

From Cattle to Capital: Exchange Value, Animal Commodification, and Barbarism

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Abstract

In the past half-century, massive structural, geographic, and technological changes have occurred in livestock production. This ‘livestock revolution’ has raised considerable environmental, public health, and ethical concerns. The majority of analyses concerning the negative outcomes associated with these transformations usually condemn industrial technologies as the root of the problem. This article argues that the force behind technological developments in livestock production is to aid capital’s blind drive for self-expansion and self-accumulation and is the source of the majority of contemporary food animal suffering. It analyzes (1) the paramount role of generalized commodity production in altering the welfare of food animals and (2) the potential of fundamentally improving human relations with food animals within the system of capital.

Keywords

animal studies, animal welfare, capitalism, concentrated animal feeding operations, factory farming, political economy

Introduction

It is said that contradiction is unthinkable; but the fact is that in the pain of a living being it is even an actual existence.

G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (1969 [1812, 1813, 1816]: 770)

In the past half-century, massive structural, geographic, and technological changes have occurred in livestock production. Most animal-derived commodities in the United States now come from large-scale, intensive, and mechanized production operations (MacDonald and McBride, 2009). The move toward massive feedlots is a global trend in food animal agribusiness and is expected to persist and grow in both developed and developing regions (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2006).

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The 'livestock revolution' has raised considerable environmental, public health, and ethical concerns. The FAO (2006: xx) has declared livestock production to be 'one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global'. The 'most serious environmental problems' include immense greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution and depletion, increased intensive land use, and significant biodiversity loss. From a public health perspective, intensive livestock production increases saturated fat consumption, filthy conditions inside concentrated animal feeding operations [CAFOs] are related to various food and water-borne pathogens, the massive use of veterinary pharmaceuticals are associated with antibiotic-resistant pathogens, and communities with CAFOs are at an increased risk for various physical, social, and mental health problems (Walker et al., 2005).¹ Although the impact of livestock production on human societal well-being is considerable, it pales in comparison to the sustained wretchedness experienced by animals within these regimes. Animal welfare scientists are becoming ever more concerned with the ways and means in which animals are subjected to increasingly confined, painful, and injurious conditions within CAFOs (Rollin, 1995).

The majority of analyses concerning the negative outcomes associated with these transformations usually blame technology, or, more specifically, industrial technologies. That is, 'animal factories', 'industrialized animal agriculture', 'factory farming', the 'industrial animal production model', etc. are the customary terminologies utilized when assessing the transformations described above. Undoubtedly, industrial technologies are the most *visible* transformation of the livestock revolution; however, few confront *why* industrial technologies have superseded old ways of farming and ranching and will, most likely, continue to do so. Reading such literature makes the concrete, pens, machines, and steel within CAFOs and abattoirs seem as if they in some way exist in isolation from the global economic system in which they are fixed. As David Harvey (1982: 119–20) stated,

[t]hat capitalist society has exhibited an extraordinary degree of technological and organization dynamism throughout its history is self-evident. The difficulty is to explain this dynamism in a way that locates its origins within society rather than treating it as some external force with its own autonomous dynamic.

Thus, describing the technologies used for producing animal products and byproducts is helpful and necessary, but one must understand the logic and structure driving technological development.

Some critical social theorists have started pointing to capitalism as a culprit in the propagation of animal suffering (Benton, 1993; Best, 2006, 2009; Nibert, 2002; Noske, 1997; Sanbonmatsu, 2004, 2011; Shukin, 2009; Torres, 2007; Twine, 2010).² These theorists have consequently begun to deliver an *explanation* for animal suffering rather than a mere *description* of it. Here, I would like to contribute to this growing body of literature by arguing capital's blind drive for self-expansion and self-accumulation is the source of the majority of contemporary food animal suffering and the force behind technological developments in livestock production. The goal of livestock production is to increase profitability, not produce for human needs – or, for exchange values, not use values. To increase profitability, capitalists will adopt profit-maximizing, labor-saving, and more 'efficient' (i.e. profitable) technologies to increase productivity. It is argued this is a highly peculiar way of producing animal-derived food compared to other socioeconomic periods. Without understanding the sociohistorical development and drive of capitalism and its unique need to produce for exchange values, industrial technologies in food animal production will continue to be considered an autonomous 'problem' to be dealt with rather than particular instruments of labor to increase profit margins. In fact, far from being independently problematic, it is argued that recent technological developments in synthetic flesh production may be the future rescuer of animals.

With these assumptions and insights, this article analyzes (1) the paramount role of generalized commodity production in altering the welfare of food animals and (2) the potential of fundamentally improving human relations with food animals within the system of capital. First I examine the historical peculiarity of CAFOs in comparison to past methods of producing livestock before turning to an evaluation of how animal suffering is now augmented and widespread in monopoly capitalist food regimes. The theoretical potential of extending Marx's theory of alienation to animals is briefly explored. I argue piecemeal reforms and individualist marketplace choices cannot lead to the structural changes necessary for substantially reducing, and hopefully eliminating, animal exploitation. Socialism is proposed as an alternative to capitalism to realize the latter goal.

