

The Covid Pandemic, 'Pivotal' Moments, and Persistent Anthropocentrism: Interrogating the (Il)legitimacy of Critical Animal Perspectives

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Abstract: Situated alongside, and intertwined with, climate change and the relentless destruction of 'wild' nature, the global Covid-19 pandemic should have instigated serious reflection on our profligate use and careless treatment of other animals. Widespread references to 'pivotal moments' and the need for a reset in human relations with 'nature' appeared promising. However, important questions surrounding the pandemic's origins and its wider context continue to be ignored and, as a result, this moment has proved anything but pivotal for animals. To explore this disconnect, this paper undertakes an analysis of dominant Covid discourses across key knowledge sites comprising mainstream media, major organizations, academia, and including prominent animal advocacy organizations. Drawing on the core tenets of Critical Animal Studies, the concept of critical animal perspectives is advanced as a way to assess these discourses and explore the illegitimacy of alternative ways of thinking about animals. Broadly, it is found that dominant Covid discourses fail to engage with the mechanisms by which human uses of nature and other animals are justified – specifically binary thinking, the normalization and naturalization of hierarchical categories of use, and the commodification of their lives and bodies – or to specify the nature and scope of practices that need to change. These key sites of knowledge, and also prominent advocacy organizations, thus reflect the illegitimacy of critical animal perspectives while also contributing to their ongoing delegitimation. Exacerbating this situation is the illegitimacy of the animal advocacy movement itself, which is attributed in part to movement factionalism and a diversity of poorly articulated aims.

Mainstreaming and normalizing critical perspectives on animals has never been more necessary. Extended beyond academia, critical animal perspectives offer a potentially productive and practical way of approaching this endeavour so that future moments may be truly pivotal for humans and nonhumans alike.

Keywords: Critical animal studies, animal advocacy, legitimacy, Covid, discourses, framing

Introduction

If one were to imagine a seismic event capable of tipping humankind towards a fundamental rethink of longstanding patterns of expropriation and eradication of nature and other animals, one might come close to the coronavirus pandemic. As well as underscoring the inherent risks animal-based food systems pose to human health – as Espinosa et al. observe, ‘not one single pandemic in human history can be traced back to plants’ (1035) – this protracted crisis has revealed the consequences for nonhuman animals when the economic systems that control so much of their existence and nonexistence, falter, collapse, or are otherwise skewed. Situated alongside, and intertwined with, climate change and the relentless destruction of ‘wild’ nature, this should be a moment that instigates serious reflection on our profligate use and careless treatment of other animals.

Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has indeed referred to the pandemic as a global wake-up call, emphasizing that ‘we cannot simply return to the systems that gave rise to the current crisis’ (np). Conceptions of nature sending us a message or ‘clear warning shot’ (Carrington np) permeate references to this outbreak as marking a major turning or tipping point in human history – a crucial, pivotal or ‘sliding doors’ moment. More hopeful assertions describe it as an opportunity for ‘a reset in environmental understandings’ (Mocatta and Hawley 2), and for the global community to ‘re-examine its relationship to the natural world’ (UN, np). The WWF’s latest Living Planet Report asks, ‘will 2020 go down in history as the year in which Covid served as the catalyst to completely alter our future relationship with nature?’ (115)

More than a year on, the answer appears to be 'no', because, despite this rhetoric, mainstream Covid discourses continue to eschew the tough social, political, and economic questions surrounding the pandemic's origins and its wider context (Cochrane). As a result, there is unlikely to be any re-examination of the basic relationship with nature¹ that underpins this and recurring human health crises, as well as escalating ecological crises (Lunstrum et al.; Mishra et al.). Under the pervasively dualistic and anthropocentric terms of this relationship, 'nature' and particularly animals remain naturalized resources to which humans are uniquely entitled, occluding opportunities for a true 'reset' or catalyzing impulse. Alleged 'pivotal' dimensions of this pandemic have not, therefore, extended to animals, but this could productively serve as a wake-up call for animal advocates – as the most conspicuous evidence to date that critical perspectives on animal use are still failing to gain legitimacy in areas of the public sphere that most influence, and reflect, prevailing understandings and practices involving animals.

Given the right groundwork, the pandemic might have emerged like a viral koan into a world ready for enlightenment, like the catalyst envisioned by WWF. However, it is argued that this groundwork – specifically building a critical understanding of the common structural and ideological foundations that connect all animal use – has been missing from decades of animal advocacy. This may help explain why the movement's considerable and tireless efforts to change the ways humans think about and act towards other animals have not achieved greater success, and why John Sorenson's observation that the animal rights movement 'has failed to reduce the numbers of animals killed and consumed, failed to create meaningful legislation, and failed to change fundamental attitudes towards animals' still holds true ('Critical Animal Studies' xxx). For critical animal perspectives to become part of mainstream discourse, they need to gain legitimacy both within and beyond the animal movement. Without this, achieving the scale of structural change required to address the calamitous consequences of animal use will be largely impossible.

This paper therefore presents findings to support the argument that both critical animal perspectives (as represented in Critical Animal Studies) and the animal advocacy movement itself not only lack legitimacy but also are continually delegitimized as part of ongoing discursive

practices. Following an outline of approach and methodology, the paper proceeds in two parts. First, dominant animal-related Covid discourses are analyzed to demonstrate the prevalence of the illegitimacy/delegitimization of critical animal perspectives even at this 'pivotal' moment of concurrent crises when human-animal relations are foregrounded more than ever before. This analysis is then extended to animal advocacy organizations and uses their (lack of) responses to the pandemic, diversity of mission statements or goals, and the absence of a unifying collective action frame to underscore the illegitimacy of these perspectives. Subsequently, the present situation is located within an ongoing pattern of illegitimacy in relation to animal advocacy and possible reasons are examined, besides the lack of critical perspectives, for the 'movement's' failure to gain legitimacy.² To conclude, the paper emphasizes the necessity of a quantum shift in how critical animal perspectives and advocacy for animals are represented and understood.

Approach and methodology

Language is a 'powerful socializing force' (Schieffelin and Ochs 167). It intersects space, is governed by (and reinforces) cultural codes and values, and constitutes the 'primary grid of things' (Foucault 'Order of Things' xxv). Recognizing language as productive of reality (Sedgwick), this paper explores the way animals are anthropocentrically (re)constituted in Covid-related discourses. In particular, it examines how animals are and are not understood, how these understandings are reproduced/negated, and how alternative understandings of animals struggle to break through the 'primary grid' – in other words, how they struggle to gain legitimacy.

