



## **Throwing the Baby out with the Bathwater: Towards a Sociology of the Human-Animal Abuse 'Link'?**

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### **Abstract**

The prevalence of animals in society, and recognition of the multiplicity of roles they play in human social life, has invoked significant interest from certain subsections of the social sciences. However, research in this area, to date, tends to be at an empirical and inherently psychological level. It is the contention of the current article that we need to redress this imbalance if we are to create a legitimate space wherein sociology can be used to investigate human-animal relations/interactions. In order to achieve this, an examination of the foundations of sociological thought is needed. This is explored in the current article through the use of one substantive, highly topical, subject in human-animal studies: the human-animal abuse 'link.'

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***Keywords: Human-Animal Violence; Deliberate Animal Cruelty; Anthropocentrism; Graduation Thesis***

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### **Introduction**

1.1 Historically, human-animal relationships (anthrozoology) have not been considered a legitimate area of research for social scientists (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Beck & Katcher, 1996). In part this has been due to the embedded Cartesian view that close relationships could only be formed and sustained by humans (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Cazaux, 1999; Sanders, 2003), and has been complemented by the utilitarian and/or anthropocentric ideology that animals are a means to human ends (Taylor, 2007a& b). Such views have recently been subject to considerable criticism and anthrozoology is now considered, by many, as a legitimate research field in its own right. The prevalence of animals in society, and recognition of the multiplicity of roles they play in human social life, has invoked significant interest from certain subsections of the social sciences (e.g. Arluke, 2003). However, interest in this topic to date tends to be at an empirical, as opposed to epistemological, level (e.g. Sanders, 1993) and it is the contention of the current article that we need to redress that balance if we are to create a legitimate space wherein sociology can be used to investigate human-animal relations/interactions. In order to achieve this, an examination of the foundations

of sociological thought is needed. This is explored in the current article through the use of one substantive, highly topical, subject in human-animal studies: the human-animal abuse 'link.'

**1.2** Much of the early literature in the area of human-animal interaction focussed on the positive medical, psychological, and psychotherapeutic outcomes accrued to humans as a consequence of their relations with companion animals. For example, researchers investigated the potential mitigation of risk factors that companion animals might provide for diseases of the cardiovascular system; as a way of reducing stress (Siegel, 1990); combating depression (Triebenbacher, 2000); increasing social interaction among humans (Sanders 1993), and buffering the effects of loneliness due to lost social support ( Garrity, et al, 1989).

**1.3** Following on from this interest, researchers have begun to quantify the factors which might impact upon both attitudes towards, and treatment of, animals. This has tended to fall into two broad categories: personality and demographic variables. Some of the demographic factors which are reported to influence attitudes towards the treatment of animals include the presence of a companion animal in the current home and/or in childhood (Paul & Serpell, 1993; Daly & Morton, 2003); ethical, religious and/or political ideology (Bowd & Bowd, 1989; Galvin & Herzog, 1992; Kimball, 1989); gender, and other variables such as age and race (Kellert, 1980; Herzog et al, 1991; Signal & Taylor, 2006). Personality variables which may influence attitudes towards the treatment of animals on the other hand are not as well quantified and have tended to be single-issue based, for example attitudes towards the use of animals in research and attitudes towards the use of animals within agricultural systems (Plous, 1991; 1998).

**1.4** More recently, however, researchers have begun to address the 'darker' side of human-animal relationships. Sparked by initial 'triad' theses of links between enuresis, fire setting and animal cruelty (Hellman & Blackman, 1966) research has turned to an investigation of links between human-directed and animal-directed violence.

### **Human-animal abuse connections**

**2.1** As companion animals have been incorporated into human lives, they have increasingly assumed an important role within family systems and structures (Thompson & Gullone, 2003). As such, human-animal relationships often reflect those between humans, and, as is in the case with interpersonal relationships between family members, human-animal relationships are not always positive (Ascione, 2001). Following this line of thought psychologists have begun to establish that abusive relationships with companion animals in a familial environment may be indicative of an abusive atmosphere involving other (human) family members (Becker & French, 2004). Thus, the so-called human-animal abuse connection posits the notion that animals may well be an "overlooked window" into cycles of abuse in that human attitudes towards, and treatment of, animals may well affect subsequent attitudes towards, and treatment of, humans (Arluke et al, 1999; Ascione & Arkow, 1999; Taylor & Signal, 2004).

**2.2** The last two decades has seen a proliferation of interest in this, and linked areas. It is beyond the scope of the current paper to provide an exhaustive review, however the following themes are those most commonly found within this research (Becker & French 2004, 401):

#### **1. Animal abuse as part of the continuum of abuse within the family.**

**2.3** The argument underpinning this thesis is that the established continuum of violence within familial relationships, which includes emotional, physical and sexual abuse, needs to be extended to include deliberate companion animal abuse. This is supported by evidence such as that by Ascione, Weber and Wood (1997) who surveyed 38 women in the US who were entering a refuge to escape violence. They found that of the 74% who had pets, 71% had experienced their partner either threatening to harm or actually harming their pet. A further example can be found in the work of Deviney et al (1983) who investigated 57 families where physical child abuse had occurred. They found that 50 of these families had incidents whereby at least one family member had also abused the family pet. In the majority of cases this animal abuse was performed by the abusive parent.