Animals as Food: From Use to Exchange

As stated in the introduction, the primary purpose of rearing livestock today is *not to create food*, but *to make money* – or, for *exchange* values, not *use* values. Mandel (1968: 58) provided a clear distinction between the rationalities behind these two forms of value production:

[s]omeone who essentially produces use-values, intended to satisfy his own needs or those of his community, lives by the products of his own labour ... The producer of commodities [products destined for the market] no longer lives directly on the products of his own labour: on the contrary, he can live only if he *gets rid* of these products.

Although this is an apparent and, at first, a seemingly trivial distinction, it is a very important one for understanding the drive, (il)logic, and intention of rearing livestock: *to accumulate capital*.

For most, living in a capitalist society naturalizes generalized and specialized commodity production (Harvey, 1982: 9). However, when compared to the majority of humanity's history, utilizing animal protein for exchange is rather peculiar. For the vast majority of the hominids' existence, animal protein came from scavenging carcasses, parasitizing prey killed by other animals, or by hunting (Mithen, 1999). In fact, hominids have likely survived for over 99.9 percent of their existence without a single domestic animal (Reed, 1984: 1). Subsistence agriculture and pastoralism have dominated post-foraging food utilization (~10,000 BP) (Price and Gebauer, 1995), where herders and agricultural communities likely exchanged some surpluses (Bar-Yosef and Meadow, 1995). However, until specialized and generalized commodity production, producing use values was still the rationale of early trading. In other words, exchange was not a specialized economic activity. As Marx (1970 [1859]: 50) noted,

[d]irect barter, the spontaneous form of exchange, signifies the beginning of the transformation of use-values into commodities ... Exchange-value does not acquire an independent form, but is still directly tied to use-value. This is manifested in two ways. Use-value, not exchange-value, is the purpose of the whole system of production, and use-values accordingly cease to be use-values and become means of exchange, or commodities, only when a larger amount of them has been produced than is required for consumption [social surplus product] ... The particular use-values which, as a result of barter between different communities, become commodities, *e.g.*, slaves, cattle, metals, usually serve also as the first money within these communities.

Thus, it should not be surprising that the word *capital* was originally used to represent a head of cattle (Schwabe, 1994). In fact, ruminants were some of the first exchange equivalents before money (Mandel, 1968). However, the production of use values was still the 'purpose' of early

exchange. Even pre-capitalist peasant societies traded with and produced primarily for use values ('petty' or 'small-scale commodity production').

The trade [in peasant societies] that created great commercial power tended to be in luxury goods, or at least goods destined for more prosperous households or answering to the needs and consumption patterns of dominant classes. There was no mass market for cheap everyday consumer products such as the market that would later drive industrial capitalism in Britain. Peasant producers typically produced not only their own food but also other everyday goods like clothing. There was, to be sure, a market in food, and peasants might take their surpluses to local markets, where the proceeds could be exchanged for other commodities. (Wood, 2002: 78)

However, 'these non-capitalist principles of trade [i.e. profits were not derived from competition]' were still modest in comparison to generalized and specialized commodity production (Wood, 2002: 79).³ It was not until (1) money, the 'confounding of all human and natural qualities', became the primary means and goal of exchange, (2) producers were separated from their means of production and needed to sell their labor-power, and (3) the means of production were expropriated by the bourgeoisie that the system of capital began to take true form (Marx, 1964b [1844]: 168). Marx (1964a [1844]: 37) felt that a mode of production that produces with the *sole purpose* of making more money, not to produce for human need, had 'a real contempt for' nature. The difference between use values as equivalents and money as *the* universal, generalized equivalent was put well by Mandel (1968: 90):

[s]urplus value appeared and developed in a society in which the social surplus product essentially retained the form of use-values. The entire history of capital, from its origins to its apotheosis in the capitalist mode of production is the history of the slow disintegration of this fundamentally non-market economy, through the effect of trade, of usury, of money, of capital and of surplus value.

Like the 'entire history of capital', there is no sharp line or exact date between a time when food animals were produced primarily for use values and when accumulating capital became the sole aim for producing food. Commercial farming (i.e. producing with intent to maximize profits and acutely responsive to market imperatives) emerged with agrarian capitalist relations as early as the 16th century in England (Wood, 2002). Market-orientated production and agrarian capitalist social relations were exacerbated by land enclosures and the destruction of communal land rights (Marx, 1977 [1867]; Wallerstein, 1974; Wood, 2002) – oftentimes with the goal to produce livestock more profitably through such means as privatized artificial selection (Epstein, 1984). Wallerstein (1974) consistently showed more efficient and profitable pasturage use as a driver in the land enclosures throughout Europe, contributing to 'the most vivid expression of the relentless process that was changing not only the English countryside but also the world: the birth of capitalism' (Wood, 2002: 109).