'Critical animal perspectives' is a formalized notion deployed in this analysis as a representation of these alternative understandings – a counterpoint to the 'primary grid'. While derived from the key tenets of Critical Animals Studies (CAS) as articulated by Best et al., Taylor and Twine, and Nocella et al., critical animal perspectives are not oriented toward academic practices. They are therefore conceived as a more mobile and user-friendly iteration of these tenets and a deliberate attempt to take a distinct way of thinking and acting about animals

that CAS advances as a field of research and extend this more purposefully into the public sphere. Critical animal perspectives are defined as those that:

1. Expose, question, challenge, disrupt, and/or reject:
 - a. The human-animal binary and the hierarchical orders of moral value ascribed to animal 'others'
 - b. The naturalization and normalization of animal categories and uses that derive from and shape these orders
 - c. The commodification of animals' lives and bodies
2. Recognize the interconnectedness of animal uses under the Animal-Industrial Complex (A-IC)
3. Emphasize the intersection of oppressions

Approaching the analysis of dominant animal-related Covid discourses through this critical lens will reveal the extent to which these perspectives can be regarded as legitimate, and also where existing problematizations of human-animal relations could be modified and extended to encompass more overtly politicized and structural critiques. The (il)legitimacy of critical animal perspectives in mainstream discourses is therefore being proposed as a way to understand and interrogate the apparent intransigence of animals' oppression. As an expected conduit of these perspectives, the (il)legitimacy of the animal advocacy movement itself is also examined for its capacity to enhance or erode their legitimacy.

The scope of analysis covers mainstream media,³ major organizations,⁴ and academia, conceived as key sites of knowledge within the public sphere – points where power is both exercised and assured (Foucault 'Power, Truth, Strategy'). Together, these three domains or apparatuses of 'truth' produce, transmit, and control the flow of the majority of authoritative, peer-reviewed, and verifiable information to the public (Foucault 'Power/Knowledge' 131-132). Social movements comprise another important dimension of the public sphere that can

play a significant role in shaping discourse (Woodly). The issues they address and their activities as movements are reported in mainstream media, included in educational curricula and academic research activities, and shape policy.

Apparatuses of truth operate within broader 'regimes of truth' that, while not static, contribute to reinforcing particular normative orders and hierarchies – of objects (living and nonliving), of knowledge about those objects, and of associated discourses (Foucault, 'Power/Knowledge'). These orders and hierarchies contribute to the level of legitimacy accorded to different discourses. The media, academia, major organizations, and also social movements therefore do not simply reflect the (il)legitimacy of particular discourses, they actively reinforce it. The boundaries between these four apparatuses are not distinct and the roles of activist, academic, journalist, and professional frequently merge.

Animal-related Covid discourses were analyzed in two phases. First, dominant discourses were explored through a web-based search of Covid materials relating to animals originating from major organizations, academia, and mainstream media.⁵ Google Scholar was also used to target academic texts more specifically. Rather than seeking specific discourses on animals, the aim of the search was to collate relevant texts that appeared in the first 5-10 pages of search results and examine these in terms of:

1. Which animals they explicitly include
2. How these animals are referred to (for example species name, use name – as in livestock, or generic category – as in wildlife, domestic, or resources)
3. The normalized uses or practices they are associated with (for example farming, consumption, trading, hunting, pet keeping)
4. Whether or not these uses/practices are problematized in principle (as opposed to their methods and/or volume)
5. Whether or not the human-animal relationship is problematized
6. What is primarily being problematized

While focusing on the ways in which animals are represented and how their use is understood, from a critical animal perspective the analysis is equally about the ways of thinking about animals these discourses exclude. Websites of major organizations were also searched directly for key statements, news briefings, or reports relating to Covid and animals not captured in the main search. Searches began formally in October 2020 as the author gathered evidence relating to trends already observed as the pandemic was unfolding, and were concluded in January 2021 in preparation for this paper. While the sources are not exhaustive, should someone seek information on how Covid relates to animals, they are illustrative of the dominant narratives they will encounter. Given the large volume of materials, only an indicative sample of these texts is included in Table 1.

To explore the broader context of these observations, a second analysis was undertaken focused on online animal advocacy discourses. Websites of ten prominent animal advocacy organizations and several single-issue campaigns were examined between December 2020 and January 2021 for references to Covid and the articulation of overarching advocacy goals or visions. Concerned primarily with what site visitors immediately encounter, and how organizations frame their activities, analysis was focused on the home page, 'about us' page, and any additional 'mission' or 'values' pages. A word search for 'Covid'-related content was also conducted in each case. Although this part of the analysis spanned only two months, the search captured material produced before this time. It is acknowledged that this may not represent the discursive content of grassroots actions or the thinking behind public facing materials, whether online or other formats. However, this approach aims to explore whether and how frontline advocacy is formally framed and review what site visitors are likely to encounter. While critical animal perspectives might inform advocacy efforts, these may be less explicitly part of public messaging and this is the issue in question. The main sections of this paper discuss each analysis in turn.

Animals in Covid discourses

This paper does not seek to convince the reader of the animal origins of Covid-19, nor the role humans have played in its viral journey. Human-to-human may now be the dominant form of transmission of this mutated and mutating virus. However, there is broad consensus within the scientific community that the ancestral reservoirs of Covid-19 were likely bats (Hedman et al.). Human activities, including habitat fragmentation, deforestation, biodiversity loss, (industrial) animal agriculture, uncontrolled urbanization, pollution, climate change, and the trade and consumption of wildlife disrupt and/or intensify human-animal interactions and are recognized as 'major reasons behind the emergence and spread of zoonotic pandemics' including Covid-19 (Mishra et al. 1; see also: Lunstrum et al.; Schuck-Paim and Alonso). The tentacles of these activities spread globally, part of intersecting networks of industrial complexes of which the A-IC is just one. There is no one practice to blame, nor country or group of people. Considering the attention directed at the wildlife trade, it is notable that the US is 'the world's top consumer of legal and illegal wildlife, largely for the exotic pet trade' (Smith, qtd. in Lunstrum et al.13). There is also no form of animal use that should be excused from question. None of the above human activities (and more) would be possible without an understanding of nature and animals as consumable and expendable in the service of human 'needs' and it is this understanding that needs to be challenged in order to arrest current trajectories which, in each of the above respects, show no signs of abating.

- *Key knowledge sites*

Dominant Covid discourses involving animals circulating within and between mainstream media, major organizations, and academia can be grouped into two categories:

1. Control and prevention of disease emergence, including:
 - Identification, eradication and control within 'food' and other animals
 - Control of human/animal disease boundary
 - Modification of production practices

2. Social and economic implications and dimensions of the pandemic:

- For various social groups
- For animal-based industries

In terms of controlling and preventing the emergence of the disease at the animal-human boundary, comprising measures intended to preserve or immunize *human* life (Esposito and Campbell), there are three secondary discourses. The first is dominated by veterinary and zoonotic literature focused on identifying, eradicating, and controlling the spread of the virus and its variants among animal populations. This involves surveillance, monitoring, modelling, and coordinated activities for 'prevention, preparedness and detection in animals' (FAO 'No Evidence' np). Animal populations in question most commonly include 'livestock' (also farm and domestic animals), wildlife (bats, pangolins, great apes, civets and others), pets, or simply all 'natural and domestic animal *resources*' (IUCN np emphasis added). Practices involving animals that are explicitly or implicitly normalized include farming, consumption, trading, hunting, laboratory testing, fur, and entertainment (primarily zoos). Rather than these uses of animals per se, texts problematize disruptions to associated industries (IUCN; WCS), and the risk of animals acting as reservoirs for new viral strains (Bridle et al.; Gorman; King). Certain 'high-risk' methods are also problematized in terms of preventing future transmission, including industrialized animal agriculture or factory farming, 'overexploitation' of wildlife (UNEP and ILRI 32), wet markets, and the 'illegal' wildlife trade. Overall, the key concern here is the 'continuous and long-term monitoring of risk interfaces between humans, livestock and wildlife' (IUCN np).

