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# Animals and Society

An American Sociological Association Section- in-Formation

## Animals & Society Organizing Committee Members

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- Clint Sanders - University of Connecticut
- Anna Williams - University of California, San Diego
- Lisa Anne Zilney - University of Tennessee

## Join the New Animals & Society Section

David Nibert

At last we have achieved section-in-formation status! Thanks for everyone's help and support. Our next step is to recruit 300 members into this important new section. If you have not already joined the new section, please do so when you pay your ASA dues. Since we are a section-in-formation, dues are only \$5.00. If you have already paid your ASA dues for 2001 but missed joining the section, send \$5.00 to David Bachman, ASA Section Coordinator, and ask him to add you to the Animals & Society Section. (David Bachman, American Sociological Association, 1307 New York Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005-4701.) Please encourage anyone who may be interested to do the same. And please try to join us at the 2001 ASA meetings in Anaheim for our first promotional and organizational meeting.

## Welcome!

David Nibert & Anna Williams

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the American Sociological Association's Animals and Society Section Newsletter. As befits such a new endeavor, the format of this edition is highly provisional. Since this newsletter is intended to provide a forum for section members to share information and ideas, we welcome your input and encourage you to share your thoughts on what you'd like to read in these pages in the future (please e-mail your comments and suggestions to Anna Williams at [annaw59@home.com](mailto:annaw59@home.com)). It seems appropriate to begin this first issue of the Animals and Society Section Newsletter with a brief reminder of the prehistory of our group. After three years of work and two petition drives the ASA Council approved section-in-formation status for Animals & Society at its August 2000 meeting in Washington, DC.

The establishment of this section reflects the increasing popular and scholarly attention being devoted to the relationship between humans and other animals for well over two decades. Philosophers, feminists, anthropologists, psychologists—and, increasingly, sociologists—are examining the complex, profound and entangled relationships of humans and other animals. For instance, the current environmental crisis has produced a sudden decline in biodiversity, while global production saturates our lives with an enormous array of animal commodities, in the forms of food, pets, medicines, clothing and entertainment. At the same time, cultural perceptions of other animals are dramatically changing. This perceptual shift is evident in the increasing scientific rejection of the concept of other animals as instinctively driven bodies—exemplified by Descartes's metaphor of other animals as clock—or impenetrable black boxes, and the emergence of models that describe them as socially engaged agents. Although there is no consensus on the ethical implications of this reevaluation, writers with differing political views nevertheless agree that other animals are cognitive subjects that exist in specific lifeworlds.

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## Anaheim 2001: Animals and Society Sessions

In addition to Animals & Society's promotional and organizational meeting for the new section, there will be two sessions at the 2001 ASA meetings in Anaheim in August on relations between humans and other animals. There also will be a session at this year's meetings of the Society for the Study of Social Problems meeting, scheduled in Anaheim concurrently with the ASA and open to ASA meeting participants. Please plan to join us at these important and informative programs. The session listings follow; check the preliminary programs for session times and locations.

### ASA Session Title: Human-Animal Interaction

Organizer and Presider: Janet M. Alger, Siena College

John P. Hoffman, Brigham Young University: Social and Environmental Influences on Species Endangerment: A Cross-National Study

Theresa L. Goedeke, University of Missouri-Columbia: Contested Science: Examining Social Conflict Over River Otter Management in Missouri. Dair L. Gillespie, University of Utah, Ann Leffler, Utah State University, and Elinor Lerner

Stockton State University: If It Weren't For My Hobby, I'd Have a Life: Dog Sports, Leisure and Social Constraints

David L. Miller, Western Illinois University: Pets as Significant Others

Patricia Anderson, Western Illinois University: The Social Dimensions of Avian Companionship

Discussant: Steven F. Alger, College of St. Rose

### ASA Session Title: The Effects of 21st Century Urbanization on Human-Animal Relationships

Session Organizer: David Nibert, Wittenberg University

Presider: Lisa Martin, Case Western Reserve University

Clif Flynn, University of South Carolina: The Thrill of the Kill: The Relationship between Hunting and Interpersonal Violence