Accordingly, Kalof (2007: 135, my emphasis) has accurately described capitalism's absorption of livestock production as an '*increasing* commodification' – implying a *growth* and *spread* of market-oriented production – especially with the rise of industrialization and urbanization. More importantly, she has linked this growing commodification of animals to increased misery: '[a]nimals suffered untold misery in the increasing commodification of their bodies for food and labour in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Making the time from birth to slaughter as short as possible for food animals was emphasized' (Kalof, 2007: 135). This emphasis is still one of the most effective ways that livestock producers can increase profit margins (Gregory, 2007), but is now aided by advanced industrial and biological technologies. Rollin (2008: 7) has described, and

perhaps somewhat romanticized, this qualitative transformation in husbandry as ‘the end of true husbandry’ and the ‘betrayal’ of an ‘ancient contract’. By ancient contract, he means that for most of farm animal rearing history, ‘farm animals provided us with food, clothing and much else while we provided them with food, protection from the elements and from predators. Humans have most often cared for their animals not out of sentiment *but because their animals were valuable to them*’ (Bonney and Dawkins, 2008: 2, my emphasis). The *value* described by Bonney and Dawkins is in reference to *use value*, which decays with capitalist development. As Mandel (1968: 66) stated, ‘[c]ommodity production develops slowly within society, while production of use-values pure and simple is slowly shrinking’. Below we will examine the misery that exchange value’s domination over use value generates within the chicken, cow, and pig sectors of livestock industry that have culminated in the phenomenon of CAFOs.⁴

Chicken Commodification: Broilers and Battery Hens

The idea of rearing chickens purposefully for their meat (broilers) seems fairly normal in today’s society. However, this is a recent phenomenon, as chicken meat throughout the chicken’s husbanded history has been a byproduct of rearing hens for eggs in small, backyard flocks (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2002). In less than 50 years, the weight of an average broiler has increased by two pounds (3.03 pounds in 1945 to 5.06 pounds in 2001), the amount of days until market weight is reached has been cut almost in half, and output has increased by almost 23 times (366 million in 1945 to 8.4 billion in 2001) (USDA, 2002). Further, chickens went from a minor part of meat production to a leading industry. This has been accomplished through growth-enhancing drugs and feeds, artificial selection for higher meat content, and industry consolidation (Gregory, 2007). However, this massive increase in productivity comes at great cost to the chickens raised in intensive conditions.

Chicks are born into hatcheries where they go without food or water for up to three days during housing and initial transportation. Deformed or undersized chicks are gassed, macerated (ground), or sometimes illegally suffocated in dumpsters (Gregory, 2007). Chicks are transported to ammonia-filled and cramped sheds (sometimes called ‘houses’) where stocking densities go up to 25 broilers per m² (Gregory, 2007). Due to the rapid pace at which broiler chickens grow, lameness (both the physical inability to walk and pain experienced from walking) ‘is recognized as the single most important welfare issue in the broiler industry’ (Gregory, 2007: 114). The broiler chicken’s skeletal system does not have time to develop given the speed at which its tissue develops. The constant pain experienced by broiler chickens is illustrated in a study that showed that broilers self-select eating feed with painkillers in it rather than regular feed when both are provided (Danbury et al., 2000). Some broilers die of heatstroke, heart failure (‘flip-overs’), and dehydration before they can be processed. During slaughter, processors attempt to save money by having low current electrified stunning ‘water baths’ (as opposed to high electrical current) to reduce the chances of broken bones via convulsions (Marcus, 2005: 23–6). This makes it impossible to know if chickens are going through the rest of the slaughtering process conscious or unconscious (i.e. many chickens regain consciousness while bleeding to death).

Hen hatcheries kill *all* male chicks hatched as they are useless to the industry (Marcus, 2005). Hens are debeaked without anesthetics either with a laser when chicks or with a heated, sharp blade in their growing phase to prevent unnatural cannibalism later in life while in battery cages (Duncan, 2004). In addition to the general discomfort of being crammed into cages with up to nine other birds, ‘[m]any of the problems for a hen in a battery cage are a consequence of things that she cannot do’ – wing spreading, dustbathing, exercising, perching, scratching, and nesting all become

impossible (Fraser and Broom, 1990: 374). The act of laying an egg is a highly private activity in natural and free-ranging conditions, leading Konrad Lorenz (1980: 264) to believe that the inability to lay eggs in private is the 'worst torture' the battery hen will experience in her brief and painful life. After about a year of cage confinement and bone-calcium depletion, battery hens are no longer productive. They are then put through a process known as 'forced molting' to achieve a second and sometimes third reproductive year (Duncan, 2004: 313-4). Forced molting involves starving hens for up to two weeks to shorten the hen's unproductive period (which takes place naturally throughout the winter). The bodies of 'end-of-lay' hens are so emaciated that they are often unprofitable to sell as meat and are 'disposed of' at the 'farm'-site (Gregory, 2007: 122).