The second sub-discourse is directed more specifically at the point of interaction between animals and humans and covers the prohibition, prescription, and regulation of practices deemed to pose a risk of transmission to humans, such as hunting, consumption, trade, and also culling. Encompassing the same species and categories of animals, and the same practices, though extending to wildlife ranching, captive breeding, and nature tourism (Roe et al.; UNEP and ILRI; WEF), concerns here are more squarely directed at human-wildlife interaction zones, primarily wildlife markets and the 'illegal' wildlife trade. Industrialized

animal agriculture is still implicated (The World Bank; Roe et al.) and Chatham House also identifies globalization, increased urbanization, and climate change as exacerbating risks of human-animal interactions (Benton). The priority here is recognizing that 'it is about changing the way our environments are managed and the way people interact with them' (Benton np).

Finally, there are discourses focused on the modification of production practices to decrease the risk of the emergence and transmission of Covid and other zoonotic diseases. Again, the scope of animal species and practices referred to is broadly the same as previously. However, 'livestock' feature more prominently and industrialized, intensive, or factory farming (CIWF; Dalton 'Coronavirus: World Leaders'; Halabowski and Rzymiski; Ng), including of fish (Jamwal and Phulia), and agricultural expansion more generally (WCS), are more frequently problematized alongside wet markets and the 'illegal' wildlife trade. Notions central to these discourses include being 'more responsible about farming methods' (Ng np), and making 'agriculture and livestock safer and more sustainable' (The World Bank). Concern for animal welfare may be part of this, but only extending to opportunities to 'increase their comfort, confidence, and capacity to make rewarding decisions' (CIWF). As Roe et al. explain, 'for all species, in both domestic and wild food supply chains, captive conditions and practices should meet appropriate standards of welfare and hygiene' (Roe et al. 3)

There is overlap between these discourses and more than one is generally present in each text (Table 1).

Table 1. Dominant Covid discourses involving animals

	Major Orgs	Mainstream Media	Academia
Prevention and Control of emergence			
Animal populations	FAO (2020) UNEP & ILRI (2020) OIE (2020) WEF (2021) WCS (2020) IUCN (2020)	Briggs (2020) Morrison (2020) Gorman (2020) Spinney (2020)	King (2020) Mallapaty (2020) Bridle et al. (2020) Almendros (2020) Csiszar et al. (2020)
Human/animal boundary	UNEP & ILRI (2020) UNODC (2020) WHO (2020) The World Bank (2020) WEF (2021) Benton (2020)	BBC (2020) Briggs (2020) Carrington (2020) Nuwer (2020)	Borzee et al. (2020) Lawton (2020) Roe et al. (2020) Koopmans (2021)
Modification of practices	UNEP & ILRI (2020) WCS (2020) World Bank (2020) IUCN (2020) CIWF (2020)	Standaert (2020) Cheng (2020) Ng (2020) Dalton (2020)	Borzee et al. (2020) Marchant-Forde & Boyle (2020) Halabowski and Rzymiski (2021) Jamwal and Phulia (2020)
Social and economic implications and dimensions			
Animal-based industries	NFU (2021) BHA (2020) FAO (2020) OECD (2020)	O'Connor (2020) BBC (2021) McClatchey (2020) BBC (2020) Jones (2020) Ingram (2020)	Grimm (2020) Nagendrappa et al. (2020) Ratschen et al. (2020) Hunjan & Reddy (2020) Morgan et al. (2020) Davies et al. (2020)

Many of these communications invoke the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's One Health approach to disease control and prevention (CDC). This comprises a 'collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary' initiative which aims to achieve 'optimal health outcomes recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment' (CDC np). Established in 2009, One Health has been adopted more widely since Covid and there appears to be broad consensus that One Health provides the perfect foundation on which to build 'a holistic, more eco-centric, educational and preventative approach' to alleviating the risk of future pandemics (Benfield et al., np). While certainly an improvement in terms of systems thinking, the measures associated with this approach are altogether anthropocentric and fall within the 'prevention and control' discourse, being focused on 'animal movement and interaction between animals and with humans' (Schmiege et al. 6).

Regarding the third discourse – social and economic dimensions of the pandemic – animals appear primarily in relation to the impact of Covid on certain animal-based industries, mostly farming, but also racing, zoos, and laboratory research (BBC 'Coronavirus: German Zoo'; Grimm; Jones; NFU). Financial pressures, job security, and the sustainability of these industries are the key concerns (Davies et al.), although the emotional impact on owners and employees tasked with increased killing (above normal rates for these industries) or killing earlier than usual is also highlighted (Grimm; BBC 'Covid-19: Fordingbridge'; BBC 'Coronavirus: German Zoo'). These animals' deaths are framed as an unfortunate necessity or, in the case of some pets, an unforeseen outcome of short-sighted guidance. Companion animals and pets feature more frequently in media and academic texts and are the main point of difference in these discourses, but it is the role of these animals in alleviating mental health issues during the pandemic that is the primary focus (Hunjan and Reddy; McClatchey). As Nagenddrappa et al. illustrate, the emphasis is on 'identifying and using the existing *resources* such as pets to address loneliness and mental health concerns' (1, emphasis added). Mainstream media also provide advice to pet owners and, especially since January 2021, highlight the growth in demand, especially for dogs, during lockdowns and the knock-on impacts of inflated prices, intensified breeding, thefts, smuggling, and increasingly, post-lockdown abandonments.

Some concerns for the impacts and implications of Covid on the animals used in different industries (primarily research, fur farming, conservation tourism, zoos, and horseracing), as opposed to concern for the fate of the industries and their employees, have been voiced mainly in nonmainstream (Cameron; Connolly; HRI; Scott-Reid; Winders) but also some mainstream media (Greenfield and Muiruri), and critical academic literature is starting to emerge (Applebaum et al.; Pepper and Voigt). However, there is as yet very little information entering mainstream discourses regarding the undoubted financial impacts of Covid on a range of industries aside from animal agriculture and fur farming, on their extensive and often interlinked supply chains (for example breeding operations), and the likely outcomes for millions of animals. One can however speculate based on the 2008-2009 financial crisis which saw the number of racehorses slaughtered double (Doward), and on the IMF's prediction that the Covid-related recession will be the worst since the 1930s Great Depression (IMF).

It is worth noting that social and economic dimensions of the pandemic are also examined through the lens of biopower and biopolitics (Lorenzini; Rose; Sylvia IV). However, despite a critical focus on the 'regulation and disciplining of life' (Correa 3), and a recognition that 'the real priority of biopower is increasingly the cultivation of capital' (Hannah et al. 5), biopolitics is used to conceptualize and understand *responses* to the pandemic but not to frame or challenge its *causes*. The rampant regulation and disciplining of *nonhuman* lives that leads to the repeated emergence of zoonotic diseases, not to mention being among the leading causes of climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and the extinction of species, is not addressed. This is despite the biopolitical techniques and strategies that underpin all human uses of animals being thoroughly theorized, though perhaps not in publications that find traction with mainstream media and major organizations (for example: Chrulew and Wadiwel; Clark; Nimmo; Stanescu; Stuart and Gunderson; Wadiwel). As Clark notes, drawing on Wadiwel, 'biopower is exercised over "*all life*" not just human life' (111, italics in original).

