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David Nibert. *Animal Rights/Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation.* Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. x + 269 pp. $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-1776-9; $102.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1775-2.

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Socialism Advocated to Reduce Oppression of Human and Non-Human Animals

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I am a psychologist, not a sociologist or historian, and as such my social construction of reality differs considerably from David Nibert's. I am generally inclined to attribute an individual's position on, or even awareness of, animal rights issues to that person's attitudes, beliefs, and emotions rather than the structure of society. In an attempt to give a fair review of this book I will briefly describe each of the seven chapters and indicate what to me are the strengths and weaknesses of this work. I suspect a sociologist, historian, or maybe political scientist would evaluate this book quite differently, but aside from the book's back cover and the foreword by Michael W. Fox I have not found any other reviews of the book with which to compare my views.

In *Animal Rights/Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation*, sociologist David Nibert passionately attempts to demonstrate that all devalued and oppressed groups–including women, gays, blacks, people with disabilities, and nonhuman animals–are victims of the same overwhelming forces of capitalist society. Most of his book is an exposition and analysis of these forces of oppression. He proposes socialism as a means to reduce the resultant misery that capitalism and its related social structures have imposed on all oppressed groups.

Nibert states in chapter 1 that "[t]his book will explore these fused forms of oppression by way of reflections on Western history and on developing economic practices, political processes, and belief systems.... [T]his book will document how the historical oppression of humans and other animals has provided a benefit primarily for a relatively *small* number of humans, particularly those with substantial privilege and power" (p. 3). Throughout the book Nibert provides countless compelling examples of events that support his view.

His goal is to convince the reader that people involved in various liberation movements need to cooperate and join forces in order to become successful. He posits three societal factors that are necessary to develop and maintain oppression of humans and other animals. These forces are economic exploitation and competition, unequal power, and ideological control. Nibert identifies capitalism and the profit motive as the major force of oppression. His comprehensive list of oppressors includes the ever-expanding and powerful agribusinesses, governments (which Nibert says predominantly serve the powerful), and cultural forces such as mass media, museums, the family, and educational institutions, all of which promote the status quo of oppression.

In chapter 2 he argues that "the motivation for the development and institutionalization of oppressive practices is primarily material, not attitudinal. Such arrangements are not generic or innate, and prejudice is the product of these arrangements not the principal cause" (p. 52). While I agree that individuals are influenced by situations and circumstances around them, I am not convinced it is sufficient to relegate attitudinal influences to the backseat.

Chapter 3 is a detailed analysis of the key role that capitalism plays in oppression. "The denigration and exploitation of workers, ruthless economic concentration and centralization–all compelled by the capitalist system–fanned the flames of prejudice and ethnocentrism against all potentially exploitable and devalued groups" (p. 64). In this analysis oppression is viewed as the outcome of institutional and economic forces, not individual attitudes or psychological factors. Furthermore, Nibert claims "millions of humans and billions of other animals have been cruelly treated and killed because their existence somehow hindered, or their exploitation furthered the accumulation of private profit–particularly for the affluent and powerful" (p. 94).

Chapter 4 is a review of the development of agribusiness and the "Green Revolution." The message here is that as small farms have been consumed by huge factory farms, the animal has become a product instead of a living being. Agribusiness gives no consideration to the quality of life for animals, who are referred to as products. Agribusiness and its profit motive have resulted in horrific living and death for livestock. Nibert refers to meat production as disassembling. That is a compelling image, one I will use when I discuss the topic with my students. Nibert also links the horror of the animals' condition with those of the human meat-production workers and the insult to the environment caused by agribusiness. Nibert further discusses the conspiracy between big business and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to promote meat consumption as healthy and necessary for human nutrition. The point of this chapter is that these practices are not good for anyone, human or nonhuman.

The message of chapter 5 is that "many activists and scholars view the state as 'a device actively developed by powerful elites to establish and maintain their dominance' over others" (p. 147). In this chapter Nibert gives many examples of laws and Congressional hearings that have unsatisfactorily (from the point of view of the animal activist) dealt with animal issues. He also makes clear the conflict of interest apparent in the USDA's dual role as both health inspector and promoter of meat products. Nibert concludes this chapter by saying that, "[f]ully aware of the limitations and obstacles to real and lasting change under capitalism, strategists for liberation of humans and other animals should continue to pursue liberation through political measures, but they must also challenge the control of the capitalist elite over the various powers of the state while striving to change the structure of the state to one that is responsive to public, not monied, interests" (p. 188).