Cattle Commodification: Beef, Dairy, and Veal

Cattle are ruminants, and thus, have grazed for most of their natural and husbanded histories (Epstein, 1984). Today, cattle raised for beef live most of their lives in confined pens in feedlots where they are fed an unfamiliar diet of grains and hormones. When beef calves are introduced to feedlots from the cow-calf ranch, they experience large amounts of stress. They are branded, dehorned, vaccinated, and ear-tagged, leading some to develop a respiratory disease caused by 'stress-induced immune suppression' (Gregory, 2007: 61). Similarly to broilers, beef cattle experience large amounts of leg pain as their leg growth cannot keep up with their abnormally large and unnaturally fast tissue growth resulting from growth promoter feed and artificial selection (Fraser and Broom, 1990). And like battery hens, cattle suffer from thwarted natural behaviors due to their restricted feeding pens – often leading to aggression and fighting (Fraser and Broom, 1990). The highly unnatural grain feedstuffs consumed by beef cattle cause a variety of digestive disorders and digestive-related disorders including acidosis, bloat, and liver abscesses (Gregory, 2007). During transport, cattle often experience temperature extremes, are bruised, and are generally stressed due to the novel and frightening conditions (Rollin, 1995). Due to the rapid pace at which abattoirs run for profit-maximization, some cattle are still fully conscious during the slaughter process (Eisnitz, 2007).

Like beef cattle, dairy cattle are penned for the majority of their lives, often standing on concrete without an adequate area to lie down (Tyler and Ensminger, 2006). This can lead to hoof lesions and lameness from hoof and foot-skin disorders (Fraser and Broom, 1990). Another leading welfare problem in dairy cattle production is mastitis. Mastitis is a painful bacterial infection of the udder tissues largely caused from unsanitary conditions, unnatural diets, and cramped conditions (Waage et al., 1998). The largest animal welfare issue in dairy production, as well as the most popularly scrutinized, is the connection of dairy production to veal production (Tyler and Ensminger, 2006). Both male and female calves are separated from their mother at a very young age, often immediately after birth, and placed into pens (Rushen et al., 2008). However, males are not useful for the dairy industry and are sold to veal producers. Veal calves live the entirety of their short lives in small crates with purposefully deficient iron diets to produce a highly unnatural, yet sought after, white meat (Fraser and Broom, 1990). Grooming, stretching, natural lying postures, social behaviors, and even the ability to turn around are thwarted entirely for up to 18 weeks until slaughter (Fraser and Broom, 1990; Rushen et al., 2008).

Pig Commodification

Pigs have remained relatively comfortable within human-mediated conditions for the majority of domestication (i.e. as opposed to today), sharing the pasture and even the household with humans

(Epstein and Bichard, 1984). Subsistence communities that still exist often own pigs collectively, decreasing most welfare concerns as the community is responsible for the pig's wellbeing (Gregory, 2007). Today, as in the broiler, egg, beef, dairy, and veal industries, pigs are brought to market weight as fast as possible. Some intensive pig operations will 'rear' pigs from birth until they are sold for slaughter (farrow-to-finish operations), but different stages of the pig's life are generally handled within various operations.

The majority of intensive pig operations use artificial insemination to impregnate gilts (female pigs that have not given birth) (Holden and Ensminger, 2006). Boar semen is either bought from laboratories or the boar itself is bought and trained to mount stationary objects known as 'dummy sows' by being aroused in various ways. The purchased or collected semen is assessed for quality, and later squeezed through an inseminating catheter into the gilt's cervix. Pregnant sows (breeds) are usually kept in individual gestation crates and put on restricted feeding regimens to avoid over-eating and 'maximise economic performance' (Bergeron et al., 2008: 65). After the breeds are moved to farrowing crates, the natural instinct of pregnant sows to privately build elaborate nests before giving birth is negated and the desire is transferred into rooting and pawing at the floor and steel bars and sometimes 'savaging' (killing) their new-born babies (D'Eath and Turner, 2009). Even if group-housed, the sows' natural drives are often displaced as aggressive behavior toward other sows (Bergeron et al., 2008).

Within the first week of life, piglets are castrated, tails are docked, and teeth severed with wire cutters, all generally without anesthetic (Holden and Ensminger, 2006). The piglet is weaned as early as one to three weeks and separated from its mother within three to five weeks (Puppe et al., 2008). In natural conditions, piglet weaning is completed in nine to 17 weeks and it can take up to eight weeks even to be socially integrated. Common instinctual relocation in response to early weaning and separation involves piglet fighting and partaking in 'belly-nosing' (nosing and sucking other piglets) when mixed with unfamiliar piglets (Puppe et al., 2008). From this point on, the piglet has reached the longest phase in production (fattening, or, growing-finishing phase), during which time the pig 'experiences a dull, non-stimulating environment' (Gentry et al., 2008: 151). Pigs stand and sleep on solid concrete or slatted steel floors unable to root or perform any natural desires until transportation to slaughter (O'Connell, 2009). The pigs that are not kept for breeding stock are loaded on to trucks with electric prods for transport. Pigs are usually piled in at high densities causing heat-death mortalities and bruising, while the stress caused by loud noises, high temperature, and crowding often leads to fighting (Bench et al., 2008). After arriving at the slaughterhouse, pigs are stunned with an electric current, high concentrations of gas, or a captive bolt in the head to induce 'unconsciousness' for a 'humane slaughter' (Raj, 2008) – although this is often not the case (Eisnitz, 2007).

Animal Alienation?