Returning to the animal-related Covid discourses, while the *methods* by which animals are used may be critiqued in these texts, their constitutions *as* food, entertainment, test subjects, companions, and legally tradable wildlife are never questioned. Some mainstream media outlets, notably *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The New York Times* occasionally feature stories more

critically implicating, or at least questioning, factory farming (Baur; Dalton 'Coronavirus: Industrial Animal'; Dutkiewicz et al.; Vettese and Blanchette) or animal agriculture more broadly (Benatar; Lymbery 'If Leaders'), including some by academics and/or activists. These signal a welcome appearance of more rigorous critical perspectives into mainstream discourse.

A similarly small fraction of scholarly Covid-related literature adopts a more critical perspective on, for example, companion animals (Vincent et al.), the commodification of wildlife (Halabowski and Rzymiski; Roe et al.; Volpato et al.), and fur farming (Halabowski and Rzymiski), in addition to industrial 'livestock' production (Garces; Halabowski and Rzymiski; Lymbery 'Covid-19'; Wiebers and Feigin). However, most of these critiques are framed in utilitarian terms and tend to default to a welfare paradigm thereby curtailing the more critical elements of their narrative. Wiebers and Feigin, and Halabowski and Rzymiski are notable exceptions in this regard. Nevertheless, the persistent prioritization of animal agriculture, or more problematically, factory farming, as one animal use requiring particular attention (in connection with environmental harm, acute animal suffering, as well as risks to human health) does not help legitimize efforts for broader animal justice.

In fact, I would argue that when it is not part of an ontological critique of animal use – which is most often the case – the preoccupation with industrialized animal agriculture or factory farming can be considered a welfarist strategy insofar as it aims to 'regulate or mitigate the violent effects of ... sovereignty, while leaving the basic structure of domination intact' (Wadiwel 22). An opportunity is therefore being missed to associate various problems not simply with one particular animal use but with the ideology that designates all animals as usable. This is an issue for two reasons, both of which counter the effective altruism position (Bockman; Broad):

1. Without being grounded in a more fundamental and comprehensive rationale opposed to animal use, critiques of meat consumption, factory farming, and animal agriculture may reinforce understandings of, and commitments to, the 'right' kind of animal husbandry, or do little to challenge them. This can have two outcomes. First, the clearer delineation of, and increased market for, what constitutes 'better', more ethical

and/or sustainable 'meat' and, second, the modification of industrial production methods, and/or animals themselves, to mitigate their worst effects (or perceptions thereof). The latter can be seen in efforts to improve farm animal welfare and develop more technologically advanced and 'humane' production methods. For example, 'ethical' dairy (Jacobs; Makalintal), multi-storey pig farms (Standaert and De Augustinis), and genetic disenforcements (Shriver). As long as other uses of animals remain unchallenged and implicitly (more) sanctioned, the argument can be made that eating them is fundamentally unproblematic (Davis; Plumwood; Scales), especially if standardized against more apparently benign and acceptable uses.

2. Similarly, while 'food' animals might physically suffer more obviously in terms of quantity, the oppression of individual animals has to be considered equally, regardless of whether that oppression is primarily mental, physical, or ontological, and whether it lasts 1 day, 8 weeks, 18 months, 3 years, or 30 years. Efforts for animal justice need to pull all animals along at an equal pace, acknowledging all forms of harm.

The effect of this Covid coverage is to limit ongoing concerns associated with zoonotic diseases predominantly to one sector of animal use – animal agriculture, and to one dimension of that sector – industrialized or factory farming. Furthermore, these concerns are catalyzed by the health risks associated with poor animal welfare, management practices, and insufficient regulation rather than being associated with practices of farming and eating animals per se. These discourses represent a missed opportunity to foster more critical, and not just multispecies (Kirksey), perspectives on all the ways humans currently interact with and use animals.

In sum, since the WHO officially declared the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, reactions and responses from major organizations, mainstream media, and academia have systematically avoided adopting a critical perspective towards human uses of animals. Dominant discourses focus on identifying the origins of the virus, monitoring potential animal reservoirs, regulating human interactions with wildlife, reducing risks associated with industrialized animal agriculture, mitigating the economic impact on industries, and improving mental health. Brief

recent searches undertaken since January 2021 indicate that the same discourses still dominate the public sphere. This is not a critique of these particular texts or authors for not including critical animal perspectives. Rather, it is to demonstrate that such perspectives are rarely even part of the discursive landscape.

At the same time, and leveraging the lack of a rigorous, universal critique of animal use (as illustrated in the next section), there are scholars cautioning against blaming animal agriculture for the coronavirus (Ani et al.; Van Eenennaam) and advising rather improvements in production methods. One Health is often invoked and extended in this regard to encompass One Welfare to ensure 'food production systems are resilient, flexible, and fair in the face of future challenges' (Marchant-Forde and Boyle 1). The FAO's guidelines for mitigating the impacts of Covid on the 'livestock' sector include internationally coordinated measures to protect animal production and markets, and maintain processing and retail operations (FAO 'Mitigating the Impacts'). Moreover, animal scientists dedicated to 'livestock' research, including those within the FAO's Animal Production and Health Division,⁶ comprise a longstanding, well-funded, and vast network of global efforts aiming to constantly improve 'livestock' production methods and efficiencies.

It is against this background that the aforementioned 'pivotal moment' observations are situated, asserting in different ways that business-as-usual is no longer an option (Holdorf and O'Neill) and that our 'arrogant' and 'promiscuous' treatment of nature needs to change (Vogel). However, weighed against these dominant discourses that continue to normalize animal uses, these pleas are little more than insubstantial platitudes. A failure to engage with the critical tenets underpinning human uses of nature and other animals – binary thinking, naturalization of hierarchical categories, and commodification – or to specify the nature and scope of practices that need to change (encompassing the A-IC), means that business, i.e., our 'arrogant' and 'promiscuous' treatment of nature, is in fact proceeding as usual.

The evident illegitimacy of critical animal perspectives across these key knowledge sites has been noted by scholars since well before Covid. For example, the IPCC, FAO, UN, and WCED, among others, have been (and continue to be) roundly critiqued for routinely excluding

critical perspectives and perpetuating conceptions of nature and animals as natural capital (Almiron; Arcari; Boscardin and Bossert). In academia, Richard Kahn observes that in an environment (largely) accepting of strong critiques of classism, racism, sexism and other forms of structural oppression, the animal standpoint remains institutionally delegitimated. Even across disciplines potentially most sympathetic to alternate views, concerned with environmental and social justice, the continued exclusion of nonhumans has been described as nothing short of 'impressive obduracy' (Twine 4, see also: Arcari et al.; Lundström). Lastly, the role of the media in both reflecting and reinforcing the illegitimacy of critical perspectives on animals, as well as the movement itself, has been well documented (for example: Almiron et al.; Cole and Morgan; Freeman 'This Little Piggy', 'Framing Animal Rights'; Khazaal and Almiron; Kristiansen et al.; Lockwood; Probyn-Rapsey and Lennox). Covid is simply underscoring a longstanding pattern of exclusion.

