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**Animals**  
Eva Meijer

Nonhuman animals are not often considered a factor of importance in Marxist thought, and insights from Marxist thought are not often considered to be relevant to animal studies (Cochrane 2010). Marx himself did not write about nonhuman animals in much detail and saw humans as distinct from all other animals. Even though he had read Darwin (Benton 1993), who famously argued that differences between humans and other animals are of degree and not kind, and recognized the capacities of nonhuman animals to produce, as well as the animal nature of humans (Cochrane 2010), he saw humans as special animals and his theory is anthropocentric in different ways. His historical account for example focuses solely on human history and teleology, not recognizing animal agency or the importance of nonhuman animal- (or interspecies-) labor in capitalism. He also explicitly addresses the human capacity for transcending their animal nature, in contrast to other animals (*ibid.*). The focus is on human liberation, and the idea of justice for nonhuman animals seems irrelevant from this perspective.

However, as several authors have pointed out (Benton 2003, Noske 1989, Painter 2016, Perlo 2002), Marxist concepts can shed light on specific characteristics of the position of nonhuman animals in capitalist societies, and a focus on nonhuman animals can bring to light dimensions of capitalism that are otherwise obscured. I

will first briefly focus on the latter point, the relevance of thinking about animals for Marxism, and then turn to the first in more detail. Our economic, cultural, and social structures are in large part built on nonhuman animal labor and matter. The rise of capitalism is interconnected with the exploitation of nonhuman animals, and the remnants of their bodies are omnipresent in most of the objects and artifacts humans produce. The book *PIG 05049* (2007), by Dutch artist Christien Meindersma, illustrates this by documenting what happens to the body of one pig after slaughter. Some body parts are made into food for humans, but her bones, skin, and whatever else is left, are used to make all kinds of objects and materials, ranging from aspirin to gasoline to porcelain. If one would take animal matter out of these products without replacing them, our physical world would collapse. This material use is furthermore interconnected with the production of cultural symbols in capitalism (Shukin 2009).

Nonhuman animal labor is also an important economic force in our societies (Hribal 2003). Barns are filled with chickens laboring for our eggs, cows who are impregnated to keep creating milk, and so on. While many nonhuman animals are used as objects, this does not mean they have no agency. Historian Jason Hribal (2003, 2007) claims that nonhuman animals are part of the working class. He argues they partly instigated the industrial revolution by being unreliable workers and were a driving force in the rise of capitalism. Their cooperation and resistance also shaped human labor and instruments. Rethinking production and labor thus also asks for rethinking relations with other animals. Here it is also important to recognize that the lives of nonhuman and human animal workers are often closely interconnected (see for example Hovorka and Geiger 2015). Human workers in slaughterhouses often suffer from large welfare issues (Pachirat 2011). For poor families, using animal workers is sometimes their only way of surviving. Vulnerable human and nonhuman groups are also often collectively affected by capitalism. Western habits of consumption may hurt animals in industrial farming, together with the non-western human and nonhuman animals whose habitats are destroyed in growing soy for these farmed animals. To analyze or improve the position of one of these groups an intersectional approach is needed. More attention to how

different groups are collectively affected might also lead to greater solidarity, which can help bring forward social change.

This brings us to the second point, the relevance of Marxist criticism for theorizing the social and political position of nonhuman animals. First, while capitalism is not necessary for animal oppression – human oppression and use of nonhuman animals seems the standard in most if not all social, political and religious settings – the Marxist focus on material conditions and economic structures can help to criticize the specific forms of oppression nonhuman animals in capitalist societies suffer from. The scale of their oppression is unprecedented and the strong focus on profit in capitalism is interconnected with the lack of progress in bringing about social change. Philosopher Dinesh Wadiwel (2016) shows that under capitalism animals are objectified and commodified for human consumption, for example in undergoing material transformations in order to become meat. They no longer only have use value for humans; they also have exchange value. This benefits humans economically and symbolically, because through using other animals human value is reified.

Second, a focus on nonhuman animal labor is important because, contrary to what Marx thought, other animals work. They work for and with humans, for example in entertainment, experiments, the police force, the army, and health care. They work for themselves, for example to build nests, bridges, houses and gardens, for food, and for artistic reasons (Bekoff 2002): they also work collectively, for example in hunting or building. Some species of nonhuman animals make other animals work for them; certain species of ants for example farm aphids, keeping them close-by through using chemicals on their feet (Oliver et al. 2007). Nonhuman animals cannot perform certain tasks humans can, but animals of many species can do things humans cannot, such as weaving webs. Theorizing labor relations between humans and other animals under capitalism is important for reasons of justice, and in order to work towards new interspecies communities (Meijer 2017).

This aspect of their lives has not been given much attention in animal philosophy so far (Cochrane 2016, Kymlicka 2017). The focus in this field has long been on

suffering and/or liberation, instead of formulating new relations. Recent approaches that focus on nonhuman animal agency, politics, and subjectivity, however, point precisely to the importance of forming new relations and communities with other animals, arguing that relations with other animals are unavoidable and that better relations are possible. A focus on nonhuman animal labor can help bring forward animal studies in different ways. From recognizing that other animals work it may follow that humans understand them more fully as co-beings in shared communities (see Kymlicka 2017 for examples). Those thinking about fair interspecies relations need to take into account that work for many other animals is part of living a fulfilled life. This means something different for different species, but boredom is one of the biggest problems for zoo animals and domesticated animals living under the conditions of factory farming, together with loneliness. These animals also very often suffer from alienation (Noske 1989). Finally, it is important to recognize that the conditions under which nonhuman animals live can certainly be improved under capitalism, but that that is not enough to bring about actual change for them. It does not suffice to give nonhuman animals bigger cages or better food: we need to challenge the conditions that enable their large-scale exploitation, beginning with the fact that many of them, as sentient beings, are considered human property, and the fact that humans think they own the planet that we all live on.

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