When critiquing Feuerbach's contemplative materialism in *The German Ideology*, Marx (1978 [1845]: 168) stated:

[t]he 'essence' of the freshwater fish is the water of a river. But the latter ceases to be the 'essence' of the fish and is no longer a suitable medium of existence as soon as the river is made to serve industry, as soon as it is polluted by dyes and other waste products and navigated by steamboats, or as soon as its water is diverted into canals where simple drainage can deprive the fish of its medium of existence.

For Feuerbach, a being's essence was immediately its existence and its existence immediately its essence. The fundamental motive for Marx's critique of Feuerbach's passive materialism was that

it was not rooted in human historical transformative activity (praxis) and did not recognize the gulf and contradictions that often occur between essence and being in concrete conditions (alienation). More specifically for our purposes, Marx was signifying that ‘just as “man” is incapable of realizing his essence or truth in capitalist conditions, so fish nature is such as to rule out any realization of its essence in [polluted water]’ (Soper, 1996: 90). Marx was proposing that the ‘essence’ of animals is their ‘medium of existence’ (i.e. immediate natural environment), animal existence can be distorted and inhibited, and, in Marx’s example, the latter condition is specific to a system of industry and private property. I am unsure how else to theoretically frame Marx’s insight, as Foster (2000) has, besides using the term Marx (1964b [1844]) used for the estrangement from one’s essence – *alienation*.

A couple of theorists have approached the subject of animal alienation. When discussing the intensive production methods of contemporary animal agriculture, Benton (1993: 59) declared the lives of animals within them ‘are sustained solely to serve purposes external to them, conditions and means for the acquisition and exercise of their species-powers are denied to them, and, more specifically, their social needs and capacities are systematically denied and suppressed’.⁵ Summarizing his brief deliberation, Benton (1993: 59) stated, ‘a good deal of the content of Marx’s contrast between a fulfilled or emancipated human life, and a dehumanized, estranged existence can also be applied in the analysis of the conditions imposed by intensive rearing regimes in the case of non-human animals’. Noske (1997: 18–21) shared Benton’s prospect of extending the theory of alienation to animals and has attempted to apply Marx’s theory coarsely in her ‘de-animalization’ theory, alleging that livestock animals are alienated from their product, productive activity, fellow-animals, surrounding nature, and species-life. In mentioning the animal’s ‘product’, Noske is referring to an animal’s body and offspring expropriated during the production process. ‘Productive activity’ is in reference to the simplified and tainted physical functions of livestock.

Both theorists are moving in the right direction, but fall short by attempting, without success, to find a specific continuity between human and animal nature that is absent. Marx’s (1964b [1844]) theory of human alienation presupposes that humanity’s ‘essence’ is to create and perfect social life through free, reflective, and creative labor, but capitalism has stunted and distorted this opportunity. I do not think this assumption can be carried over into the nonhuman animal realm without significant theoretical and practical problems. If there was to be a coherent theory of animal alienation, it would surely have to go back to early domestication and artificial selection and would need to take into account the natural behaviors of the species in question in comparison to its behaviors in human-mediated conditions. Nuances aside, Marx, Benton, and Noske have all shown that the animal’s human-mediated world – especially under current conditions – has become an *alien* and *estranged* force that hinders the development of the species’ essential capacities and thwarts their fundamental needs. This insight should not be taken as a vulgar metaphor. In fact, Marx presupposed that ‘animals can be said to feel their needs in much the same way as man’ (Ollman, 1976: 75). Subsequently, animals can be said to feel the *negation* of their needs in much the same way as humans. The realization of this mutual suffering under capitalism has a practical outcome that has been overlooked by most Marxists for years: *radical compassion* is vital for workers and animals alike (see Horkheimer, 1993 [1933]).

Capital’s Prospects for Change

This article has argued animal suffering has significantly increased with the rise and spread of commodity production for the sole purpose of producing exchange values (i.e. the development

of capitalism). If there were a crude way to operationalize and quantify the rate of global animal misery, I would theorize that misery has increased considerably with the shrinking of the ‘production of use-values pure and simple’ (Mandel, 1968: 66). The barbarism described above is not due to greed, mismanagement, callousness, or any other psychological or individualist explanation in general. Nor is it due to machines and crates that exist in isolation from our global socio-economic system. Capitalism is concerned with accumulating capital ‘for the sake of accumulation’ and ‘production for the sake of production’, not with the livelihood of the creatures it uses to do so (Marx, 1977 [1867]: 742). No wonder that Adorno (1973 [1966]: 306, my emphasis) described the outcome of these forces as the ‘*violent* domination of nature’. In other words, the brutality is *structural*. Any cursory reading of an animal science textbook will reveal how students are rightly informed that corporate animal agribusiness *is* the future and jobs in animal production will be found with vertically integrated firms (e.g. Cunningham et al., 2005; Pond and Pond, 2000). In fact, the insights of this article are summarized in a brief introductory textbook passage discussing the lucrative benefits of vertical integration, technological innovation, and industry consolidation: ‘[i]n our capitalistic economy, profit opportunities are the ultimate economic incentive for many market changes’ (Damron, 2009: 316–7). The immense suffering created to do so is simply a byproduct.