Animal advocacy

It might be expected that critical animal perspectives would exhibit greater traction outside these formal sites of knowledge. However, even in the advocacy space, a presence and history of their illegitimacy is evident. A review of the websites and sub-pages of ten prominent advocacy organizations with both national (US, UK, and Australia) and international reach underscores the primary, and often singular, focus on highlighting links between factory farming or animal agriculture, the sale and consumption of wildlife, and zoonotic diseases (Table 2). As part of these narratives, a wholesale or partial shift towards plant-based or vegan diets is typically promoted as the way to avoid future risks to human health and reduce animal suffering. None of these organizations provide an overarching statement in response to Covid.

Table 2. Covid responses and primary frames of prominent animal advocacy organizations

Organization	Covid-related topics	Covid narrative?	Worldview Framings/Vision
PETA	Vaccine testing (monkeys, mice, guinea pigs) Adopting a dog Vegan hand soaps Ending wildlife trafficking Pandemics and meat Responsible mask disposal	No	Speciesism
Human Society International (HSI)	Companion animals Cat and dog meat Vaccine testing Banning wildlife trade Wildlife consumption Protecting wildlife sanctuaries Intensive farming Fur farming	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A humane and sustainable world for all animals • Ending animal suffering • A humane society
Vegan Society	Vaccine testing Vegan diet (animal agriculture and health)	No	Ending animal exploitation
VIVA!	Zoonotic diseases and diets Factory farming Livestock farming Banning wildlife markets Vegan diet Meat processing Bear bile and Covid	No	Creating a kinder, more sustainable world for humans and animals alike
Freedom for Animals	Reindeer displays	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom from exploitation, harm, and captivity • Freedom for all animals

<p>Animals Australia</p>	<p>Wet markets Factory farms Slaughter practices Zoonotic diseases Plant-based diets</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>A world where animals are free from cruelty</p>
<p>Faunalytics</p>	<p>Meat consumption Companion animals Banning wildlife consumption and trade Wildlife conservation Animal agriculture Zoonoses</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Inspiring change for animals</p>
<p>Animal Aid</p>	<p>Slaughterhouses Reindeer displays</p>	<p>No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ending animal cruelty • Freedom from abuse and exploitation
<p>The Humane League</p>	<p>Factory farming</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Ending abuse of animals used for food</p>
<p>Animal Rebellion</p>	<p>Protests Animal agriculture Plant-based food Zoonotic diseases Factory farming Wildlife hunting and farming</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Truth, justice, and equality for all humans and non-human animals</p>
<p>Single-issue campaigns</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CAGED NW (greyhound racing) 2. Grey2K (greyhound racing) 3. Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses 4. Animal Equality (farmed animals) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. None 2. None 3. None 4. None 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No 2. No 3. No 4. No 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Against greyhound exploitation and death 2. End dog racing cruelty 3. Addressing serious animal welfare concerns. 4. Ending cruelty to farmed animals. A world in which all animals are respected and protected.

Instead, a range of two-pronged solution frames/visions are offered, describing the future these organizations are aiming for are – a kinder world without cruelty or suffering where animals are free from exploitation. Only two organizations (PETA and DXE) allude to more structural issues resonant with a critical animal perspective. PETA offers a brief explanation of speciesism as a ‘human-supremacist worldview’, and DXE rejects ‘oppressive institutions and ideologies that harm all animals’. However, neither articulate in plain-language the scope of these concepts, or the practices they encompass. Nor do they contextualize this discrimination in relation to others such as sexism, racism, ableism etc. There are glimmers of these broader links, for example in Viva’s goal of ‘creating a kinder, more sustainable world for humans and animals alike’, and Animal Rebellion’s call for ‘truth, justice, and equality for all humans and non-human animals’. However, a clear framing of the fundamental problem(s) these visions and goals address (such as the human-animal binary or the commodification of animals as part of the A-IC) is universally absent along with the wider importance of addressing it. Moreover, single-issue campaigns do not connect their issues with other kinds of animal use and so do not leverage opportunities to foster more inclusive understandings of human exploitation and domination of animals.

Several organizations do use Covid to underscore arguments against animal agriculture. Yet all routinely fail to identify, let alone explain, the logics of human supremacy and the capitalist pursuit of profit underpinning humans’ treatment of ‘food’ and other animals that Covid has foregrounded so clearly. It is through these logics that the nature and extent of animal oppression could be articulated, drawing together what are currently presented as separate issues under a coherent critical animal perspective that provides context and justification for their respective goals/visions. As it is, a search of these organizations’ responses to Covid delivers either nothing or a grab-bag of disconnected headlines and campaigns.

PETA, for example, provides information on the use of animals in vaccine research, the need to stop wildlife trafficking, things to consider before adopting a dog, advice on vegan hand soaps, the link between meat and pandemics, and responsible disposal of facemasks to protect animals. The only concept that unites these organizations and their various campaigns is that

animal suffering/cruelty is morally bad and must be stopped. For multi-campaign and certain single-issue organizations, benefits to human health and the environment of making more compassionate choices are also a shared theme.

A two-minute film from Humane Society International (HSI) titled 'End the Lockdown for Animals' deserves mention.⁷ The film invites viewers to empathize with caged and captive animals based on our own lockdown experiences. It is visually powerful and seeks to expose the conceptual barriers that separate humans from those with whom 'we're up to 99% related'. HSI's main webpage does not promote the film, nor does it appear on any sub-tabs. The only way to find the film is through an online search using the title. Its release via social media on World Animal Day in October 2020 was noted by the India State Times, a South African community news site, and by online eco-platform One Green Planet, but not by any mainstream media. Since October 2020 (to May 2021), the film has received just 4,800 views on YouTube, 2,500 views on Facebook, and been shared fewer than 1,000 times. Perhaps the biggest drawback for this film is that it does not connect with any larger, pre-existing narrative of animal use. Like other advocacy efforts, it adds another disconnected fragment to an already incoherent story. This is underscored by HSI's identification of six ways people can bring about a 'pivotal moment for change' for confined animals: 1. End factory farming, 2. Ban fur farming, 3. Ban wild animals in circuses, roadside zoos, travelling shows, and attractions, 4. Say no to animal selfies, 5. Ban dog meat farms in South Korea, and 6. End animal testing (Menon). As noted above, ending animal suffering and creating a kinder world are the only unifying context provided for these efforts.

Animal advocacy organizations may variously expose, question, challenge, disrupt and/or reject particular uses of animals. However, often the focus is more on certain practices associated with that use (for example live export, factory farming) than on critiquing the use in principle. More problematically, organizations continue to silo their efforts and messages, and therefore perform little better than key knowledge sites at leveraging the 'wake-up' potential of the global pandemic in the interests of a fundamental shift in thinking about human-animal

relations. This constitutes a significant failure to highlight and leverage the multiple, compounding, and systemic problems with animal use that Covid has emphasized, and with which critical animal perspectives are concerned.

