutions in powerful capitalist nations and to purchase food.

At another level, minimalist government regulations in the United States that purport to oversee the welfare of other animals subjected to the practices of agribusiness, pharmaceutical, entertainment and other industries are underfunded, underenforced, and serve primarily as ideological subterfuge to quiet public concern.

The Social Construction of Speciesism

Oppression usually is naturalized — that is, it is made to appear as a normal and innate part of worldly existence. The metaphysical and theological ideologies that for thousands of years explained the “natural” place of the enslaved, women, children, other animals and other devalued and oppressed groups today largely have been replaced with “scientific” ideologies that justify and naturalize the contemporary socioeconomic order. The benefits and success of capitalism, the desirability of wealth and the “inferior” qualities of women, humans of

color, those with disabilities, those of advanced age and other animals are deeply woven into contemporary reality. Powerful messages coming from such diverse sources as church, school, family, state, peers and the mass media create widespread and deep acceptance — and internalization — of this socially constructed reality.

Over the past 100 years many oppressed groups have been disparaged for their alleged “low mental caliber” and consequently scaled low in a hierarchy of worth. The measurement of an individual’s or group’s value was based on the purported level of intelligence, measured or attributed in ethnocentric, anthropocentric ways. In addition, ecofeminists have observed that ideas about the hierarchy of worth are deeply entwined with patriarchy, a system of social organization in which masculinity is valued over femininity (both being social constructions). Ecofeminist Janis Birkeland put it this way:

In the dominant Patriarchal cultures, reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on those attributes associated with masculinity, a construction that is called “hierarchical dualism.” In these cultures, women have historically been seen as closer to the earth or nature. . . . Also, women and nature have been juxtaposed against mind and spirit, which have been associated in Western cosmology with the “masculine” and elevated to a higher plane of being. . . . [I]t is clear that a complex morality based on dominance and exploitation has developed in conjunction with the devaluing of nature and “feminine” values (1993: 18-19).

General acceptance of the existence and naturalness of such a hierarchy continues to legitimate oppression of other animals, women, humans of color, humans with disabilities and other devalued groups. The denigration of some groups, generated to a large degree by cupidity, is increased by high levels of socially cultivated egocentrism and is woven into both the culture and individual psyches in a way that shapes personal identities. Those who perceive themselves to be superior to others sometimes display their socially induced prejudice by acts of discrimination, frequently by creating physical, social and emotional distance between themselves and the devalued. At times, discriminatory acts are perpetrated only for the amusement value of

denigrating and harming the “lowly other” and to display the perpetrator’s power. The prevailing beliefs and values required to legitimize widespread institutionalized oppression, such as that practiced by agribusiness and the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, shape the reality and cultivate the general personality types of human members of society. In an often predatory system, where the prevailing ideology glorifies wealth and power, more humans will be inclined to accept or tolerate, if not practice, violence against those “others” who are perceived as poor, weak or powerless. The widespread acceptance of the general concept of the hierarchy of worth of living beings both rationalizes oppressive acts and arrangements and thoroughly entangles the various beliefs that arise from a hierarchical worldview. Only the rejection of the entire notion of such hierarchy can remove the ideological support for oppression of any group and begin to make all groups secure.

The important point to take from this analysis, particularly for those interested in challenging and reducing oppression, are that the principal causal factor underlying the oppression of humans and other animals is material in nature and that oppression primarily serves the interests of elites — particularly male elites. Oppression is supported by the state, and an ideological support system is manufactured to legitimate the tyrannical treatment of others.

The Future of Sociology

The social construction of speciesism is deeply entangled with the oppression of devalued humans, and such oppression has only intensified with the rapid advance of modern global capitalism. However, the unethical and chauvinistic treatment of other animals, the entanglement of oppressions and the unsustainability of the current prevailing arrangements based on this oppression all have been largely overlooked by the sociological community. Reflecting on the nature of capitalist society, R.H. Tawney observed, “The appeal of . . . [capitalist] . . . society must be powerful, for it has laid the whole modern world under its spell” (Tawney 1948: 29-30). Sociologists, particularly in the United States, certainly are not entirely immune from this spell. Members of

the discipline, 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 easy to give up. Silence, denial and substantial intellectual acrobatics are necessary for oppression of all forms to continue.