Livestock production’s structural, technological, and geographic restructuring did not occur in a socioeconomic vacuum. All the processes described above are fastened to, and embedded in, a larger, global monopoly capitalist system (Baran and Sweezy, 1966). (1) Expecting capitalists to replace labor-power with technological innovations to increase profits and (2) for technological developments to primarily benefit larger operations are two basic assumptions of Marxist economic theory. As Engels (1968 [1847]: 68) stated in the *Principles of Communism* regarding the technological developments of the industrial revolution: ‘the machines turned out cheaper and better commodities than the workers could produce with their inefficient spinning wheels and handlooms. The machines delivered industry wholly into the hands of the big capitalists and rendered entirely worthless the meager property of the workers’. Corporate firms *must* continually adopt new and revolutionary ways and technologies to *increase profits* and *continue circulating and accumulating capital*.

Even if capitalism is quite reckless and contradictory at times, it is the most dynamic and revolutionary mode of production that has existed to date. Thus, it is necessary to examine the potential capitalism has to overcome the barbarism described above. Those who are concerned with animal suffering and mistreatment and have developed ideologies and practical solutions to ease or cease suffering generally fall into two camps.

- (1) Animal welfarists seek piecemeal reforms through civil organizations (e.g. societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals) to attempt to treat animals humanely when being utilized for human ends, but do not object to using animals for human ends per se (Haynes, 2008). That is, animal welfarists ‘accept most current uses of animals, but seek to minimize their suffering and pain’ (Jasper and Nelkin, 1992: 8).
- (2) Animal liberationists/rightists (hereafter, rights/rightists) argue that using animals for human ends is unethical in and of itself (in most instances), regardless of humane or inhumane treatment (for two influential treatises on animal rights, see Singer [1975] and Regan [1983]). For animal rightists, ethical vegetarianism is viewed as the most imperative practical action to end animal suffering. Singer (1975: 163) feels ethical vegetarianism is of ‘supreme importance’ as ‘it underpins, makes consistent, and gives meaning to all our other activities on behalf of animals’. Similarly, Regan (1983: 351), in *The Case for Animal*

Rights, called ethical vegetarianism ‘morally obligatory’. Below, we will explore the value the practices proposed by animal welfarists and animal rightists have in easing or ceasing animal suffering under capitalism. It is argued social reformism and ethical vegetarianism have little to no effect on capitalist livestock production practices.

Animal Welfarism is Still Reformism

Most people agree that treating animals ‘humanely’ or without inflicting ‘unnecessary’ cruelty is beneficial for both animals and society. However, there is a question if the pain can even be conceptualized correctly as ‘cruelty’. The German metaphysician Arthur Schopenhauer (1965 [1840]: 135) described cruelty clearly as the ‘the malicious joy at another’s misfortune’ when put into practice. That is, ‘cruelty’ usually implies a practiced *desire* for another’s woe. Capitalism does not desire anything but more capital to accumulate and circulate. The pain experienced by food animals under current conditions *is* necessary. As Gary Francione (1995: 400) argued in the *Rutgers Law Review*, ‘welfarist reform has not – and *cannot* – lead to the abolition of animal exploitation. Animal welfare, especially when applied in an economic system that has strong property notions, has had little, if any, success historically, and is structurally defective’. The reason for the ‘structural’ failure of the reformist approach is simple: the means animals are produced today to increase profits entails a large degree of suffering *due to* the *structure* of capital itself. In other words, ‘kneebent, humble pleas for small reforms’ are no match for a system that *must* accumulate more capital with a strict structure of private property relations (Bookchin, 1980: 11). Similar to Marx’s passage from Müntzer’s work (see below), Francione (1995), who is surprisingly not a Marxist, has concluded that private property itself is at the root of food animal suffering.

It should be noted that Marx and Engels, well over a century ago, presaged many of today’s criticisms of animal welfarism (see Gunderson R, 2011) Marx’s comments on animal welfare. *Rethinking Marxism* 23(4): 543–548). In Marx and Engels’ (1968 [1848]: 42–58) review of ‘socialist and communist literature’ in *The Communist Manifesto*, they critiqued ‘Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism’ in the second subsection. Draper (1990: 176) has claimed Marx’s critique of ‘bourgeois socialists’ was a critique of social reformists; those that want to conserve ‘the present status quo’. Marx and Engels’ (1968 [1848]: 52) considered ‘members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals’ to be social reformists. As implied by Marx and Engels, animal welfarism (societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals were started by animal welfarists) is fundamentally reformist. Marx has been criticized for making these comments (Best, 2006; Eckersley, 1996); however, they are quite valid in context and, as Francione (1995) has shown, are still very relevant. Animal welfarists ‘want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom’ (Marx and Engels, 1968 [1848]: 53). In other words, reformist approaches are merely a petty *reaction* (note, ‘Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism’) to a much larger and more powerful system of exploitation.

Ethical Vegetarianism: Toward a Cruelty-Free Commodity Fetishism⁶

In reviewing her interview with Alex Pacheco, co-founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the largest animal rights organization, Susan Finsen (1997: ii) claimed that

he stated that he was marketing compassion. The idea is that compassion, just as soap or toothpaste, can be effectively sold to the public. If enough people learn about the issues, they will demand change (for example, cruelty-free products). On this view, there is seemingly no incompatibility between status quo corporate capitalism and the ends of animal rights.