Even a recent 'Animals' Manifesto' addressed to a special Covid-19 session of the United National General Assembly held in December 2020, and signed by over 150 'animal welfare and other organizations,' including Animals Australia, HSI, and PETA Asia, begins by contextualizing Covid recovery under the One Welfare paradigm (Bridgers). Accordingly, in addition to promoting 'healthier consumption patterns' through diets that are 'low in animal protein' and 'plant-rich' (as opposed to plant-based or vegan), it includes seven reformist recommendations to reduce the 'vulnerabilities of industrial animal farming' (20) including reducing stocking densities and the use of antibiotics. The Manifesto adopts a more hard-line approach to the commercial wildlife trade, which should eventually end altogether, and the farming of animals for fur and fashion, which should end immediately. However, overall, the approach to human-animal relations conveyed in this Manifesto is incoherent and selective. The notion of 'sustainable use' is questioned in relation to some animals but not others, and there is an unspecified distinction made between 'non-essential' and 'essential' uses of animals (24).

While the conservative tone of this document is perhaps understandable given its intended audience, the Manifesto further illustrates the logical inconsistencies and piecemeal, disconnected approach to issues that are features of animal advocacy in general. Coupled with the absence of a critical framing of the overarching problem(s), these features undermine the legitimacy of advocacy for all animals and constrain the capacity of associated efforts to engender critical animal perspectives. Specifically, advocacy efforts generally avoid addressing the human animal binary and associated hierarchies of value. Some organizations, to varying degrees, challenge the naturalization and normalization of certain animal uses, particularly involving the most intensively commodified animals. However, the scope of these mechanisms, their interconnections across all animal uses, and their location and role in broader structures of oppression are not articulated. Strategically, it may be that organizations are encouraged to simplify their messaging to increase readability and comprehension, thereby appealing to as wide an audience as possible (HRC). Simplification, however, does not mean the message has to be

simplistic. In the process of simplification, critical dimensions of the movement's broader liberatory goals may be excised or made invisible (Rodrigues), curtailing opportunities for audiences to engage on a deeper level.

The value and necessity of a plurality of approaches to change is acknowledged, and many advocacy organizations and campaigns can point to measurable successes with their respective strategies. However, the critical point is that if the animal issues these strategies address had been more clearly and consistently contextualized in a way that removes any doubt about their common origins/enemy (structurally, ideologically, and economically), then Covid might have appeared on a world stage better primed for critical thinking. In this scenario, the separate fragments are drawn together, like individual cells of a compound eye (O'Sullivan), to become part of a larger story about the matrix of animal oppression. Instead, the disconnection that characterizes the advocacy movement is mirrored and amplified in key knowledge sites so that this larger story is indiscernible, buried under dominant discourses concerned with disease control, short-term prevention, social and economic impacts, animal welfare, and above all, reducing risks associated with industrial animal agriculture. Measurable advances in animal welfare and the rise of veganism may be regarded hopefully (for example, Harrington et al.). However, in terms of challenging human relations with animals in a substantive way, especially at this historic 'turning point', dominant reactions and responses to the pandemic have to be interpreted to some extent as a sign of the cumulative inadequacy of advocacy efforts to date.⁸

These analyses demonstrate that the illegitimacy of critical animal perspectives is far-reaching and even constituted in part by the advocacy movement itself. This illegitimacy contributes to a preference for advocacy strategies focused on individual behaviours that can be overly sensitive, non-confrontational, and sometimes deferential to the hegemony of the animal-industrial complex. The cycle is self-fulfilling. Furthermore, by association and also conflation, the animal advocacy movement itself, or elements thereof, can have a legitimating or delegitimizing effect on critical animal perspectives.

Compounding (il)legitimacies: The animal advocacy movement

The struggle for legitimacy in the broader movement for nonhuman animals has been widely noted (Cazaux; Schonfeld; Woodhall and da Trindade; Wrenn 'Abolitionist Animal Rights') and examined more specifically in relation to its goals (Greenebaum 'I'm Not an Activist!'; Tuohey and Ma), membership demographics (Einwohner 'Gender, Class'), specific organizations (Lee), and certain actions or events (Badano et al.; Gelber and O'Sullivan). Wrenn and Johnson describe advocacy organizations in competition with each other for mainstream legitimacy resulting in an inevitable shift to moderate reformist strategies that pose less of a challenge to prevailing structures. In pursuit of this mainstream legitimacy, the advocacy movement is seen as having opened its doors to movement 'freeriding' (Wrenn 'Free-Riders') and 'neoliberal backgrounding' (of nonhuman others) (Singer), both of which speak to the profitability of an 'uncritical mass' (Wrenn 'Free-Riders' 17). Differences in preferred goals and strategies are a consistent feature of the animal movement (Broad; Fisher; Stallwood) and also a source of tension (Francione and Garner; Wrenn 'Toward a Vegan'). They are also longstanding. In 2002, Nibert called for greater unity and cooperation among animal advocates.

In this regard, one of the simultaneously most critiqued and celebrated offshoots of animal advocacy is the promotion of dietary veganism and plant-based eating. For some, the rising popularity, availability, and legitimacy of vegan foods are largely seen as a step forward (Harrington et al.), though not necessarily for animals. For others, the ascendancy of this contemporary brand of veganism or 'veganwashing' (Bertuzzi 'Veganism: Lifestyle'), heavily influenced by social media, celebrity figures, and lifestyle-based identities, and colonised by pre-prepared and convenience foods, is primarily a 'vehicle for corporate profit' that carries deeply problematic implications (White np) (see also: Doyle; Wrenn 'Trump Veganism'). This strand of vegan capitalism is seen as depoliticizing veganism (Bertuzzi 'Becoming Hegemony'; Morris; Singer), disconnecting it from animal issues and the broader meaning of veganism to such an extent that it is 'bereft of the ability to usher in a more ethical, peaceable, and non-violent world' (White np). The fact that a seven-fold increase in online interest in veganism since 2014 is mirrored by a decline in interest in animal rights and animal liberation would seem to support these observations (Figure 1).

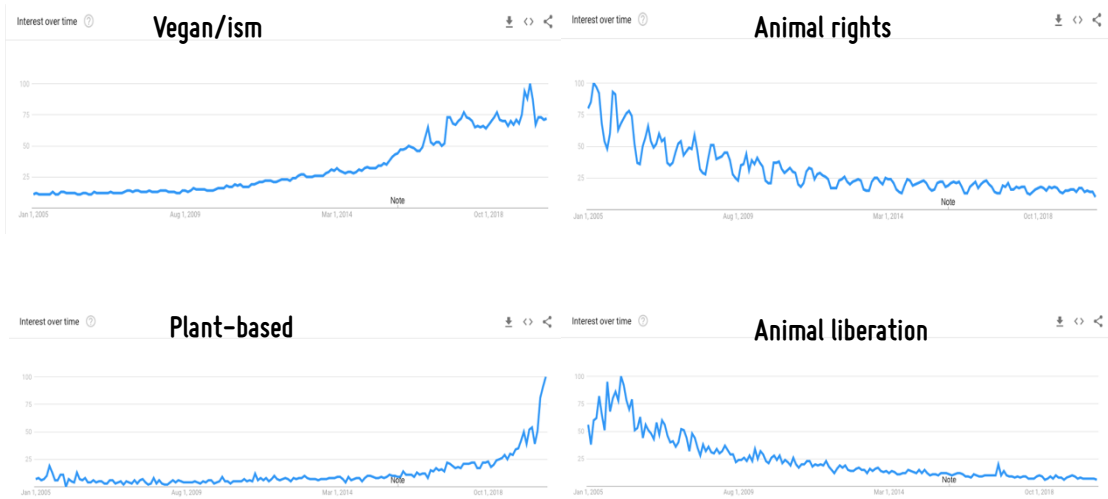


Figure 1. Google Trends worldwide interest over time in the terms *Vegan/ism*, *Plant-based*, *Animal Rights*, and *Animal Liberation* between 1st January 2005 and 7th July 2020 (scale and date ranges match).

