



Epistemology of Ignorance and Human Privilege

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***Abstract:** The article below introduces epistemology of ignorance to animal studies, unearthing various ideologies that legitimate practices of animal exploitation. Factory farming, the slaughterhouse, circuses and zoos, as well as scientific animal research are all investigated for the operation of ideological narratives and images. It is seen that the tropes of Old MacDonald's farm, Noah's ark, and the temple of science play pseudo-justifying roles in regards to these institutions. The article concludes that such ideologies of human privilege must be exposed and analyzed for progress to be made in overcoming animal oppression.*

***Keywords:** epistemology of ignorance, human privilege, Old MacDonald's Farm, Noah's Ark, temple of science, sacrifice, ideology*

Introduction

Animal studies inherited a strain of individualism from first-generation animal ethics, a concern for the properties and capacities of individual animals. Are they sentient? Can they be agents? What about subjectivity? These and similar queries formed the conceptual backdrop of many inter- and trans-disciplinary investigations of animality. Yet there has also been a complementary strain of relational thought in much animal studies. This breed of thinking can be traced at least as far back as Mary Midgley's notion of the 'mixed community' (of humans and other animals) and forward through more contemporary ideas of 'zoopolis' found in the works of Jennifer Wolch as well as Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson. The questions pursued therein revolve around a concern for explaining how other animals relate to each other and to human animals. In the latter concepts of zoopolis, the propounding authors are remarkably sanguine about the prospects for human-animal cohabitation. Other animals are cast in the roles of neighbour and fellow citizen, not simply that of (individualistic) moral patient. It is seen or promised that salutary multi-species inter-relationships are plausibly formed and maintained between humans and other animals; that we can and should live together relatively peaceably.

Why, then, does zoopolis still seem so utopian when viewed against the mainstream of social and political thought? One answer to this sort of question can be extrapolated from Zipporah Weisberg's contention that:

the main problem with citizenship theory [out of which springs the latest form of zoopolis] is that, as a specifically liberal theory, it leaves the problem of capitalism relatively untouched. It fails to acknowledge and remedy the vast social and economic injustices perpetuated by the prevailing capitalist socioeconomic order. (77)

That order interferes with the rise and maintenance of zoopolis, or so I will argue.

The solution to this problem may be found in another area of theory, namely the epistemology of ignorance. This latter sub-discipline examines not the truth-claims of a given body of knowledge, but rather the falsehoods and erroneous aspects of a body of myth or ideology. Linda Martin Alcoff surveys three models for the epistemology of ignorance: one in which 'ignorance follows from the general fact of our situatedness as knowers', a second which 'relates ignorance to specific aspects of group identities', and a third that 'develops a structural

analysis of the ways in which oppressive systems produce ignorance as one of their effects' (40). It is this third model that holds the key to understanding the ways in which speciesism reduces the conceptual and thus practical prospects of zoopolis. Martin Alcoff paraphrases the structuralist model's main argument thus:

1. One of the key features of oppressive societies is that they do not acknowledge themselves as oppressive. Therefore, in any given oppressive society, there is a dominant view about the general nature of the society that represents its particular forms of inequality and exploitation as basically just and fair, or at least the best of all possible worlds.
2. It is very likely, however, that this dominant representation of the unjust society as a just society will have countervailing evidence on a daily basis that is at least potentially visible to everyone in the society.
3. Therefore, cognitive norms of assessment will have to be maintained that allow for this countervailing evidence to be regularly dismissed so that the dominant view can be held stable. (47)

Applied to the case before us, the oppressive society is that of human privilege and the dominant view of its injustice is anthropocentrism. What I shall undertake here, in concert with the emphasis on Frankfurt School critique that Martin Alcoff marshals (50-56), is to reveal the cognitive norms of assessment that protect anthropocentrism from countervailing evidence in contemporary capitalist society. These norms are embedded in various practices and communications that include or derive from animal agriculture, zoos and circuses, and experimental laboratories. To examination of these we now turn.