Helene Lawson, University of Pittsburgh: Wildlife Managers: Socialization, Motivation and Areas of Conflict

Carol Miller, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse: Virtual Deer: Bagging the Mythical Big One in Cyberspace

Anna Williams, University of California, San Diego: Urban Meat Consumption and the Representation of Animals: the Visual Culture of Commodification

Discussant David Nibert, Wittenberg University

### SSSP Session Title: Diversity and Rights: Confronting Anthropocentric Definitions of Community

Sponsor: Environment and Technology Division

Organizer, Presider: Lisa Anne Zilney, University of Tennessee

Dana Atwood, Western Michigan University: Interspecies Interaction: An Ethnographic Study of Two Veterinary Clinics

Laura Joan Zilney, Carleton University, Norman Patterson School of International Affairs: The Metamorphosis of Anthropocentrism: A Political Economic Analysis of the (Ab)uses of Greyhounds

Pamela Carlisle-Frank, Green Mountain Environmental College, and Joshua M. Frank, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute: Conflicting Attitudes and Social Dissonance: Why Mixed Messages Lead People to Abuse and Abandon Their Companion Animals

Steven Lang, City University of New York, IACERE: Negotiating Nature in the Estuary Commons: An Exploration of Community-Based Oyster Restoration Projects in New York and New Jersey

Discussant: Lisa Anne Zilney, University of Tennessee

## Teaching Animals and Society: Surprises and Resistance

### An Interdisciplinary Approaches Brings Unexpected Rewards at Ohio State University

Aileen Hall.

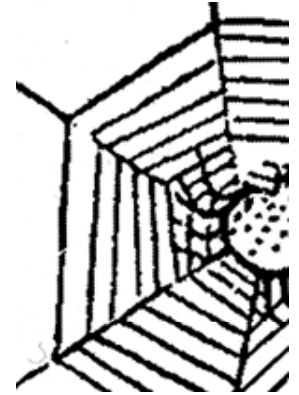
The fact that the study of animal/human relationships has become recognized in sociology as a legitimate field is a source of great personal satisfaction for me as it will be, I would imagine, for a number of other sociologists. My academic career began with an appeal for a sociology as if women mattered and may end with an appeal for a sociology as if animals mattered.

In the interest of encouraging others--historians, psychologists, anthropologists, as well as sociologists--to develop courses on the relationships between humans and non-human animals, I will briefly describe the course I designed and taught. I will also mention some of the challenges I found and some of the changes that I will likely make in future offerings of the course.

My course was divided into five segments. In the first, I set the parameters for the course content and introduced concepts such as anthropomorphism, androcentrism, and Aristotle's Great Chain of Being. In this introductory section, I made the case for seeing animals as social constructs and opened the possibility that some animal/human interaction could be seen as symbolic interaction.

Next, I briefly surveyed the animal/human relations during several periods in history--Ancient, Medieval, Modern, etc.

*Continued p. 7*



### New Course Approved at USC Spartansburg

Clif Flynn

On February 26, 2001, "SOC 321: Animals and Society" was approved by the Faculty Senate at the University of South Carolina Spartanburg. But not without a few battles along the way. The process for new course approval is already a cumbersome one at USCS. A lengthy course justification form must be submitted to the Academic Affairs committee of the faculty member's area (in my case, the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences). Then, it must go to the whole division, then the University-wide Executive Academic Affairs committee (EAAC), and then to the Faculty Senate.

I had the support not only of my colleagues in sociology, but of all the other faculty (including psychology) in my division. The attacks came predictably from the science (biology) faculty, whose strategy was twofold: First, try to raise objections that would keep the EAAC from approving the course. And second, try to orchestrate a vote against the course at Faculty Senate. Fortunately for me, for students, for animals, and for academic freedom, their efforts failed.