Chapter 6 is titled "The Social Construction of Speciesist Reality." The thesis of this chapter is that "the entangled nature of the oppression of humans and other animals not only has deep economic roots, supported by a powerful state apparatus, but also has considerable public support among a citizenry raised in a society in which powerful corporations exert extraordinary control over beliefs and values" (p. 196). The examples Nibert provides in this chapter support his view that "the political, educational, religious, and familial institutions of these societies were shaped and molded by the economically motivated oppression of humans and other animals" (p. 199). He continues by identifying and discussing "agencies of socialization" such as mass media, schools, museums, and the state that promote and indoctrinate people with the accepted socially constructed view of reality.

In his seventh and final chapter Nibert exhorts activists who are working to improve conditions for various oppressed groups to join forces and promote socialism as a means of gaining rights for the oppressed. He discusses the inability of many who are working in the arena of human rights to see this connection between the oppression of human and nonhuman others. Nibert states that "[i]t is important that members of other contemporary liberation movements come to realize that the current oppression of other animals, especially as 'food,' is ethically atrocious and causes unimaginable pain and suffering" (p. 240). "Many on the Left, who otherwise will challenge authority and question the status quo, nonetheless accept the social position and treatment of other animals determined by agribusiness; the pharmaceutical, biomedical, and chemical industries; state departments of 'wildlife.'... As long as social critics and activists accept this state of affairs, odds are great that, among the numerous other disastrous consequences, the dispossessed of the Earth will continue to experience malnutrition and oppression while the masses in more affluent countries are pacified in part by making themselves obese and sick eating 'meat,' dairy products, and eggs" (p. 241).

For the rest of my comments to be understood in their proper perspective, the reader should know where I stand on the question of animal oppression. Prior to reading this book I was concerned about the well-being of humans and other animals. I work for PSYETA (Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, www.psyeta.org), whose goal it is to reduce human and animal suffering and abuse. I am a vegetarian. My route to vegetarianism was not through the creation of a socialist society but through psychology and cognitive ethology. Knowledge gained from these fields confirmed my appreciation of the uniqueness, sentience, and individuality of nonhuman animals. I decided it was simply wrong to eat any other beings.[1] While I completely agree with Nibert's statements about the horrors of factory farming and disassembly plants, I did not really learn about these atrocities until after I had already stopped consuming meat.

Reading this book made me think about elements of society and how they may collude to treat the oppressed and perpetuate the miserable condition of nonhuman animals. However, I do not think I would have finished reading the book if I had not agreed to review it. I found many of the examples and themes repetitive and the tone

of the book didactic. I wanted to know how Nibert could be so certain that he was correct. I might have been more convinced by a two-sided rather than a one-sided argument. I kept waiting (in vain) for some empirical evidence other than correlational examples to convince me of the rightness of Nibert's socialist position.

I suspect others would have similar problems with the book. The book presents no replicable methodology. Nibert himself tells us that he is going to give us "reflections" on Western history. While I am sympathetic to the condition of oppression, I cannot believe that every person's reflective process would lead to Nibert's conclusions. This book is a statement of the author's own social construction of history and reality. He certainly presented a large number of cogent examples that supported his point of view, but I am reasonably sure that someone who disagreed with him could find an equal number of powerful examples that would support an opposite view. How is the open-minded but skeptical reader to know whether to accept or reject Nibert's position?

Nibert does not address this methodological concern and that bothers me a great deal. The ability to find and interpret historical events in a way that supports a theory will not convince the skeptic that the theory is valid. I read the book as a skeptic, not as a believer in socialism and its potential benefits to the oppressed. I imagine that a reader who did not subscribe to an animal rights point of view prior to starting the book would probably never finish reading it. Such a reader could readily identify the book as the presentation of one person's observations and that would be sufficient excuse to discount the book and its message.

These observations aside, a reader who is interested in promoting the welfare of human or nonhuman others will probably benefit from reading and reflecting on Nibert's message.

Note

[1]. For a very readable discussion of cognitive ethology and its implications for animal rights I recommend Steven Wise's book *Drawing the Line: Science and the Case For Animal Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books, 2002).

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