Animal Agribusiness: Old MacDonald's Farm

In the realm of animal agriculture one mythic narrative in particular has shielded anthropocentrism and buttressed human privilege: the storybook discourse about a lovely, Edenic operation known as 'Old MacDonald's Farm'. This narrative has held sway for a long time in most of North America and in other regions as well. It has served to cover over industrial developments in animal agriculture by preserving an image of farm life that is replete

with blissful barnyard scenes. The realities of factory farming are quite different from the storybook version of open fields and humane treatment. In actuality, animal farming underwent a revolution during the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century: mass production, confinement conditions, and commercialized efficiency programs were the new order. Traditional animal husbandry fell by the wayside, and in its place was fostered a modern, machine-age paradigm. This new arrangement succeeded in bringing ever greater quantities of meat products to market, but at a steep price in terms of the effects on animals' living and dying circumstances: practices included, and still include 'cramped incarceration; mutilations; lack of sun and light; lack of exercise; chaining and caging; drugging; force-feeding [some] and ... deliberate malnutrition [for others]; forced weaning; forced insemination; loss of individuality; general deprivation; frustration of natural instincts and the denial of freedom' (Coats 20f.). From within this paradigm 'humane treatment is seen as unnecessary, irrelevant, and in conflict with the maximization of profit' (Coats 21).

The reality of factory farming has been knowable for decades, and yet it does not register on the collective psyche of society, because the Old MacDonald story, inculcated in childhood, prevails in tandem with associated imagery in advertising and packaging of animal products. There is a numbing of compassionate response to new realities that goes along with the old narrative, sufficient to overwhelm even the evidence of correlations between meat-eating and various diseases. That is the strength of the MacDonald myth: it can outdo even self-interest in our own health. As C. David Coats points out, 'telling the idealized story of traditional farming bliss [brings] ... the subtle, unwritten message that animals exist only to serve [hu]man's needs'. Indeed, 'this image of jolly service to the benevolent master unintentionally misleads us into the comfortable but false belief that farms are harmless, happy places' (28).

Let us survey some of the particular discrepancies between myth and reality in factory farming. Regarding pigs, the MacDonald myth would have it that families are kept together and have access to open yards or fields; in actuality, most piglets are segregated from their parents and most pigs live indoors in crowded conditions. Whereas MacDonald has it that gestation and weaning occurs in a cosy bed of nesting straw, the actual situation is that of bare steel crates. And, as they grow, pigs are kept in stacked cages with open mesh for floors, so that waste from the upper bunks falls through and down upon those unlucky enough to occupy lower cages.

Finally, in contrast to the sunny myth, lights in hog barns are frequently low or nonexistent (Coats, ch. 2).

With respect to dairy cows, the myth partakes in the overall fantasy of bliss: ‘The sun shines down. Contented animals graze on fresh green grass. The clear stream flows by. Crops, orchards, pastures, and garden plot are all integrated elements in the old-fashioned farm ideal – people, animals, and earth in harmony.’ (Coats, ill. 12) The reality includes so-called rape racks, where females are regularly inseminated to keep them lactating; crowded feedlot stalls; mechanical milking operations automated for efficiency. It is definitely not the case that Old MacDonald patiently tends each cow, manually milking her in a comfortable manner – that is only the mythic representation (Coats, ch. 3).

‘Veal calves’ may have it worst of all. Contrary to the myth of frolicking and gambolling in freedom, these animals must spend their time in narrow crates crowded together in dimly lit barns. There is not enough room for them even to turn around (exercise would develop muscles and thus toughen the meat), and they are fed a diet that makes them anaemic (in order to produce the pale-coloured flesh preferred by consumers). Despite this, ‘a children’s coloring book from the Wisconsin Agri-Business Foundation describes the bare wooden crate as “somewhat like the crib you had when you were a baby”’ (Coats, ill. 18). Indeed, the MacDonald myth lives on even here, as one representation portrays outdoor suckling activity: ‘The sun is shining, the [mother-cow’s] bell tinkles, and the mother-calf bond is strong’ (Coats, ill.19).

‘Beef cattle’ present a stark example of the discrepancies we’ve been surveying. They are invariably shown in MacDonald-type books and films as living and grazing in lush pastures, enjoying fresh water and shady trees (Coats, ill. 21). In reality, however, they must spend the last three to four months of their lives in crowded, fenced-in feedlots that are treeless and flyblown. As befits factory farming, these feedlots are massive operations with huge silos hulking over the scene (Coats, ill. 22). This environment is penultimate to the slaughterhouse and constitutes the actual circumstances of the overwhelming majority of cows who are grain-fed for ‘finishing’ rather than grass-grazing their whole lives.