## **2. Animal abuse perpetrated by children who show later aggressive and deviant behaviour**

**2.4** The majority of studies in this area involve retrospective accounts of animal cruelty by males currently incarcerated for violent crimes. For example, Schiff et al documented the animal abuse histories of 117 males in a South African prison. They reported that of the 58 men who had committed aggressive crimes 63.3 percent also documented cruelty to animals. This was in comparison to the 10.5% of animal cruelty reported by the non-aggressive inmates (Ascione, 2001). Tingle et al (1986) in a study of 64 convicted male sex offenders found that 48% of rapists and 30% of child molesters reported childhood or adolescent animal cruelty. Similarly, Fleming, Jory and Burton (2004), following an examination of the family characteristics, victimisation histories and number of offences committed by young offenders, reported 96% of those who had engaged in sexual activity with non-human animals had also committed sex offenses against humans. Those who had engaged in sexual activity with non-human animals also reported higher levels of emotional and physical abuse within their families of origin.

**2.5** Following increased interest in the animal abuse histories of serial killers researchers have also linked a history of animal cruelty to the recent rash of killings by school-age children (Ascione, 2001). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychological Disorders now contains deliberate animal abuse as an indicator of Conduct Disorder (CD), with this disorder being posited as a preliminary to later adulthood antisocial behaviour (e.g., Cohen & Strayer, 1996). Authors have suggested that approximately 25% of children meeting the criteria for CD engage in deliberate animal harm, and this behaviour has been suggested as one of the earliest, observable, symptoms of anti-social behaviour (Miller, 2001). Based on increasing beliefs in such links the FBI includes histories of animal harm in their profiling (Lockwood & Ascione, 1998).

## **3. Animal abuse as an indicator of child abuse**

**2.6** Adams (1995, 64) in her analysis of the 'woman-animal abuse connections' argued that the pets of abused children were often used to maintain their silence and/or child victims of sexual abuse often harm animals themselves and thus child harm of animals should be taken as an indicator of some kind of family dysfunction. In a similar vein Becker & French (2004) cite the findings from an analysis of case histories drawn from a national, UK based, specialist service working with children who sexually abuse other children and who commit other violent offences. This analysis demonstrated that approximately one fifth of the children had a history of sexually abusing animals.

**2.7** Ascione and Arkow (1999) argue that children in dysfunctional families often have their trauma compounded by witnessing displays of animal abuse. Witnessing these displays alongside the abuse of their mother may increase their later propensity for interpersonal violence as well as increasing the likelihood of their subsequent abuse of animals. The authors suggest that domestic violence, animal abuse and child maltreatment form interlocking circles of abuse.

## **4. The therapeutic potential of animals in child development and within post-abuse work.**

**2.8** As Becker and French (2004) highlight the role that animals can play within therapy are numerous including sources of comfort and support, the promotion of childhood resilience, the rebuilding of trusting relationships and the promotion of healing following trauma. It is within this framework that animal assisted therapy is often used (e.g., Lockwood & Ascione, 1998), building on the pioneering work of Levinson and his dog Jingles with children diagnosed with Autism (Levinson, 1978).

**2.9** In a modern context a distinction is drawn between animal-assisted therapy (i.e., therapies which involve both the presence of, and interaction with, an animal) and Humane-Education (i.e., curriculum based presentations regarding animal wellbeing), although the two may well overlap in practice. Despite superficial differences both forms of 'therapy' are predicated upon the idea that empathy may well be a mediating factor within human-animal violence links (e.g., Hastings et al, 2000; Warden & Mackinnon, 2003), thus, humane education has been posited as one particularly effective mechanism whereby a lack of human-directed empathy may be remedied by teaching animal-welfare appropriate attitudes (Ascione,

1992; Ascione & Weber, 1996; Barker et al 2000). Based on similar principles, Animal Assisted Therapy has been used successfully with a number of groups including incarcerated and institutionalised individuals, the elderly and victims of trauma (see Beck & Katcher, 1996).

### **Graduation versus Desensitization Theses**

**3.1** Despite the superficial differences in focus of the above categories, underpinning all ideas of the 'Link' are two separate, but related, theses: the graduation thesis and the desensitization thesis. The graduation thesis is based on the idea that those who deliberately harm animals will graduate to the deliberate harm of humans whilst the desensitization thesis is more concerned with the general levels of callous behaviour which permeate modern life. This is seen to manifest itself in certain personality traits such as deliberate animal harm which can then be seen as a risk factor for the development of further anti-social behaviours, directed at humans (Beirne, 2004).