Taking a moment to explore ‘meat’ consumption in response to Covid in more detail, it is true that since the pandemic took hold, annually increasing rates of global ‘meat’ consumption have been somewhat checked. The UN forecasts a 3% decline in global per capita meat consumption for 2020 due to market disruptions and a global economic downturn that The World Bank has dubbed the worst recession since World War II (Felsenthal). Online articles cite surveys indicating consumers’ increased *interest* in eating less meat and shifting towards plant-based diets (‘29% of Germans’; Ho ‘Coronavirus Triggers’, ‘Pandemic Meat’; Turner). Reasons include reduced confidence in hygiene and safety, lack of product availability, increased cost, and concerns for health, the environment, or animal rights.

It is uncertain what the practical and long-term impact of consumers’ self-reported attitudes and intentions will be, especially once food businesses, supply chains, and prices return to near normal. Following the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, per capita ‘meat’ consumption in the US fell by 9% between 2007 and 2014 only to rebound by 12% in the subsequent five years (NCC). UK consumption by contrast remained fairly steady, dropping only 0.2% over the same period before increasing 10% by 2019 (OECD ‘Agricultural Output’). During this period,

both the production and consumption of 'meat' made frequent headlines linked to climate change, deforestation, pollution, human health, and the abuse of 'farm' animals, although risks to health have never been as conspicuous as they are today. As with these still ongoing concerns, mainstream media and major organizations are primarily associating Covid with particular (industrial-scale) production practices involving 'livestock' rather than the consumption and use of animals per se. The current decrease in demand for 'meat' and increased interest in plant-based and vegan foods may therefore have little to do with concern for animals and their use, and also may not be any more enduring than previous occasions.

Indeed, aggregate figures can conceal important details. For example, it is expected that the production of meat from bovines and pigs will contract in 2020 while that from poultry and ovines will expand (FAO 'Food Outlook'). Lockdowns have sparked an increase in home baking with corresponding increases in demand for eggs in the US and UK ('Sainsbury's'; Reiley) further indicating that concern for animals may not be especially central to reported dietary shifts. In addition, it is reported that 50% of all 'meat' in the US was consumed outside the home before the pandemic (Bloomberg), accounting for a significant proportion of the overall decline. Whether eating out will return to the same levels post-pandemic is unknown but this provides cause for some speculation regarding reduced demand for 'meat'. Indeed, other analyses show significant increases in the volume of household retail purchases of certain types of 'meat' more suited to household cooking practices (Martin; Roerink). Crucially, while production is projected to drop by just 1.7% in 2020, the FAO still expects moderate growth (of 2.4%) in the international 'meat' trade (FAO 'Food Outlook'). Meanwhile, global per capita fish consumption, the majority of which derives from aquaculture, is expected to continue its upward trajectory to 2030 (FAO 'The State of'), with scientists recommending yields be increased by 36-74% to supply an increasing proportion of 'meat' for human consumption (Costello et al.).

Building on contested conceptions of the vegan revolution, schisms have emerged within the vegan community in the ways veganism is conceptualized, distinguishing for example between ethical, environmental, health, and intersectional vegans among others (Alvarez; Dutkiewicz and Dickstein; Greenebaum 'Veganism, Identity'). The caution advised by Jallinova

et al. against an overly optimistic interpretation of the current popularity of vegan eating appears well founded. These authors call for more research before determining the long-term political impact of this trend.

The ideological fracturing of the animal advocacy movement and increased focus on (and tensions between) identities (vegan, plant-based, welfarist, activist, abolitionist) alludes to an increasing relativism that, while reflecting a positive shift to 'a recognition of "otherness"' might also be fostering 'a suspicion towards notions of "universal justice" and "political community" without which resistance to the systematic injustices of the marginalized and oppressed is impossible' (Taylor 20-21). Furthermore, Suchman notes that 'legitimacy appears to be especially problematic when organizations of different distinguishable types compete for the same resources' (593). Factionalism and shifting emphases in the animal advocacy/rights movement are well recognized (Bertuzzi 'The Individualization'; Pendergrast 'The Vegan Shift'; Wrenn 'A Rational Approach'), regarded as not necessarily negative (Wrenn 'Why Can't') and perhaps inevitable (Haines, qtd. in Pendergrast 'A Sociological Examination' 71). However, the lack or gradual erosion of a unifying, politically engaged understanding of universal justice for animals is a problem and one that Tuohey and Ma identified in their assessment of legitimacy in the US movement nearly 30 years ago (Tuohey and Ma). Ten years later, in 2002, Nibert echoed this judgment, declaring: 'many in the animal rights movement are unaware of the entanglement of the oppression of humans and other animals and how oppression of other animals is fueled by the structure of political-economic arrangements' (xiii-xiv).

In addition to external and internal questions of legitimacy, the movement for animals has been subject to more overt attacks that have served to further undermine public perceptions and understandings of its aims and intentions. These prolonged, diffuse, and destabilizing attacks are spearheaded by animal-based industries (primarily 'meat' and research) and centre on the introduction of the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act into US law in 2006 (Sorenson 'Constructing Terrorists'), with similar developments in Europe (Potter). Sorenson ('The Myth') shows how corporations have repeatedly constructed direct links between animal organizations (including PETA) and terrorism, and argues the term is deliberately misapplied to place activists 'outside acceptable moral boundaries (73). As well as constructing a culture of

fear (Sorenson 'Constructing Terrorists'), this has also located that fear in an amorphously defined group of 'activists' that can include whole organizations, its supporters, and anyone who holds a minority view on the use of any animal. As Sorenson notes, 'concern for animals is itself considered motivation for crime' ('Constructing Terrorists' 246).

In her exploration of affective economies, Sara Ahmed explains that rather than being located in any single figure, hate works 'to create the very outline of different figures or objects of hate, a creation that crucially aligns the figures together and constitutes them as a 'common' threat' (Ahmed 119). While hate may be too strong a word, the conflation of concern for animals with animal rights, activism, activist organizations (particularly PETA and the ALF), extremism, violence, and terrorism (Sorenson 'Constructing Terrorists'; Véron), compounded by enduring narratives of animal advocates and vegans as over-emotional, hyper-sensitive and mentally unsound (Cole and Morgan; Einwohner 'Bringing the Outsiders'; MacInnis and Hodson), constitutes a powerful counter framing of the whole movement that discredits and casts suspicion on its associated ideas and practices. That the movement does not advance a coherent alternative⁹ or counter-history of the animal standpoint (Kahn) lends this frame greater sway than it might otherwise have and allows it to detract attention from the serious matter of animal oppression.