The situation with chickens is scarcely better and often worse. For starters, most eggs are incubated in artificial apparatus; after hatching, depending on sex and breed, they are shipped off to broiler houses or laying barns. Male chicks, unusable by the industry, are exterminated in great masses of gassing and asphyxiation. All this is a far cry from the MacDonald representation of mother hens in open fields rearing their chicks peacefully and cosily. Moving on in the lifespan, egg-layers are commonly housed in large arrays of battery cages with multiple birds per ill-sized cage – certainly not arranged as individuals with each their own straw-lined laying box (as the myth portrays). The battery cages rule out the exercise of natural instincts such as flying, and the wiring of the cages produces deformations in their feet. So-called broiler chickens hardly have it better: they are debeaked without anaesthesia to keep them from maiming each other in their overcrowded, stressful conditions. In addition, since they are slaughtered when they are still chicks (not yet sexually mature), broilers of both sexes are imprisoned for six weeks in sheds and both the sexes are used for meat. Finally, there is no mythic cock crowing around the standard farmhouse; he was eliminated early on with all the other male chicks mentioned above (Coats, ch. 6; Potts).

Despite all the horrific realities we have surveyed, most of the public remains wedded to the blissful myth. As Coats indicates, ‘the popular images of farm life are represented by the gentle and idyllic life on Old MacDonald’s farm; they carry the message that life is pleasant and satisfying for the animals in the care of the kindly, amiable farmer’ (159). Perhaps we should not be surprised: there is, after all, an apparently innate biophilic tendency in humans (Wilson); we tend naturally toward compassion for other life forms, and so we want to believe the best about their circumstances. And when reality pokes through? Well, we are then apt to prefer the comfort of myth or else succumb to the ‘hardening process’ Coats describes, whereby our compassionate nature is numbed by lies and double-talk regarding the place of other animals in human society (167). It is important to remember that a whole machinery or economic engine drives the relations between these species and the (mis)understandings of those relations. The capitalist insistence on efficient processing and maximization of throughput is what essentially demands that other animals be treated merely as resources in our agricultural institutions.

At this juncture it may come to mind that there are allegedly humane alternatives—free-range, organic-type operations that hold the promise of farming with a conscience. Indeed, a veritable movement of ‘locavores’ (those who eat foodstuffs from local sources, instead of

globalized supermarkets) has formed in support of such small-scale alternatives. Free-range farming features livestock raised outdoors or in large pens with straw, access to fresh air and water, antibiotics only when animals are sick, and more natural behaviours (Mickelson 1-17). Overall, free-range farming is held by its proponents to be ‘kinder, healthier, and better for the environment’ (Mickelson 19). To those who object to meat production per se, livestock ranchers respond that farmed animals are protected from the ravages of the wild; for example, disease, hunger, predation, aging (Mickelson 35). And the humane slaughter practices of free-rangers removes advance notice of killing (thus reducing fear and anxiety among cattle or other animals) (Mickelson 37).

Don’t these developments give the lie to the supposed inevitability of capitalist exploitation of animals used for food purposes? Not exactly: as commentator Vasile Stanescu points out:

locally based meat, regardless of its level of popularity, can never constitute more than either a rare and occasional novelty item, or food choices for only a few privileged customers, since there is simply not enough arable land left in the entire world to raise large quantities of pasture-fed animals necessary to meet the world’s meat consumption. (15)¹

In actuality, then, the free-range alternative represents merely a niche market insufficient to replace the system of factory farming. Moreover, not all is exactly humane in these alternative farming arrangements; for example, free-range or cage-free chickens are still subject to debeaking and the male chicks among egg-layers are still eliminated upon hatching (Mickelson 27, Potts). However, these points do not stop some people from peddling a false pastoral

¹ Cf. Mickelson, who acknowledges the limit to scale, i.e. that there’s not enough grassland for mass production (45); this leads to the admission that ‘producing less meat may be the best option for protecting the environment’ (46).

narrative meant to assuage consciences. Thus another layer of hypocrisy is added to the modern story of animal agriculture.

