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## Confronting Cruelty

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# Confronting Cruelty

Moral Orthodoxy and the Challenge of the  
Animal Rights Movement

*by*

Lyle Munro



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To Jenny – my nearest  
and dearest



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## Acronyms

AAHR	Australian Association for Humane Research
ACIG	Animal Cruelty Investigation Group
AFBF	American Farm Bureau Federation
AHA	American Humane Association
AL (NSW)	Animal Liberation New South Wales
AL (VIC)	Animal Liberation Victoria
ALF	Animal Liberation Front
ANZFAS	Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies
ARC	Animal Rights Cambridge
ASIS	Animal and Social Issues Survey
AWI	Animal Welfare Institute
BALE	Brightlingsea Against Live Exports
BUAV	British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection
CADS	Coalition Against Duck Shooting
CIWF	Compassion in World Farming
DDAL	Doris Day Animal League
DoW	Defenders of Wildlife
FARM	Farm Animal Reform Movement
HSA	Hunt Saboteurs Association
HSU	Humane Society University
HSUS	Humane Society of the United States
iiFAR	incurably ill For Animal Rights
IPPL	International Primate Protection League
LACS	League Against Cruel Sports
MRAR	Mountain Residents for Animal Rights
NCDL	National Canine Defence League
NSMR	National Society for Medical Research
PETA	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SAPL	Society for Animal Protection Legislation
WFAD	World Farm Animal Day
WSPA	World Society for the Protection of Animals

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## Acknowledgements

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation *Beasts Abstract Not: A Sociology of Animal Protection*. Some sections are based on work that I have previously published and on a number of case studies I used in my book *Compassionate Beasts: The Quest for Animal Rights*, Praeger, Westport CT, which have been brought up to date with new material. Thus the case studies in Chapter 5 of three multi-issue and three single-issue animal organizations have been revised for this book. Additionally the case study used in Chapter 7 of the Coalition Against Duck Shooting (CADS) is drawn from two related articles I published on CADS in Munro, (1997a) "Narratives of protest: Television's representation of an animal liberation campaign", *Media International Australia*, 83, pp. 103–112 and Munro (1997b) "Framing cruelty: The construction of duck shooting as a social problem", *Society & Animals*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 137–154.

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DANKE SCHATZ



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## Chapter One

### Introduction

*Beasts abstract not.* (John Locke)

According to Freud, people need love and work to give their lives meaning. Intuitively, the idea is sound and a moment's reflection should convince most people that love and work are central to most people's well being. If love and work help to make people's lives meaningful, then we can expect that people will seek every opportunity to maximise both in their everyday lives, even in their extracurricular activities encompassing such things as leisure and social and political pursuits. I was not consciously aware of the possibilities of the love/work couplet when I began the research for this book. Yet, on reflection, the questions I asked of my informants in the interviews could be seen as an exploration of the relationship between commitment and campaigning, which is a more formal description of the notion of love and work in social movement participation. The focus in the book on the actual work of activists and advocates as they engage in collective action calls for a distinctively sociological analysis of the movement.

The initial research proposal I drew up seeking approval from the University's Ethics Committee was called 'Animal liberationists and their campaigns'. From the outset, the focus was on the individual animal liberationists (their personal background, motives, involvement and commitment to the

movement etc.) and what they did in their campaigns (the actual work involved in being an activist or advocate). The research question which frames the study is 'Why and how do people campaign on behalf of a species that is not their own?' Questions used in the interview schedule focused on the meaning of animal activism and the nature of the key campaigns; the *why* and *how* of social movement involvement are therefore central to the study and correspond to new social movement theory and resource mobilisation theory respectively.

I argue that people support the animal movement because of their abhorrence of cruelty, of what the animal movement labels as speciesism. While speciesism comes in many forms, there are three main practices – vivisection, factory farming and bloodsports – which have been identified by the movement as the worst abuses and hence the seminal campaigns of animal rights activism. Yet these putative abuses are perceived by most people outside the movement as legitimate activities and are labelled less negatively as animal research/experimentation, intensive farming and recreational hunting. Most people, it seems, are only concerned about the welfare of animals when they are the victims of gratuitous cruelty and not the allegedly institutionalised abuse that concern animal activists in the aforementioned practices. Defenders of these practices appear to have majority opinion on their side, that is, animals matter, but not as much as humans, a position which is the norm in virtually all liberal democracies where there is at best, only moderate, lukewarm concern for the welfare of animals. The philosopher Stephen Clark (1997) refers to this norm of moderate concern for animals as 'the moral orthodoxy', a stance he and the animal rights movement regard as morally bankrupt. Animal movement supporters want people to see speciesism and its consequences – the institutionalised abuse of animals – as a social problem not unlike child abuse, spouse abuse or elder abuse; that is, these abuses are morally objectionable because the victims are vulnerable populations of human and non human animals.