When the EAAC met to consider my course, I took no chances and attended their meeting. Normally, this would be unnecessary, but a memo by the sciences representative of the committee outlining numerous "concerns" made it clear that battle lines were being drawn

*Continued on p. 7*

"When my course was up for consideration, the Chair of the Division of Natural Sciences, a biologist, immediately moved for a secret ballot."

## Book Review: Ambivalent Attributions in Human-Canine Interactions

*Understanding Dogs: Living and Working with Canine Companions*, by Clinton R. Sanders. Temple University Press, 1999, 201 pages, ISBN 1-56639-690-5.

Corwin Kruse

Dogs are an ever-present part of many American families; almost 53 million of them share our homes (American Veterinary Medical Association 1997). Despite these numbers, sociologists have paid little attention to the role they play in our lives. *Understanding Dogs* is an engaging and insightful exception.

Saunders draws from fieldwork in a puppy "kindergarten," a large veterinary hospital, and a guide dog training program

In this book, Clinton Sanders draws upon fieldwork in a puppy "kindergarten," a large veterinary hospital, and a guide dog training program, as well as autoethnographic insights to paint a rich and perceptive portrait of the multi-faceted relationship between humans and dogs. Throughout he presents a picture of owners who view their dogs as unique, thoughtful, and sentient individuals and respond to them as socially defined "persons."

Shared rituals such as playtime, feeding, and various family celebrations contribute to emotional bonds between caretakers and their companion animals that may be as strong as those between humans. This bond facilitates the assignment of personhood to pets; not only do owners attribute mindedness and emotion to their dogs, they also perceive them as being able to interpret and respond to human emotion.

Although ample evidence of dogs as minded co-actors emerges throughout the book, this view is not universal. For example, guide dog trainers display substantial ambivalence about the mindedness of dogs. Immersed in the behaviorist ideology that forms the base of guide dog training, most attribute canine action to conditioned response rather than conscious thought. Veterinarians also experience contradictions as they try to negotiate the complex relationship between doctor, patient, and client. Unlike doctors who treat humans, veterinarians often find themselves caught between acting in the best interests of the animals in their care and carrying out the wishes of the person paying the bill.

In the final chapter, Sanders confronts the ambivalent nature of our relationship to other animals. Drawing upon his fieldwork, Sanders argues that we should understand dogs not as "things" but as "persons," minded individuals with whom we have meaningful and mutually rewarding relationships.

*Understanding Dogs* is not perfect; although brief mention is made of "masculine" or "feminine" characteristics of certain breeds and the status of owning pedigreed animals, issues of race, class, and gender are all but ignored. In addition, more space could have been devoted to the self-presentational aspects of pet ownership, as well as the reaction of others to the construction of dogs as "persons."

Such flaws are minor, however, compared to the contributions of this book.

*Understanding Dogs* is a significant and well-written addition to the small but growing literature on human-animal interaction. It is recommended to all who wish to see sociology take a more inclusive view of human existence.

## The Animal Welfare Act: When is an Animal not an Animal?

Anna Williams

Last year activists came close to closing an important loophole in the regulatory legislation that covers the use of animals in biomedical research: the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

The act was originally passed in 1966 and thereafter subject to periodic revisions; in 1972 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was charged with its enforcement. The language of the original bill defined animal as "any warm blooded animal." However, the USDA narrowed this definition to exclude birds, mice and rats, effectively omitting these animals from the coverage afforded by the AWA.

This exemption is particularly significant because rats and mice are so widely used in research and teaching. The National Association for Biomedical Research estimated that 23 million rats and mice were used in 1999: 95% of all laboratory animals. It is deeply ironic that the vast majority of research animals are therefore exempt from the AWA's stated intention, "to insure that animals intended for use in research facilities ... are provided humane care and treatment."

Animal advocacy groups queried the USDA's authority to limit the Congressional definition of what constitutes a warm-blooded animal. But these challenges were repeatedly stonewalled by the legal ruling that such organizations lacked standing to address the USDA on behalf of animals.