Beyond the animal farm, whichever kind it may be, lies of course the slaughterhouse. It lies on the land, and it lies to the public inasmuch as slaughter is largely kept hidden from the great mass of people, including consumers of the relevant products. A counterfactual that makes the rounds in animal ethics is the idea that if slaughterhouses had glass walls vegetarianism would skyrocket. But, and this is as important as it is obvious, slaughterhouses are not at all transparent in their functioning; indeed, very nearly the opposite condition holds true: they are sequestered away, behind closed doors, far from most people's perceptual experience. This circumstance, along with our penchant for wanting to believe the best of otherwise horrible situations, makes for another dimension of ignorance in our domination of other animals. Most human meat-eaters simply do not know how their meals underwent the transformation from living flesh to meat market.

Even efforts to investigate and shed light on the slaughtering process are subject to subversion in the maintenance of ignorance. Investigator Gail Eisnitz reports that the mandated inspection process at slaughterhouses is routinely undermined; for example, on one occasion allegations of misconduct were only feebly checked into: 'the reviewers conducted a forewarned tour of the [processing] plant one morning, did a little poking around, and interviewed a few plant workers who were not free to speak' (227). Given the tip-off and superficiality of inspection, we should not be surprised that 'the secretary [of agriculture] gave [the beef packer] a glowing report, glossing over all fourteen of [the] allegations, and declaring each one unfounded' (Eisnitz 227). Apparently, this way of handling things is customary: on another occasion of inquiry (involving chemical residue in veal) 'federal regulators tried to keep their investigation under wraps' and 'the investigating agencies – trying to protect the veal industry from what its members stated could be 'potential ruin' – initiated a major news blackout' (Eisnitz 278). Two points are salient here. First, as Eisnitz point out, it is hard to learn anything 'in a vacuum of media coverage' (230). Second, the motivation behind obfuscation is market-driven, to protect profits from the sale of relevant meat products. Again, then, we see the hand of capitalism in the constitution of ignorance involving animal abuse.

Another, more recent investigation was conducted as an undercover participant by ethnographer Timothy Pachirat. He found that confinement, sequestration, and concealment were the organising principles of slaughterhouse work. In his analysis:

to enable us to eat meat without the killers or the killing, without even – insofar as the smell, the manure, and the other components of organic life are concerned – the animals themselves: this is the logic that maps contemporary industrialized slaughterhouses. (3)

Such operations are constituted not only by the obvious walling off of slaughterhouse machinations, but also more subtly ‘by the delegation of dirty, dangerous, and demeaning work to [abject] others tasked with carrying out the killing, skinning, and dismembering of living animals’ (Pachirat 4). Industrial agribusinessmen are serious about maintaining public ignorance. Protecting their capital interests, they managed to lobby successfully for passage of state legislation that ‘makes it a felony to gain access to and record what takes place in slaughterhouses and other animal and crop facilities without the consent of the facilities’ owners’ (Pachirat 5).² In general, there are several means for the enforcement of distance and concealment: ‘through walls, screens, catwalks, fences, security checkpoints, and geographic zones of isolation and confinement’; ‘by constructing and reinforcing racial, gender, citizenship, and education hierarchies that coerce others into performing dangerous, demeaning, and violent tasks’; and ‘with language – in the ways we avoid descriptions of repugnant things, inventing instead less dangerous names and phrases for them’ (i.e. euphemisms) (Pachirat 9).

Pachirat reminds us that making things deemed disgusting invisible is a mark of the civilizing process, according to Norbert Elias; on the other hand, it is also true that much of modern institutionalization is given over to the production of surveillance regimes, according to

² ‘This legislation counteracts a politics of sight by seeking to create and maintain zones of concealment and areas of darkness around contemporary practices of food production.’ (247f.)

