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Political Science and Animal Studies

Examining the state of political science's contribution to the field of animal studies depends, to a large degree, upon the definition of "political science" one uses. If we define it in a narrow sense—to refer to the empirical and normative examination of activities centering on the state—then the contribution to animal studies has been minimal. If, however, we broaden the definition somewhat—to include political sociology and moral and legal, as well as political, philosophy—then the contribution looks much more substantial. In general, however, the issue of animal protection remains a peripheral part of mainstream political science and only a minor partner in the much larger Green politics sub-field.

Much of the research on the animal protection movement falls into the category of political sociology. A great deal more is known now about the nature of animal protection activists; their social characteristics, political affiliations, and motivations. This work has much relevance for social movement theory in general. A useful way of locating this political sociology literature is in the context of Olson's (1965) legendary account of group dynamics. Olson changed

the parameters of the debate about movement recruitment and mobilization by suggesting that the pursuit of selective incentives, as opposed to collective goods, was the motivation behind group membership. Common sense might suggest that individuals join groups, at least partly, to help achieve public policy objectives that will have collective benefits. Olson, however, argued that this would not be sufficient incentive to join because individuals would take a free ride, calculating that they could get the public policy benefits without the costs of participation. Rather, individuals will join groups because of the benefits they can get only from being a member. If the theory is correct, then sectional interest groups that can provide a larger array of selective incentives—discounts on financial products, legal assistance—have a distinct advantage over promotional, cause, or public interest groups that are unable to offer such incentives to the same degree.

The research undertaken on the animal protection movement only partly supports Olson's (1965) account. My own work offers an Olsonian explanation for the revitalization of the animal protection movement (Garner, 1998, pp. 71-81). Here, it is suggested that compensations for the difficulties associated with recruiting members exist in the form of sources of finance—primarily through legacies and foundation grants—outside the immediate membership. Compensation is also evident in the role of entrepreneurs who pay the costs of setting up organizations and providing incentives for others to join in return for senior staff positions. There are many such figures in the animal protection movement, from Christine Stevens (the Animal Welfare Institute) and Alex Hershaft (Farm Animal Reform Movement) in the United States to Jean Pink (Animal Aid) and Mark Glover (LYNX) in the United Kingdom.

Other research indicates the need to go beyond Olson in order to explain recruitment, mobilization, and maintenance in the animal protection movement. A number of accounts support an issue-orientated explanation (Shapiro, 1994; Berry, 1977). Jasper and Poulson (1989), likewise, have produced some interesting work showing how, unlike other social movements where networks are the key, people are recruited into the animal rights movement through the use of "moral shocks" that provoke isolated individuals to join and get involved in group activities. Herzog (1993) and Sperling's (1988) research confirm these findings by showing how in many cases a concern for animals preceded involvement in group activity. In so far as animal protec-

tion activists do have other social and political interests and concerns, research suggests that they tend to share similar political values to those involved in other “progressive” causes such as civil rights, women’s rights, and the environment (Greenville & Moss, 1985; Nibert, 1994; Shapiro, 1974). This supports the view that it is ideology, rather than utility maximization—whether social or material—that holds the key to explaining organizational recruitment and mobilization in the animal protection movement.

There is an important distinction to be made between the study of pressure groups, narrowly defined, and new social movements. Pressure group activity focuses on directly influencing public policy or its administrative arrangements. New social movements denote a wider entity that usually involves a radical ideology consisting of substantial life-style change, non-hierarchical organizational forms, and a willingness to engage in a wide range of activities, including direct action. Political science’s contribution to the pressure group universe of the animal protection movement has been much weaker than the new social movement sphere. There is little work dealing with the former (Garner, 1998; Ryder, 2000) which, given the considerable legislative and administrative machinery that has been created to protect the welfare of animals and given the increasing involvement of animal protection organizations in the policy networks surrounding this machinery, is seriously deficient.