Once sociologists are capable of recognizing and reducing their own privilege, privilege fueled by exploitation legitimated by hegemonically constructed and deeply entrenched realities and buttressed by quasi- and pseudo-scientific ideas, the challenge then becomes one of crafting a more inclusive sociology. For example, instead of emphasizing the purported “lowliness” of other animals, as is frequently done in introductory textbooks, the discipline must present other animals in the spirit of embracing diversity and developing respect for difference. This paper has called for the inclusion of other animals in the study of oppressed groups and has provided a glimpse of how the exploitation of humans and other animals is inextricably tangled.

This 21st century variation of “the new sociology” (Horowitz 1964) should begin by treating other animals as subjects who have personalities, wills, desires and social relations and who are capable of experiencing both pleasure and suffering. Their lives should be studied both in relation to human animals and — to the extent that they can be — in the absence of human imposition. While the lives of other animals can be studied in the context of their own communities and societies, it is also necessary to include them in the broader use of the term *society*. The tremendous power that humans, particularly the elite, exert over the other inhabitants of the earth and the social positions assigned to groups of other animals — “livestock,” “game,” “zoo animal,” “lab animal” and so forth — require their substantive inclu-

sion in the concept of society that has hitherto referred only to human society.

A major paradigm shift is necessary to set the discipline on a new course. To further the creation of a sustainable and just world, and for the advancement of science, the question posed by Alfred McClung Lee, “sociology for whom?” should be answered: *sociology for all humans and other animals*.

Endnote

1. One of the ways in which oppression masquerades as somehow right and natural, particularly in more affluent nations, is through the use of language. The very words we use exert considerable control over our consciousness and our views of the world. I have struggled with the English language in my attempt to use words and phrases that do not automatically reflect hierarchical rankings of living beings. For example, I largely refrain from using the terms “people,” “nonhuman” and “animals,” choosing instead to use the phrase “humans and other animals.” This wording emphasizes human commonality with other inhabitants of the planet, rather than fostering a perception of separate-ness and “other-ness” that helps to rationalize disregard and mistreatment of other animals.

References

- Andersen, M.L. and Hill Collins, P. (1992). *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Associated Press. (2000). "Chronic Ills Hit Nearly 1 of 2 in U.S.," *Dayton Daily News*, 1 December, 4A.
- Birkeland, J. (1993). Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice, in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 18-19.
- Blum, W. (1995). *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Intervention since World War II*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.
- Crossette, B. (2000). "In Numbers, the Heavy Now Match the Starved." *New York Times*, January 18, A10.
- Crossette, B. (2000a). "Pain Relief Underused for Poor, Study Says." *New York Times*, February 23, A5.
- Horowitz, I.L. (1964). *The New Sociology: Essays in Social Science and Social Theory in Honor of C. Wright Mills*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, A.M. (1978). *Sociology for Whom?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- New York Times. (2000). "Obesity Rate Rising Fastest in the South." October 27, A21.
- Nibert, D. (1996). Minority Group as Sociological Euphemism. *Race, Gender & Class*, 3, 129-136.
- Nibert, D. (2002). *Animal Rights/Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Noel, D. (1968). The Theory of Ethnic Stratification. *Social Problems*, 16, 157-172.
- Noske, B. (1993). The Animal Question in Anthropology. *Society & Animals: Social Scientific Studies of the Human Experience of Other Animals*, 1, 185-187.

- Oxfam America. (2002). Oxfam Dumps Sugar at WSSD. *Oxfam Exchange*, Washington DC., 2, 3.
- Pharr, S. (1988). *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*. Little Rock: Chardon Press.
- Regan, T. (1982). *All That Dwell There: Animal Rights and Environmental Ethics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rossides, D.W. (1997). *Social Stratification: The Interplay of Class, Race, and Gender* (Third Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Sagarin, E. (1971). *The Other Minorities*. Toronto: Ginn and Company.
- Schmidt, C.W. (1999). Too Big, Too Soon? *Child*. August, 28.
- Shiva, V. (1997). *Vandana Shiva on McDonald's, Exploitation and the Global Economy*. <http://www.mcspotlight.org/people/interviews>.
- Singer, P. (1990). *Animal Liberation*, rev. ed. New York: Avon.
- Spiegel, M. (1996). *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*. New York: Mirror Books.
- Sumner, W. (1906). *Folkways*. Boston: Ginn and Company.
- Tawney, R.H. (1948 [1920]). *The Acquisitive Society*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Tilman, D. et. al. (2001). Forecasting Agriculturally Driven Global Environmental Change. *Science*, 292, 281-284.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1988). *Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health*. Pub. no. 88-50210. Washington, DC.
- Young, I. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press.