Michel Foucault. Pachirat's novel contribution is to make us aware of the fact that concealment and surveillance can actually work together in synergy (10f., 14), as when an official inspection regimen becomes a justification for sequestration and compartmentalization of slaughterhouse activities (such that not only the general public, but also slaughterhouse workers themselves are kept distant from the full scale and detail of killing and disassembly). It is often assumed that the rectification of this situation would include greater transparency; if only more people saw what was actually going on at a contemporary slaughterhouse, there would be vociferous calls for reform or even abolition: 'this [politics of sight] is the strategy characterizing diverse movements across the political spectrum that seek to make visible what is hidden in zones of confinement as a catalyst for political social transformation' (Pachirat 243). Here Pachirat raises a chilling possibility, that there is a 'capacity for surveillance and sight to reinforce, rather than subvert, distance and concealment' (240). For instance, the very shock of putatively revealing slaughterhouse operation would itself be dependent on that operation's usually being removed from sight (with repeated exposure comes apathy and boredom, not necessarily sympathy and outrage) (Pachirat 252). And so 'even when intended as a tactic of social and political transformation, the act of making the hidden visible may be equally likely to generate other, more effective ways of confining it'; for example, a glass abattoir might engender commerce for witnessing or participating in killing (Pachirat 253f.). (If this last illustration seems far-fetched, just think of the businesses of professional wrestling and pornography, which purvey disgusting and degrading forms of dominance for profit of huge proportions.) Pachirat concludes that we can never rest easy with simple solutions, and must instead do the research necessary to distinguish contexts wherein exposure is likely to transform and wherein it is likely to perpetuate repugnant practices (255).

Circuses and Zoos: Noah's Ark

If the story of Old MacDonald's farm is the master narrative for animal agribusiness, then the story of Noah's Ark is the meta-discourse for circuses and zoos. These latter institutions are illusorily held to be benign venues of salvation. According to their conservationist rhetoric, circuses are portrayed as a force of civilization coming to the rescue of animals endangered by poaching activities, savage peoples, and extinction pressures (Schwalm 84f.). This salvation

encompasses the provision of breeding operations (Schwalm 86). The Noachic ideology extends to the point of depicting animals in the show as colleagues or partners living in relations of harmonious equality with the circus operators (Schwalm 87). Overall, it is claimed that there is ‘an air of pleasing domesticity’ about the circus (as per William Dean Howells, Davis 24).

Alongside the parable of Noah’s Ark, circuses are also fit into the normalizing discourse of imperial colonialism (Schwalm 80). In addition to dramatizing adventure stories and travel accounts, animal acts ‘embodied human mastery over animals and legitimated the colonization of nature’ by portraying them as natural relations (Schwalm 81ff.). Indeed, such is the power of getting people to accept circus practice as natural and appropriate that, though technically visible, the assorted cages, chains, and constraints used by operators disappear from the audience’s phenomenal experience, which enables continued patronage (Schwalm 89f.).

We should not lose sight of the economic undercurrents at the circus. The myths invoked above serve as lubricants for the selling of admission tickets, but also for the creation of consumer goods. Thus the circus uses imperialist inspiration to make saleable commodities (Davis 35). For example, animal personages are invented and made into commodified celebrities that build ‘consumer demand for circus imagery’ (Schwalm, n. 16). Such is the situation at the circus that it can legitimately be said that therein ‘capitalist ideology defines ... animals as consumable objects’ (Schwalm 92).

It is important to notice, however, that circus discourse is as false as it is effective. For instance, the circus still features small cages (Schwalm 88) and its wildlife education efforts are paltry (Davis 18). Various abuses have been documented.³ These include ‘hitting animals with sticks, whips and clubs, use of electric prods, tight collars, confinement and deprivation of food

³ ‘Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus’, PETA factsheet, cited in Schwalm, n. 13.

and water. The animals may also be drugged, frightened, and shouted at or otherwise intimidated'.⁴ All this goes on behind Noah's back, one presumes.

Beyond the Noachic narrative, one commentator reads the hermeneutics of the circus a bit differently. Yoram Carmeli acknowledges that animal acts, in their traditional form, have served as symbols of culture dominating nature (74). So deep does this symbolism go that, in the words of another critic, the animals' 'particular biological or individual reality has little to do with the part they play [in the circus]... They are symbols, not a natural event' (Bouissac, 95). In specific, the symbolism at stake is one in which the trainer is cast as cultural hero and the animals as hostile forces of nature to be mastered and overcome (Bouissac, 96f.). Carmeli goes on to theorize, however, that in late modernity there has been a disintegration of the nature/culture dichotomy and that circus experience has consequently become surreal: 'The circus animals have become emptied images, ephemeral embodiments of Nature transcended' (80). Thus animal acts at the circus now represent our era's culture/nature crisis (Carmeli 83), wherein there is a loss of nature in threatened habitat, extinction of animals, et cetera.