Ironically, the same juggernaut that mutilates billions of animals a year has provided animal rightists with a kinder and gentler niche-market. Faux meats and cruelty-free cosmetics adorn (high-income) neighborhood supermarket shelves. The idea of bloodless flesh itself brings to mind Slavoj Žižek's (2004: 400) conception of the 'paradoxical structure' of the 'chocolate laxative', or 'a product containing the agent of its own containment' (decaf coffee, non-alcoholic beer, fatless cream, etc.). Postmodern capitalism's self-indulgence attempts to synthesize carnality and self-discipline, which allows animal rightists to consume fatless soap, turkey-less 'Tofurky', chicken-less nuggets, cow-less burgers, skinless leather, etc. – commodities that immaculately contain 'the agent of [their] own containment'. As *Time* recently announced, the 'vegetarian world is buzzing' about how

scientists at the University of Missouri announced that after more than a decade of research, they had created the first soy product that not only can be flavored to taste like chicken but also breaks apart in your mouth the way chicken does: not too soft, not too hard, but with that ineffable chew of real flesh. (Cloud, 2010)

Of course these are only minor examples with the intent of illustrating how a movement can be recuperated into accepting the larger, structural 'chocolate laxative': *a cruelty-free capitalism*.⁷ The commodification and co-option of the animal rights movement allows its activists to *consume* their identities as a pseudo-political achievement (see Ashley, 1997: 220–22). That is, many animal rightists are enchanted by the newly 'revolutionized' 'means of consumption' (Ritzer, 2005) rather than pushing to revolutionize the means of *production* (i.e. a push for a plant-based, sustainable agriculture).

There is nothing unique about the 'vote with your fork' perspective in animal protection circles (Imhoff, 2010). It dominates the environmental movement (see Heartfield's [2008] analysis of green consumerism) and other justice movements (e.g. Hudson and Hudson, 2003). 'Ethical consumerism' is a reflection of bourgeois market ideology that alienated individuals are expected to subscribe to. The problem is that individualist ethical consumerism is not only limited and ineffective in the face of larger socioeconomic forces, but it also *halts social justice movements from pursuing radical means of altering society* because they have been co-opted. Even Peter Singer, the author of the highly influential, vegetarianism-supporting *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975), has recently recognized the limits of individualist ethical consumerism in the face of a constantly expanding production: 'during the next decade or two, billions of animals will live and die in factory farms, their numbers barely diminished by the slowly growing number of vegans, and their sufferings entirely unaffected by it' (Singer, 2008: viii).

Is this recuperation damaging for the animal protection movement? Not necessarily. If the goal is to live a 'cruelty-free' vegetarian *lifestyle*, then no, late capitalism has and will continue to provide niche 'alternative' markets, given the demand and money is present. In fact, providing a diverse and excessive range of diverse yet non-essential commodities to shape one's 'identity' is one of the feats late capitalism is very good at (e.g. Bauman, 2007). As Adorno (1978 [1951]: 207) stated, all 'products, even non-conformist ones, have been incorporated into the distribution-mechanisms of large-scale capital'. If the goal is in fact liberating animals from the dominion of private property, then yes, co-option is a problem – a contradiction which can only be solved through radically restructuring *production*, not a niche area of consumption.

Capital and In Vitro Meat

Over three decades ago, the Marxist philosopher Howard L. Parsons (1977: 45) briefly discussed his Promethean vision of food animal production in a future, and presumably communist, society:

when animals are displaced entirely by machines as instruments of production, and when food is synthesized chemically, animals will enjoy a freedom not enjoyed since their domestication for food and labor in Neolithic times, and man's attitude toward them will likewise change with man's new freedom.

Parsons's utopian speculation of human–animal relations under communism now has the potential to take place within capitalist societies, though it is currently underdeveloped, unprofitable, and potentially ecologically unsound (Edelman et al., 2005; The In Vitro Meat Consortium, 2011). If this opportunity does in fact become viable, affordable, and ecologically sound under capitalism, it will show how developments in technologies may have a viable chance to fundamentally improve human–animal relations within the restraints of capital. This may sound contradictory to many of the claims made above; however this is not the case. Lest my position be misunderstood, if synthetic, lab-grown meat does in fact take hold and displace factory farming in capitalist societies, it will not be to better meet human needs or reduce the suffering of animals, but because it became, for one reason or another, more profitable than factory farming. Stated negatively, cultured and synthetic meat production *will not* displace factory farming in capitalist societies if it remains unprofitable. If the latter remains the case, it will present another example of when the 'social-productive means for implementing a more sustainable relation to the environment within the context of a developed socioeconomic formation are available' but 'the social relations of production ... stand in the way' (Foster, 2002: 101).