A significant body of literature examines understandings of animal activism *within* the movement, focused on self-identified activists already aligned with their cause. However, there is a marked absence of research on public understandings of animal advocacy, whether in relation to the movement as a whole, certain organizations, specific campaigns, or its general principles. In one study of non-activists, Mika focuses on the efficacy of different campaign frames in PETA's recruitment efforts. Findings were variable and inconclusive, with mostly negative reactions that failed to instigate the intended 'transformational epiphany' (937). These reactions extended to moral shock campaigns whose effectiveness has been questioned (Mika; Wrenn 'Resonance of'). As Jasper explains, feelings and attitudes need to be contextualized – 'for a moral shock to lead to protest, it must have an explicit cognitive dimension as well as emotional and moral ones' (Jasper 180). Buddle et al. examined the reactions of meat consumers to online animal activism from individuals and groups including PETA and Animals

Australia. The authors found that almost all study participants did not engage with or entirely dismissed the information 'because they did not view animal welfare organisations as credible sources of information' (251). Echoing these findings, focus groups conducted with UK non-vegans found that pro-vegan messages based on ethics (as opposed to the environment or health), and advocacy messages in general, were regarded as the least credible and lacking in evidence or scientific proof (Parkinson and Twine 62).

Legitimizing critical animal perspectives

As highlighted, an extensive, and ongoing, volume of research demonstrates the illegitimacy of critical animal perspectives not only across major organizations, mainstream media, and academia, but also in popular media, TV and film (Molloy, Mills, Arcari). This paper adds to this body of work and has also demonstrated that this illegitimacy extends to the animal advocacy movement, encompassing both the content and framing of their activities, and perceptions of the movement as a whole. Reasons for this are contained within the definition of critical animal perspectives – the respective hegemonies of the human-animal binary, normalized categories of animal use, the commodification of 'natural' resources under capitalism, and intersecting complexes of oppression. The more important question is how to bring about a social transformation such that critical animal perspectives not only gain greater legitimacy but also become normalized.

The animal advocacy movement plays a key role as the interface between dominant and alternative understandings of animals. Finding ways to assist and encourage the movement to reflect on its approaches to advocacy and be open to more explicitly foregrounding the critical tenets of their work could constitute a significant shift in how animal use starts to be represented and thought about more broadly. These tenets are central to critical animal studies, a discipline that has, in contrast to animal advocacy, gained legitimacy in a short space of time and continues to grow.

As part of this, research is needed into how the animal advocacy movement is broadly understood by those who do *not* consider themselves part of or aligned with it in order to gauge the movements' current position both socially and ideologically, identify where it is collectively misfiring, and help guide (and justify) the development of a more legitimate unifying framework. Questions could include, for example: How do you understand 'the animal movement'? What does it comprise? Which organizations and/or individuals do you most identify with it? What does the movement aim to achieve? What practices and/or principles do you associate with it?

Armed with that knowledge, one possible way to unite the heterogeneous animal movement that could accommodate, and mitigate the impacts of, movement diversity and to some degree transcend problems of perception, is the adoption and deployment of a new collective action frame that 'punctuates and syntactically connects patterns or happenings in the world' (Snow and Benford 138). Like O'Sullivan's compound eye, an effective collective action frame could make sense of the apparently disconnected ways in which animals' lives are expropriated, controlled, modified, and extinguished, lending legitimacy to the advocacy movement, their respective actions, and more importantly, the critical animal perspectives they ideally advance and support. Recalling the foundational tenets of CAS on which this paper's formulation of critical animal perspectives is based, Nocella et al. offer potentially useful guidance in this regard, stating that '[CAS] can properly be seen as an *anti-oppression* movement' (xxvii, emphasis added). The possibilities presented by oppression as a new transformational frame for animal advocacy will be examined in a forthcoming paper.

Conclusion

This paper was inspired by dominant animal-related Covid discourses that, since March 2020, have circulated within and between key sites of knowledge identified as mainstream media, major organizations, and academia. The implications of these discourses for animals have been explored, particularly within the context of widespread representations of the pandemic as marking a 'pivotal' moment for human relations with nature. This exploration is underpinned by a conception of critical animal perspectives intended to extend ways of thinking about animals associated with CAS beyond academia. Based on this, it is determined that dominant Covid discourses do not question, challenge,

disrupt, or reject the human-animal binary, hierarchical orders of animal 'others', the naturalization and normalization of associated categories and uses, or the commodification of animals' lives and bodies. Nor do they recognize the interconnectedness of animal uses across the A-IC or the intersecting oppressions of which the A-IC is part. Hence, it is argued that these key sites of knowledge, and also prominent animal advocacy organizations, both demonstrate the illegitimacy of critical animal perspectives and contribute to their ongoing delegitimation. Moreover, due to factionalism, fragmentation, inconsistent messaging, but primarily lack of overall coherence, the advocacy movement does little to support its own legitimacy, and by extension, the legitimacy of the critical animal perspectives it might be expected to champion. Indeed, the movement may, by association, be exacerbating the illegitimacy of these perspectives in mainstream discourses.

Movement diversity is not the problem. With so many issues to address, and with so few resources, a variety of frames, strategies, and repertoires of contention are necessary to achieve meaningful change. Many of these efforts dramatically alter the everyday lives of many individual animals for the better. Yet, these efforts remain largely disconnected and heavily focused on certain practices involving certain groups of animals, while more universal conceptions of animal use, encompassing all its dimensions and with a view to structural and lasting change (for existing and future animals), fail to gain traction. This has been the case for many decades and perhaps partly explains why the realities foregrounded by the Covid pandemic failed to strike a deeper chord. This is not to imply that individual advocates, activists, and others working on behalf of animals do not already embrace critical animal perspectives and apply them in their work. However, when it comes to addressing the wider public, their substance is diluted, if not removed altogether.

Animals are currently legitimate subjects of discourse, but only when thought about and seen through an anthroponormative lens. Alternate, critical perspectives on animals are widely illegitimate and delegitimized even as they have become increasingly relevant. Formally and consistently democratizing the critical perspectives enshrined in CAS beyond the academy could be a useful and practical way of approaching this problem and laying more fertile ground for the next 'moment' to be truly pivotal - instigating the social transformation in human relations with nonhumans envisioned by all those advocating on behalf of animals.

Notes

¹ There is also lack of clarity around what, or who, the term 'nature' encompasses and who it excludes (Arcari et al.).

² Recognizing that it is not one movement but rather several (Woodhall and da Trindade 25)

³ Understood as 'the press...[and]...ancillary forms of journalism and media' that embody the 'Fourth Estate', as compared with the 'Fifth Estate' that emerged with the Information Age (Flick 376).

⁴ For example, the WHO, the UN, the World Bank, the OECD, the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and major think tanks, such as Chatham House, among others.

⁵ Search terms included 'Covid-19, 'Covid', 'coronavirus' or 'pandemic' paired with 'animals', 'wildlife', or more specific terms such as 'livestock', 'pets', 'companion animals', 'zoo', 'horses' etc.

⁶ The FAO views the 'livestock sector' as a key element of its poverty alleviation programs in 'developing' countries.

⁷ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ORqK8zLwU8>

⁸ My conception of advocacy includes organizations, research centers, scholars, journalists, and individuals who can be considered part of the broader movement aimed at eliminating practices involving animal exploitation.

⁹ A form of vegan hedonism, as described by Twine (2017) and Bertella (2020), might be considered an emerging counter narrative, although the interests and inherent value of animals are not central.

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