The illusory analogy of Noah's ark is rooted more firmly in the case of the zoo than that of the circus. It is the explicit metaphor of choice used by zoo professionals. And, implicitly, it exudes an air of what Foucault called 'pastoral power', conceived as benign care over individuals and flock alike (Braverman 20ff.). The ark image, as Irus Braverman shows, conveys the notions 'that zoos are of one body, that this body is constantly in motion, and that it sustains animals far from what are deemed their native habitats' (190). Indeed, zoo conservation is pitched as a religious enterprise, involving a 'pledge for the salvation of all animate beings' that marks an essentially spiritual ideology (Braverman, 191).

These aspects of the Noah myth notwithstanding, the reality is that zoos can only save species as an abstract construct, not actual, envired individuals (Acampora 2006, 105). Furthermore, Noachic reintroduction schemes often devolve into biotech dreams of freezing

⁴ As per SAFE, quoted in Schwalm, n. 17.

genetic material in hopes of reanimating species in some unspecified future (Acampora 2006, 106). The result is that ‘animals [in the zoo] have a status akin to refugees. They are in enforced exile, but a false one at that because realistically there is no ‘home’ to return to’ (Mullan and Marvin 29). When actual reintroductions are executed, no freedom genuinely results, because the animals are continually checked and tracked via electronic gear (Acampora 2000, ch. 9, n. 5). Those animals that remain at the zoo in effective exile are often subject to neglect of basic biological conditions, according to an expose by P. Batten and D. Stancil.⁵ Finally, the educational merits touted by proponents of the Noah vision are actually lackluster to say the most, according to 1979 and 1997 studies by social scientist Stephen Kellert.⁶

The Noah narrative would have us believe in the redemption of wildlife. But any such belief is sorely mistaken. What zoos provide are sites/sights of simulacra: they make their keep visible, which reduces the natural behaviour of avoidance (Acampora 2006, 105). By taming animals and promoting their tolerance to human proximity, zoos are actually subverting wildness (Mullan and Marvin 73). And we should not be duped by the rise of naturalistic architecture, which is really just a conscience-soother never really successful at its own aims, because nature itself is *sui generis* and therefore not reproducible by definition (Mullan and Marvin 77f.). As one commentator puts it, ‘A significant part of what an animal is involves its context, its natural state, which zoos cannot provide’ (Malamud 32). In other words, minus original habitat, there is no natural behaviour or real animal any longer (Malamud 127). Since captives cannot elude or engage others freely, *wildlife* is not as a matter of fact saved (Acampora 2005, 70). Finally, although there is an assumption of wildness, in actuality zoo inhabitants are subjected to thorough governance through institutions of classifying, watching, naming, registering, regulating, and reproducing them (Braverman 187f.).

⁵ Cited in Acampora 2000, n. 3.

⁶ Cited in Acampora 2005, 73.

Far from wilderness, zoos are much more like prisons. They are artificial spaces of enforced occupancy and demonstration (Acampora 2005, 78). To borrow terminology from Bentham and Foucault, what might be fairly termed the zoöpticon is like a biological panopticon wherein display is discipline, flattening the experience of inter-species encounters and producing docile animal bodies; thus the zoo deserves to be mapped in society's archipelago of carceral institutions (Acampora 2005, 79; Acampora 2006, 109, 112). As per Mullan and Marvin, zoos are about control and dominance: they employ techniques of force and fear, and they interrupt inter-species negotiations (Acampora 2006, 107). Animals' lives in zoos are totally enclosed, highly structured, strictly controlled, and intensively surveilled (Mullan and Marvin 31). As a result, zoo animals frequently succumb to institutional neuroses, such as apathy, lethargy, lack of initiative, loss of interest, and submissiveness (Mullan and Marvin 38). Another critic, Randy Malamud, agrees that zoos are prisons and as such produce distorting experiences for inhabitants and visitors alike (49). Finally, if we shrink from the prison analogy, it is worth considering that the territory of a wild jaguar is about 25,000 acres – more than the area of all accredited zoos combined! (Acampora 2005, 76).