Eyerman and Jamieson (1991, p. 56) have pointed out that not every problem generates a social movement, and it is only those social problems that resonate with the public that give rise to social movements. For many people outside the animal movement, the idea that animal experimentation, intensive farming or recreational hunting constitutes a social problem is an alien idea. The core objective of the animal movement is to normalise this alien idea: 'If there is



a telos of social movement activity then it is the normalisation of previously exotic issues and groups' (Scott, 1990). The purpose of the animal movement and its campaigns is to stigmatise the 'legitimate' practices of animal researchers, farmers and hunters as social problems that require a social solution. By problematising activities that are taken for granted by most people, activists seek to change the way people think about animals and their treatment. The animal rights movement therefore challenges people outside the movement to question the moral orthodoxy which underpins our attitudes towards animals, namely, that animals matter, but not as much as humans. This is the norm of moderate concern for animals which characterises relations with them in the case study countries featured in this book. Put differently, while most decent people would be quick to condemn wanton cruelty to cats, dogs, horses and ponies, for example, they are unlikely to be concerned about the welfare of the many non-companion animals who routinely suffer and die in research labs, on factory farms or who are the victims of recreational hunters and shooters.

How social movements achieve their objectives constitutes the second theme in this study. Tilly (1985) contended that a movement is what it does rather than why it does it. The position taken in the present study is that both are important since one needs to know why people act as they do if one is to have a deeper understanding of social movement activism. Even so, Tilly's point is well taken and there is more emphasis in the book on the 'how' rather than the 'why' of animal activism and advocacy. In the case of the animal movement (and other new social movements), activists and advocates engage in social problems work in pressing their collective claims. Social problems work, as conceived in the book, is broadly defined to include the intellectual, practical and affective dimensions of conventional work. Eyerman and Jamieson (1991, p. 161) support the idea of new social movement activism as social problems work when they noted that social movements provide 'public spaces for thinking new thoughts, activating new actors, generating new ideas, in short, constructing new intellectual "projects"'. Similarly, Melucci (1989; 1996) showed how new social movements provide the space for challenging the values and cultural codes of a society. The animal movement does this by raising people's consciousness about cruelty to animals in its various campaigns. The animal movement's challenge – as conceptualised in this book – is prosecuted in three phases: It firstly diagnoses speciesism as a social problem,

the intellectual work of philosophers and animal advocates, and then sets out to find a solution. Secondly, the movement's prognosis, or its strategies and tactics, is to build single and multi-issue social movement organizations, preferably in conjunction with the more expressive campaigns of grassroots activists, to press these intellectual and moral claims. This constitutes the practical dimension of the movement's social problems work. Finally, the affective work of the movement is its call to action in which people's emotions are mobilised for the cause.

### **Scope and Purpose of the Book**

This book focuses on the grassroots activism and organisational advocacy of the animal movement in Australia, the UK and the USA. Why these three countries were chosen needs some explanation. Although legislation to protect animals was first enacted in England, animal protection could be described as an Anglo-American tradition. According to J. Turner (1980), the Anglo-American world in the 19th century was a separate cultural entity within the larger European civilisation. Thus it is not surprising that animal protection in both countries followed a similar pattern. Worster (1977, p. ix) also wrote of a distinctive Anglo-American tradition in the ecology movement in the late 20th century, which while 'never wholly a consensus, but withal a single dialogue carried on in a single tongue'.

Australia's early efforts in animal protection were also part of this dialogue. An Australian RSPCA was established in 1891 and by the end of the 19th century each of the colonies had its own society modelled after the English parent organization. Like its Anglo-American counterparts, the Australian RSPCA consisted of predominantly middle-class urbanites, although in the Australian case, the RSPCA attracted affluent people from rural areas as well. Historically then, the animal movement has been strongest in the UK, the USA and Australia. The present study says little about the old, welfarist organisations like the RSPCA; instead the focus is on the newer animal rights/liberation groups, which developed in the post World War II environment in the case study countries.

One of the first full-length books on the sociology of animal rights was Keith Tester's (1991) *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights*, which was based on the author's doctoral dissertation in sociology. While

the book stands out in the sociological literature as refreshingly different in its approach to animal rights, it seemed to me to have seriously misrepresented the movement as experienced by activists, advocates and supporters. Tester argued that the animal rights movement is not about animal well being at all and is only marginally concerned with animals. 'More importantly, it is part of a social project to classify and define humanity. Animals are useful for humans to be able to think human' (Tester 1991, p. 48). In Tester's view, the animal rights movement is profoundly anthropocentric since its members are concerned only with constructing a more attractive identity and a sense of superiority over lesser humans who eat, hunt, wear and generally use other animals. While identity construction is part of the motivation for animal rights activism, it is not the main motive according to animal protectionists themselves. Insider perspectives are missing in Tester's abstract study; for example, he quoted a single source who evidently disliked the sentimental term 'animal lover' as evidence of a fetish which permits people who do not necessarily like animals to campaign on their behalf. Had Tester widened his sample, he may have discovered a whole range of views among animal rights supporters.