Conclusion: The Socialist Alternative

Concerns for animal suffering may be ethical, but I speculate that the larger, structural changes necessary for alleviating their suffering cannot be attained through individualist ethical lifestyles, especially when 'the higher immorality' caused by the quest for riches is *structural* itself (Mills, 1952: 343–61). As argued above, the resolve will not be attained through individual dietary choices or reformism. Socialism is a proposed opportunity for positive liberty and a mode of production concerned with meeting needs. Below, it is argued that such a system would provide a greater possibility to rectify the consequences and contradictions discussed above.

Unlike capitalism, socialism would offer a considerable *potential* to fundamentally improve our relations with animals. In fact, socialists were some of the first to call for the liberation of animals. Most of the Fabian Society (Spencer, 1995), Henry Salt (1980 [1894]), George Bernard Shaw (1929), H. G. Wells (1905), and Edward Carpenter (1916), were all committed to a rational, socialist society free of 'flesh eating' and animal suffering. Even Marx (who has been framed as a 'speciesist' by Benton [1993]) approvingly quoted the peasant revolutionary, Thomas Müntzer, who declared that it is 'intolerable "that every creature should be transformed into property – the fishes in the water, the birds of the air, the plants of the earth: the creature too should become free"' (quoted in Marx, 1964a [1844]: 37). As Wilde (2000: 37, 52) has pointed out, this 'clarion call for the liberation of animals' would be a necessary addition to any truly rational society and '[t]he realisation of our sense of compassion in our dealings with animals is a necessary part of that [Marx's vision of] revolution'. Marx anticipated communist man, with fully humanized world relations and internal senses, would be 'revolted and outraged by anything that reflects inhumanity, meanness, cruelty, suffering and ugliness' (Parekh, 1975: 59). If Marx's enlightened vision of human perfectionism through communal living is ever realized, there would surely be a compassionate place for animals within such a society.

As for the current immensity of livestock suffering, production for private riches is *the* question, and Left solidarity, alliance politics, and collective agency are the only genuine answers. Although

socialism is not a guaranteed solution to animal suffering, it provides the *prospect* for a more free and rational society and, as Herbert Marcuse (1972: 68) stated, ‘no free society is imaginable which does not ... make the concerted effort to reduce consistently the suffering which man imposes on the animal world’.

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Notes

1. The working conditions in CAFOs and slaughterhouses are wretched. Eisnitz’s (2007) ethnography of slaughterhouse workers is particularly poignant and illustrates how estranged labor can lead to self-hatred and externalized cruelty. The ways many of Eisnitz’s interviewees brutalized animals confirms Max Horkheimer’s (1978 [1956]) assertion that the alienation of animals can mediate the alienation of humans.
2. Although these scholars have made links between capitalism and animal suffering, many frequently push their analyses into the ambiguities and fixations of postmodernism (whether knowingly or unreflectively). This is primarily seen in the hyper-fascination with symbol systems (especially Shukin, 2009) and politically correct language. Because an extensive critique of postmodernist influence on critical animal studies and animal studies in general is outside the scope of this article, it will suffice to say that these tendencies may shackle meaningful dialogue in the future.
3. The distinction between the production and trade for use values and specialized and generalized commodity production can be roughly compared to Tönnies’s (1957 [1887]) distinction between trade in the close-knit community (*Gemeinschaft*) and ‘exchange *Gesellschaft*’, or, ‘bourgeois society’.
4. It should be noted that there is no reason to believe that human-facilitated animal suffering has not existed in different forms throughout human history. In other words, I am not attempting to romanticize the past as a human–animal utopia. However, if we can learn anything about the past from the present, there are few animal welfare concerns associated with the very few subsistence livestock production units that exist today (Gregory, 2007). That is to say, food animals produced for exchange values experience a more augmented and sustained form of misery than food animals produced for use values.
5. Animals may have species-specific powers but do not have ‘species powers’ in the traditional, Marxian conception of the term (Ollman, 1976). Species powers necessitate production beyond immediate need and self-reflection on the part of the producer regarding its creation. To our knowledge, animals perform neither. This is not a trivial detail as it is crucial for conceptual clarity and to avoid a crude analogy.
6. This is not a critique of ethical vegetarianism itself, but a critique of individualist vegetarianism as a legitimate solution to end global animal suffering. A vegetarian diet can be highly gratifying and even emblematic but, under a capitalist system with isolated and market-dependent individuals, will not bring about the structural changes necessary to end animal exploitation. That is, for vegetarianism to achieve its full potential as a universal activity (as opposed to a consumer activity), it would require *social* discipline and a radically different form of agriculture. In other words, I would like nothing more than to see vegetarianism become widespread but argue this goal is likely unachievable under current socio-economic conditions.
7. I am not arguing faux meat, synthetic leather, etc. are a problem of some kind. It is inconsequential, for example, whether one prefers soy in the form of a bean or in the form a gourmet patty. The problem is the individualist *ideological* structure of ethical vegetarianism in current form *lends itself* to recuperation. The belief that purchasing a vegetarian commodity will diminish animal suffering mystifies the root of animal suffering in the same way that attending a rock concert to alleviate AIDS in Africa mystifies what actually needs to take place to alleviate AIDS in Africa. The objective should be eliminating animal-derived commodity production, not basking in the ‘mysterious character of the commodity-form’ (Marx, 1977 [1867]: 164).

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