Not only is the zoo prison-like, it is pornological as well. Zoos, like pornography, are caught in paradox: they over-expose their show-items and thereby make the subjects' real natures disappear (Acampora 2006, 110; Acampora 2000, n.4). The pornographic element of zoos is not sexual, but does mark an enslavement to visive violence (Acampora 2005, 71), for zoos cultivate an arrogant eye that 'coerces the objects of [its] perception into satisfying the conditions [its] perception imposes'.⁷ Think here of capture, feeding schedules, display space, breeding regimen, et cetera. In addition, zoo spectatorship disallows reciprocal revelation, and thus encourages voyeurism (Malamud 250). The analogy alleged here is really rather thick: we find both at zoos and in pornography fetishes of the exotic, underlying fear of nature, fantasies of

⁷ As per Marilyn Frye, quoted in Acampora 2006, 113.

illicit or impossible encounter, and a strong ambience of mastery and control (Acampora 2005, 75f.). The pornographic structure of zoos profanes the ideological sacredness of the Noachian ark image.

Perhaps it should not surprise us at this point that zoos are vital to the rhetoric and ethos of empire (Malamud 60). Their history is rooted in European colonialism, whereby they became ‘museums of living creatures’ (Mullan and Marvin 112). In effect, the zoo says to its viewers, ‘See what specimens of faraway lands we can bring forth and control?’ Zoos are, indeed, repositories of power conditioned by the imperial mindset, and it is not at all clear that a benign despot, such as Noah, is in charge.

Lastly, but by no means least, Malamud encourages us to understand that ‘the representations of animals in zoos and zoo stories are indebted to the machinations of capitalism and the agenda of capitalist hegemony’ (11). This is partially due to the way in which a zoo fits into a locale’s tourism, such that it becomes a purveyor of geocommercial culture (Malamud 91). Moreover, zoos’ pseudo-environmentalist merchandising amounts to exploitative e-commerce (endangered species dolls, and the like) (Malamud 98). If it is any kind of vessel, the zoo is subject to tides and currents of the marketplace.

Animal Research: Temple of Science

Another significant usage of other animals, the last one we shall consider, is experimental research. Here the relevant meta-narrative was robustly and still is more subtly a story about the ‘temple of science’ at which the altar is suitably sacred to warrant ‘sacrifices’ in pursuit of rational and empirical knowledge. If other animals’ health or lives must be forfeited in the process of knowledge acquisition, the quasi-religious status of science legitimates this sacrifice. Today we don’t hear nearly as much of the temple itself, because science suffered prestige-loss during the period of Nazi experiments and nuclear warfare and due to epistemological scepticism shortly thereafter (cf. Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Kuhn). However, there is still much operative in the field that is consistent with the old narrative, most especially the notion of sacrifice. In what follows, I attempt to bring out these elements of consistency with science-as-religion and to demonstrate contrarily the more profane side of animal experimentation.

First, we look at what proponents of animal research have had to say. Going back a century to the stance of John Dewey, we see that the arch-pragmatist was against regulating vivisection, and believed that we should trust the scientists involved and that there was no ethical problem in the matter. Dewey had it that there was an obligation for scientific men to experiment as a benefit for humans, and he casts researchers as ‘ministers and ambassadors of the public good’ (Welchman 183, cf. 179f.). More recently Michael A. Fox wrote a whole book defending animal experimentation, in which he claims that ‘human welfare is a more vital concern than animal welfare ... because humans are more important than animals’ (1986, 5). Echoing Dewey’s quasi-clerical standoffishness, Fox says that research is a ‘difficult matter for laypersons to judge’ because ‘they have little understanding of the pursuit of scientific knowledge’ (1986, 98, cf. 189). In general, scientists follow an ideology that places their work above and beyond mundane matters of morality: theirs is held to be a value-free enterprise that, as commentator Bernard Rollin observes, ‘absolves scientists of moral responsibility for what they do and shifts [it] to “society” or to “politicians”’ (1993 45, cf. 2006, ch. 2).

Perhaps the most glaring facet of science taking on religious ambience is the notion of sacrifice itself, which one ethnographer of scientific practice has defined as the killing of laboratory animals for purposes of experimentation (Lynch 265). To consummate a legitimate sacrifice in this context it is necessary to accomplish the transformation of naturalistic creatures into objects of technical investigation, and methodic routines are central to the transformation (Lynch 266, 268). The actual animal is transmogrified: it becomes a reduced and abstracted version of a lab rat (for example), a set of material and literary products of laboratory work (for example, a series of electron micrographs of dead tissue), ultimately a complex of data (Lynch 270ff.). Once this transformation is achieved ‘vocabularies and actions implying a ‘sentient being’ ... are carefully screened from official accounts of the data’ (Lynch 268f.). There are several stages to the transformation: selective breeding; preparation of the victim; sacrifice (sometimes using a miniature guillotine); destruction of the victim, preserving some aspects for iconic value in the data complex; constitution of the post-sacrificial victim (decapitated head in vial), which is often a rite of passage for new technicians (Lynch 273-79). Throughout the process traditional religious meaning resonates, and ‘scientists are not oblivious to these

significances', using them to justify experimentation by appeal to the 'higher' causes of scientific knowledge and medical progress (Lynch 274f.).⁸