Tester's abstract thesis is seriously flawed because it is too speculative and pays little attention to the experience of social movement participants. In a doctoral dissertation on animal liberation, Kew (1999, p. 147) has criticised Tester and argued that his thesis on the movement 'robs it of its sincerity, identity, ethics and politics'. Other critics have described Tester's book as dogmatic and unreflective (Benton, 1992), as crude and insulting (Cooper, 1992) while Singer (1992a) was surprised the book had its origins in a doctoral dissertation. To be fair, Tester did receive the occasional positive review, most notably from C. Bryant (1993) and to a lesser extent from Ritvo (1992). Tester's *Animals and Society* (1991) encouraged me to take an entirely different approach to the animal rights movement, one that is based on the insider accounts of movement supporters, advocates and activists.

It is appropriate at this point to clarify some of the terminology used in the study. Throughout the book, the designation 'animal movement' will be used as an umbrella term for the more specific terms – animal protection movement, animal welfare movement, animal liberation movement and animal rights movement – terms which will be used whenever the specific designation is appropriate. The umbrella term is justified for two reasons: firstly to avoid

the ideological and definitional quibbles which these specific terms have generated (see for example, Francione, 1996) and secondly, the term animal movement is frequently the preferred designation of movement insiders who prefer this term as they hope to avoid these internal disputes as well as to remind outside observers that the animal movement, as an umbrella term for the specific forms mentioned above, is united in its opposition to cruelty. However, according to Francione (1996) there are really two kinds of animal protectionist, the welfarist and the rightist, with the former seeking *regulation* of animal exploitation and the latter its *abolition*. This is far too strict a division as it effectively disenfranchises the many animal protectionists and leaders such as Richard Ryder, Christine Stevens, Kenneth Shapiro and the late Henry Spira who philosophically are inclined towards animal rights and programmatically towards animal welfare or animal liberation, which I argue is the pragmatic middle road between animal rights and animal welfare.

The term animal protectionist, also a widely accepted umbrella term within the movement, encompasses anyone who supports the animal movement on a continuum from animal welfare through to animal rights. I have taken a slightly different perspective to the continuum depicted by Jasper and Nelkin (1992, p. 178), who categorised American animal protectionists as welfarists at one end, fundamentalists at the other, and pragmatists in the middle. My study of animal protectionists in the three main sites of animal movement activity in the USA, the UK and Australia broadly agrees with the Jasper and Nelkin typology with one or two modifications. Their pragmatists at mid point on the continuum correspond to the animal liberationists in my study; they are more moderate than the fundamentalists or abolitionists and more radical than the welfarists. I use the term abolitionist in preference to Jasper and Nelkin's term 'fundamentalist' since it is a more accurate designation for the adherents of the animal rights philosophy espoused by Tom Regan (1984, 1987). All of these animal protectionists (welfarists, liberationists and abolitionists) follow a non-violent philosophy of animal advocacy and activism which should not be confused with extremists such as the Animal Liberation Front, whose use of violent and illegal tactics places them outside the mainstream movement.

There are a number of ways of defining activists in the social movement literature, ranging from generic social movement activism to specific animal rights activism. Oliver and Marwell (1992, p. 252) provided a generic definition

in their description of social movement activists as ‘people who care enough about some issues that they are prepared to incur significant costs and act to achieve their goals’. This generic definition has the advantage of breadth and inclusiveness and incorporates Shapiro’s (1994) ingredients of care, action and costs or ‘tensions’ in his terminology. Shapiro’s definition was an accurate statement of how his activists experienced activism at a psychological level since ‘caring, seeing and seeking’ were evidently part of their daily lives. The notion of ‘the caring sleuth’ is also close to what many people inside and outside the movement perceive as the prototype animal rights activist, namely an individual who is prepared to *do* something, no matter what the cost, about animal suffering.

However the Animals and Social Issues Survey (ASIS) that I devised revealed a further distinction relevant to animal activism. When asked to describe themselves as an activist, an advocate or a supporter in the animal movement, 46 percent chose supporter, 33 percent advocate, and only 16 percent activist; some 5 percent described themselves as animal lover, activist and advocate or activist/supporter or some similar combination of these designations. Thus one-third of the ASIS sample saw themselves as advocates compared to one half of the interviewees who used the designation ‘advocate’ rather than ‘activist’ to describe their involvement in the movement. However, with the exception of the one ‘supporter’ in the sample, all of the interviewees saw themselves as animal protectionists, either in an activist or advocate role. I argue throughout this book that these terms are often used interchangeably within the movement and there is indeed considerable overlap between them. Nonetheless, the terms are useful in distinguishing between those who practice direct action as grassroots activists and the organisational advocates who prefer lobbying and legislation to the more expressive actions of their activist colleagues. I used the terms ‘in the streets’ and ‘in the suites’ both literally and metaphorically to refer to activism and advocacy respectively, as the two main forms of animal protection practice in the case study countries.