Legal and Moral Philosophy

In as far as both moral and legal philosophy touch upon what might be regarded as the “political,” there have been important advances in the past decade or so. The early moral philosophizing of Regan (1984) and Singer (1975) has given way to the so-called “second wave” of thinking about the moral status of animals. This includes work by Pluhar (1995), focusing particularly on the argument from marginal cases, and DeGrazia (1996) who reviews the literature on animal emotions and cognition. This second wave also incorporates responses to those texts, such as Carruthers (1992) and Leahy (1991), which emerged to challenge the first wave of attacks on the moral orthodoxy as regards animals.

It might be argued that the field of animal ethics—focusing on what moral status animals and humans ought to have—has become somewhat stale. The

field retraces old arguments that, partly because of the subjective nature of normative arguments, are unlikely to be resolved to the satisfaction of either side. Arguably of greater interest now is the debate, conducted mainly among legal theorists, about the problems of converting moral arguments into legal and political practice. An important element of this debate centers on the relationship between property and the well being of animals. Two main claims are made (Garner, 2002): (a) that while animals are still regarded as property it is impossible to achieve the equal consideration of human and animal interests; and (b) that the property status of animals is incompatible with even the most basic protection of animals (Francione, 1995, 1996; Kelch, 1998; Wise, 2000).

The first of the two claims would seem to be a reasonable one. At the very least, the abolition of the property status of animals would seem to be a necessary step toward the achievement of an animal rights agenda, because while animals remain property, they cannot have the full entitlement of rights that a morally equal status would require. It is not as clear that abolishing the property status of animals, however, is a *sufficient* condition for the achievement of an animal rights agenda. For one thing, although wild animals are not the property of humans they are still exploited. Similarly, domestication sometimes has beneficial consequences, as in the condition of some species in some zoos. Private ownership of land, where animals are protected against hunts, also may have beneficial consequences. Second, as Benton (1993) has argued, merely abolishing the property status of animals, without a corresponding change in social attitudes toward them, is unlikely to achieve the desired results. Conversely, there is some justification in the claim that if social attitudes changed and the exploitation of animals was regarded as morally objectionable, then their property status becomes irrelevant.

The second claim, that the property status of animals is incompatible with even a basic degree of protection, is much more difficult to sustain. It is based on the claim that while animals remain property they are regarded as not much more than inanimate objects and that even the most trivial human interests are preferred to the most important interests of animals. There is no doubting that there are many inadequate animal welfare laws and administrative arrangements, but it is unlikely that their weaknesses have much, if

anything, to do with the property status of animals. Other factors are at least, if not more, important. Of great importance is the character of the political system and its ability to represent the interests of animals, which, in turn, often is related to public opinion toward animal protection issues. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research into these two areas.

Work on the relationship between animal studies and political philosophy more narrowly defined has been at a premium. Mainstream political philosophy has largely neglected the moral status of animals (Clarke & Linzey, 1990), a potent symbol of this being the exclusion of animals from Rawls' (1972) influential theory of justice. An important research question for animal studies is the location of the most appropriate ideological home for animal protection. The intellectual defence of animals has tended to come from the liberal tradition, whether based on rights (Regan, 1984), utilitarianism (Singer, 1975) or contractarianism (Rowlands, 1998). Yet, arguably, the relationship between liberalism and animal protection is problematic because the principle of moral pluralism—the liberal view that a range of different, and often incompatible, moral views should be tolerated—is difficult to reconcile with the moral imperative to prohibit the exploitation of animals for food, clothing, and sport (Garner, 2002a).

The problematic nature of liberalism leaves open the possibility that a more appropriate ideological location for animal protection might be found. Benton (1993) has explored the socialist alternative and Adams (1990, 1994), Adams and Donovan (1995), and Birke (1994) among others, have explored the feminist care ethic perspective. Attention also needs to be directed at the communitarian perfectionist emphasis on a goal-based state with a shared moral code and the conservative notions of responsibility and paternalism.

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Note

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