It was under this adverse legal climate, on April 29, 1998, that the Alternatives Research & Development Foundation (ARDF) filed a lawsuit challenging the USDA's semantics. At the same time, the group began the lengthy process of petitioning the USDA change its policy. The ARDF filed a Petition for Rulemaking To Amend the USDA Regulation Excluding Birds, Rats and Mice from Coverage under the Animal Welfare Act. This procedure required the USDA to solicit and respond to public opinion on the agency's interpretation of the AWA.

In June 2000 the situation changed when the precedent denying standing to animal advocacy groups challenging the USDA was overturned in a Pennsylvania case. This decision made the USDA newly vulnerable to legal challenges on its enforcement of the AWA. Under Clinton Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman the agency sought an immediate settlement with the ARDF in order to head off a newly threatening lawsuit. By early October 2000 USDA agreed to expanding definition of what constitutes an animal under the provisions of the AWA.

At this point biomedical forces, who had originally opposed the passage of the AWA in 1966 and have vigorously resisted all of its subsequent amendments, began to vigorously lobby against the proposed USDA action. The argument against an expanded definition has been two-fold:

- A. It is unnecessary. Adherence to animal welfare standards is a de facto practice: the de jure formalization of such standards in law is therefore redundant.
- B. It would create excessive amounts of paperwork. When researchers use animals covered by the AWA they are legally required to submit a written proposal to an internal review body (the Institutional Animal Care and Use



"The rats and mice that constitute 95% of laboratory animals in the United States are currently excluded from coverage under the USDA's interpretation of the Animal Welfare Act."

## Animal Law *continued*

or IACUC).

Biomedical opposition culminated in the addition, by Senator Thad Cochran (R-Miss), of a rider to the Agricultural Appropriations Bill that denied the USDA funding to implement the agreement for the next financial year. The passage of the Agricultural Appropriations Bill at the end of October 2000 effectively delayed the petitioning process until the end of September 2001. This is how the situation currently stands.

Extensive coverage of this issue can be found in the *Newsletter* of Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals: <http://www.psyeta.org/newsltr.html>.

## Electronic Resources

Corwin Kruse

In every issue of the *Newsletter* we will highlight websites of potential interest to section members.

*ASA Animals and Society section:*

<http://www.asanet.org/sectionanimals/>

First and foremost, the website of the Animals and Society section. Log on to take a look at our mission statement or find out a bit about the members of the organizing committee. The site also includes membership information, research links, and a discussion forum. Look for more content as the section grows.

*Society and Animals:*

<http://www.psyeta.org/sa/>

Full-text back issues of *Society and Animals* (through volume 6, 1998) can be accessed at this site maintained by Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. A beneficial resource if your library doesn't carry this journal.

*International Society for Anthrozoölogy*

<http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/C/CAB/ISAZ.htm>

If you have suggestions for useful electronic resources contact Corwin Kruse at [kruse008@tc.umn.edu](mailto:kruse008@tc.umn.edu).

ISAZ is an international cross-disciplinary organization of scholars interested in the relationships between human and non-human animals. Membership is open to anyone currently or previously involved in research in the area of human/animal interactions; information is available on the website. ISAZ publishes *Anthrozoös*, a leading journal in the field.

Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society

<http://www.vet.upenn.edu/cias/index.html>

CIAS is one of a number of research institutions focusing on the human/animal bond that have sprung up at large veterinary schools around the nation. Through this site you can access information on upcoming conferences as well as descriptions of current research.

Tufts University Center for Animals and Public Policy

<http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/index.html>

Another research institution connected to a vet school. The center's (very interesting) newsletter is available in pdf format. In addition, you can find information on conferences, research, and recent publications.

### Ohio State, *continued from p. 3*

Then, I provided material on the role that animals have played in the perpetuation of racism and sexism in human societies. The role of animals in some basic human institutions came next. Here, I included material on war dogs and warrior elephants in a lecture on the political institution. My students especially enjoyed a grim reading about rats, fleas, and bubonic plagues in human history as part of a class on animals and human health. Other institutions included were the economy, the family, religion, sports, and the law. I concluded the course with a survey of the range of ethical and policy positions currently being expressed regarding animal/human relations.