## **Overview of the Book**

In what follows I provide a thematic overview of the book. The present chapter sets up the key question which frames the study – how and why do people campaign on behalf of a species that is not their own? The analysis of the

'why' and 'how' of animal rights activism is taken up throughout the book in an attempt to explain how the movement sets out to extend people's abhorrence of wanton cruelty involving animals to the institutionalised cruelty inherent in factory farming, vivisection and bloodsports. Chapter 2 outlines the social constructionist perspective on social problems and the conceptual framework for the book. A key concept is the notion of social problems work, which is broadly defined to incorporate the main features of social movement activism and advocacy. The epigraphs to Chapter 3 note that modern literature treats animals as a genuine problem and that the meanings we attribute to animals are social constructions. In order to make up for a deficit in this field, the chapter describes how animals feature in the mainly sociological literature of academic writing. The chapter begins with a discussion of the relevance of social movement theory to the animal problem and how the mainstream movement frames this problem. I argue that there are three main frames in animal movement activism – welfarist, liberationist and rightist – in contrast to Francione (1996) for example, who claims there are two, rights versus welfare. Animal protectionists themselves support the threefold categorisation outlined in the present study and so it is important to theorise animal protection with their concepts and practices in mind.

Throughout the book, the words of the interviewees (or informants) when quoted are given in *italics* to distinguish them from other sources. Occasionally, a comment that was expressed by more than one informant is indicated in inverted commas. Details of how the data were collected and analysed are given in the Appendix.

The remaining chapters are the substantive chapters in the book. Chapter 4 paints a broad picture of the role of cruelty and its opposite compassion in what Margalit (1996) called 'a decent society'. This chapter explains the origins and nature of speciesism and the structures of dominance of which it is a part. Why people join the animal movement and their reflections on cruelty are explained in a number of personal testimonies. The chapter also introduces the concept of caring in the context of animal welfare and rights/liberation. The concept of animal protection as social problems work is introduced in this chapter. Chapter 5 describes the movement's diagnosis of cruelty in the three seminal campaigns against vivisection, blood sports and factory farming. The role of women, particularly in the campaigns against vivisection and factory farming, seems to be more prominent than the role of men who are

more active in the campaign against recreational hunting. The chapter seeks to explain what activists find objectionable in these socially sanctioned practices and how they challenge the moral orthodoxy which underpins these practices.

One of the things they do is to build social movement organisations (SMOs). The chapter highlights the intellectual work or cognitive praxis performed by animal protectors in both multi-issue and single-issue SMOs in the three case study countries. Profiles of these SMOs suggest that they function as think tanks in carrying out their animal protection work. The chapter examines animal protection as a calling as well as activist commitment to the cause. Chapter 6 describes the strategies and tactics of animal protection work, which range from the more conventional strategies I call publicity strategies (demonstrations, pamphleteering, bearing witness) to more direct interference strategies (hunger strikes, ethical vegetarianism, undercover surveillance) all of which are described in this chapter. The affective work of animal protection is the focus of the last substantive chapter. Chapter 7 explains the animal movement's call to action and how it seeks to mobilise support by emotional appeals, dramatic animal images and advertising stories in the form of 'powerful stories' or 'atrocious tales'. A case study involving the protection of wildlife is used to illustrate the power of television images for mobilising people's emotions. Chapter 8 concludes with a summary of the main themes in the book and some critical reflections on the future of animal protection.

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## Chapter Two

### **Animal Abuse as a Social Problem**

*I am sure that as long as our movement continues to grow in this way, there will be a world in which the killing and eating of animals is considered as much a sin as theft, pollution or rape. (Christine Townend)*

This chapter outlines the research question and the theoretical and conceptual approaches taken in the book. It begins with a discussion of the utility of the theoretical orientation used in the book, namely the social construction of social problems/ social movements approach, and some possible alternatives to the approach. Next, the chapter discusses social movement theory and locates the animal rights movement within that theory. The animal movement is described as a kindred spirit of the environmental movement with similar strategies, tactics and arguments. More than most causes, animal rights is a social construction. Speciesism is constructed as a social problem by the animal movement in the way sexism and racism are constructed as social problems by the women's and civil rights movements. In explaining the approach known as 'the social construction of social problems', a distinction is made between strict and contextual constructionism. Perhaps controversially, comparisons are drawn between the linguistic disadvantage of very cognitively disabled people and the plight of



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