There are several points to be made against the scientific ideology sketched above. First, it would not be a good idea to just leave researchers alone to proceed with business as usual, because, as Rollin puts it, 'one realizes that not all science is intelligent, not all protocols are well designed, and, frankly, not everyone knows what he or she is doing' (2006, 124). Indeed, in a recanting of his earlier pro-experimental position, Fox admits that social conditioning contributed to his prior speciesism, and he references the cultish nature of science when he acknowledges the 'fatherly or fraternal approval I sought and received from members of the scientific community' (1987, 57). Regarding the supposedly value-free status of science, the claim made by experimenters, that advances in human welfare justify animal research, is nothing other than a piece of moral evaluation (Rollin 1993, 46). As to the logic of sacrifice, a few remarks should be registered: unlike conventional rituals in real religions, no compensation is made in the case of animal sacrifice (Fox 1987, 58); despite the attempt at ritual transformation in the laboratory, the naturalistic animal persists in many routines and skills of handling (Lynch 280); because it is so esoteric, analytic knowledge can seem a poor excuse for killing animals (just as human sacrifice can appear atrocious without being steeped in Aztec tradition); scientific practitioners themselves do not fully embrace the religious analogy, due to mundane and disenchanting use of specimens in ordinary experimental practice (Lynch 282). If there is an apt analogy for animal experimentation it is not religion but business, because so much research is funded by biomedical foundations and pharmaceutical companies.⁹ Finally, it

⁸ Note that the zone of sacrifice in the laboratory is sometimes referred to by workers on site as the 'wailing wall' (Lynch, n. 27).

⁹ See Sorenson xxv: 'Indeed the [vivisection] industry is hugely profitable, not only for individuals who make a career from experimentation, but also for specialist breeders, the manufacturers of genetically engineered animals, the companies that make the cages and tools used in the experiments, the pharmaceutical and chemical industries that develop new drugs, and the advertising industry that markets them.' [paraphrasing Greek, ch. 8]

should be mentioned that the deepest issue posed by animal research – namely, whether it is morally permissible to benefit from harms caused to others (i.e., whether risk transference is legitimate) – is never really addressed through temple-of-science imagery and its associated narrative (Fox 1987, 75).

Conclusion

It is now time to take stock of the topics discussed above. I have highlighted a few of the myths, narratives, and images that serve to legitimize in popular consciousness various ab/uses of other animals. The story of Old MacDonald's farm, the parable of Noah's ark, and the religious view of science (temple, sacrifice, et cetera) proffer pseudo-justifications, respectively, of factory farming and slaughter, zoos and circuses, and animal experimentation. These are instrumental forms of ideological reason that short-circuit any zoopolitan attempt at constituting citizenship, denizenship, or sovereignty for domestic, feral, or wild animals, respectively. Taken together, they buttress dominionism and dress up human privilege for consumption by the public, allowing capitalist exploitation to grow. Illusion-producing machines, animal ideologies take root where there is a pre-existing lack of knowledge—for example, writing about the human uses of other animals, Orlans et al. admit 'that at present we have no shared conception of what counts as a justifiable 'harm' and a justifiable 'risk' of harm for an [other] animal' (32), and that situation is an invitation for ideology. The bottom line is that we see a reinforcement of human exceptionalism, which aids animal exploitation. Orlans and company put it bluntly at one point: 'Humans receive the benefits, [other] animals the costs. [Nonhuman a]nimals are subjects or objects of sacrifice, humans are not' (35). It is only by exposing and scrutinizing animal ideologies that exploitable and exploitative ignorance can be redressed. I hope to have made here a small contribution in that regard, though there is much more to be done in my chosen and other areas.

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