To my surprise, the strongly held positions I feared would disrupt the class from anti-evolutionist zealots and dogmatic animal rights activists never materialized. I had also worried, unnecessarily, about the availability of appropriate academic material at the undergraduate level. But other challenges did appear. The greatest of these came from the interdisciplinary nature of the course that made it necessary for me to do additional reading in history, biology, religion, the law, and environmental policy and to use videos to supplement some lectures. A related challenge as the result of my choice to cover this very broad field in the ten weeks our quarter system allows. A minor challenge was the task of explaining the field to other academics. The invisibility of animal/human relationships to social scientists continues to amaze me!

In future versions of this course I will likely resist my preference for interdisciplinarity and narrow the topics so that they are more exclusively sociological. This may include, for example, the examination of other theoretical frameworks vis a vis animal/human relationships. I also plan to add material on animal/human competition for habitat and resources. Drawing an exceptionally large number of students for a first offering, this course has been so well received by students that I anticipate the second offering with great eagerness.

### USC Spartansburg, *continued from p. 3*

Their objections were scattered in all directions - the course was not sociology, the instructor was not qualified in animal behavior, the course was really an "animal rights" course in disguise. So I explained why this was a sociology course in its purest form, and why it was not an animal rights course, but why the moral status of animals and the animal rights movement were perfectly legitimate topics to cover in such a course. After 30 minutes of explaining and convincing, they thanked me for coming, clearly intending for me to leave. I stayed, and after a brief discussion, they unanimously approved sending the course to Faculty Senate.

When the Senate met the following month, I was there to defend my course. It was next to last on the agenda. All of the other curriculum changes had sailed through on voice votes with little or no discussion. When my course finally was up for consideration, the Chair of the Division of Natural Sciences, a biologist, immediately moved for a secret ballot. I was stunned. It became evident that, behind the scenes, he had persuaded or pressured other faculty to vote against this course, and now was enabling them to do so without having to identify themselves!

I rose to address my colleagues. First, I reiterated that this was a sociology course about how humans regard other animals. Second, I argued that we should respect the autonomy of individual disciplines to determine and control their own curricula. Third, I suggested to them that whatever my personal views, I am a professional who knows the difference between instruction and indoctrination. And finally, I told them that a vote against this course would be a vote against the open and free examination of ideas - a vote against academic freedom.

When the secret ballot was taken, the course was approved 17 to 7. Not a landslide, but a victory, nonetheless.

## Welcome, *continued from front cover*

It has been argued that the social production of other animals is deeply implicated in our understanding of what it means to be human. Enlightenment thinking constructed other animals as a category of physiologically inferior otherness, mapping the distinction animal/human onto the nature/culture dualism. On the one hand, the category of the other animal has functioned to unify the concept of the human subject but at the same time has been used to produce and naturalize human difference (e.g., the development of theories of racial biology in the 19th century that find contemporary expression in neoconservative texts such as *The Bell Curve*). Recent scholarly inquiries on the social construction of other animals demonstrate that human societies cannot be understood fully without an examination of their constitutive animal economies. It is such centrality of other animals to society that gives this topic particular intellectual merit as a subject of sociological analysis. Contemporary scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, working in this broader context, are taking an unprecedented interest in the interactions of humans and other animals, driven by the insight that the other animals are always human cultural constructions. For example, changing social perceptions of other animals were recognized in the 1966 passage of the federal Animal Welfare Act and its subsequent amendments.

While several existing ASA sections may touch upon aspects of the interactions of humans and other animals occasionally and tangentially, none are adequate vehicles for serious investigation and development of the issues and question in this area. Nor do they provide a specific space in which a theoretical sociological framework on other animals can be collaboratively developed. It is hoped that the formation of an ASA section on Animals and Society will facilitate improved sociological inquiry into these issues.

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