**3.2** There does exist, however, considerable disagreement regarding the specifics of both these theses, not to mention a lack of (uncontested) empirical data. For example, Tallichet & Hensley (2005) point out that those who harm 'convenient' animals (i.e. their own companion animals) may be less at risk of developing serious anti-social behaviours than those who deliberately seek out animals to harm. This often manifests itself in terms of the species of animal they harm in that they do not harm cats, dogs and other convenient companion (i.e. home-bound) animals. Other research has failed to find predictive utility in the graduation thesis at all (e.g., Dadds et al 2006). For example Taylor & Signal (2004), in an Australian community based sample, found that links between aggression and animal attitude measures existed on a correlational level only yet failed to reach predictive significance.

**3.3** Moreover, research in both these areas is often marred by methodological issues. For instance no clear agreement exists on the definition of animal abuse (e.g. Ascione, 2001, Becker & French, 2004, Beirne, 2004) or on whether deliberate neglect should be taken into account (Ascione, 2001). The majority of research utilises either parental reports of children's animal abuse and/or child self reports of abuse which often differ drastically in terms of estimated prevalence (Ascione, 2001; Miller, 2001). Additional methodological problems are to be found in the fact that much research rests upon retrospective reports drawn from current violent offenders.

**3.4** Despite these methodological problems and a lack of empirical evidence regarding how such violent behaviour becomes established and the mechanisms whereby deliberate animal harm becomes interhuman violence and vice versa (i.e., causality), there is no lack of current research in this area. Nor is there a lack of public interest in, and awareness of, 'The Link.' For example, in a study of approximately 1200 Australians, Taylor & Signal (2006) found that 63% thought there was a link between family violence and deliberate animal harm. Animal protection agencies also utilise 'The Link' in their various campaigns, for example, First Strike in Scotland and New Zealand and the Humane Society of the United States. A number of innovative projects have also been established, in response to recognition of human-animal violence links, to foster the companion animals of women entering refuges fleeing violence (e.g. DVConnect's Pets in Crisis, Queensland, Australia). Furthermore such ideas are now permeating the legal system with, for example, states in the US such as California and Illinois recently enacting legislation that allows judicial discretion to include pets in domestic violence protection orders (HSUS, 2007).

**3.5** One problem with this, however, is that such campaigns often blur the boundaries between correlational concepts (i.e. that conceptually there is a link between the two forms of aggression) and causality (i.e. that children who are cruel to animals will necessarily go on to become serial killers or other harmers of humans). And it remains the case that the empirical evidence for causality is, to date, ambiguous at best and altogether absent at worst. One potential problem therefore is that this research area is in real danger of stalling, of becoming mired in its own lack of evidence and associated methodological problems. With this comes the risk that the baby be thrown out with the bathwater. That is, due to a lack of empirical – causal, predictive – evidence, we abandon the notion in its entirety.

**3.6** There are two potentially fruitful ways forward here. The first is to develop more specific and responsive

instruments. For example, much of the work in this area involves the use of generalised instruments such as the Attitude Towards the Treatment of Animals Scale (Herzog et al, 1991 ; Taylor & Signal, 2006). Whilst a robust and useful measure of general attitudes towards the treatment of animals it may be that it is not specific enough for use within clinical populations where the aim is to test human-animal abuse theses for their predictive ability, nor should it be expected to be given that this was not its purpose by design. Evidence available to date seems to be suggesting that it is the deliberate cruel treatment of animals – as opposed to generalised attitudes towards them – which is important in predicting human directed aggression, certainly within clinical/aggressive populations. Similarly, it may be that aggression across species, or animal category (e.g. ‘wild’ animal vs. domesticated animal or vice versa) plays a more important part than general attitude towards animals in predicting those who will graduate from animal-directed to human-directed violence (e.g., Tallichet & Hensley, 2005).

**3.7** In a similar vein research which addresses the relationships between personality variables, attitudes to animals and aggression/violence often works with scales which may not necessarily be appropriate. For example, Taylor & Signal (2004) argue that one of the most commonly used instruments to measure human-directed empathy; the Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) may well tap into empathy directed towards *all living beings* and not just humans. It is highly likely that this was not a consideration for the original authors of the Davis IRI but the fact remains that if it is to be used successfully in human-animal graduation research this needs addressing. Thus, limitations of current instruments need addressing in any future research programme in this area as does the lack of suitably sensitive or specific measurements. It may be that entirely new, specifically-designed instruments, are needed if future research is to accurately assess the predictive utility and ability of the graduation thesis.

**3.8** A second way forward involves a move away from the specifically diagnostic/clinical utility of the human-animal violence link and calls for analyses of this link on a much broader, conceptual, level. Since the inception of ideas regarding human-animal violence, research has predominantly focussed on any diagnostic utility such theses may hold which has resulted in a comparative lack of conceptual analysis. Such diagnostic approaches appeal as they have pragmatic utility but also because they appeal to those who believe that human interests are central. Seeing deliberate animal harm as a precursor to a variety of human directed harms allows anthropocentric worldviews to remain essentially unchallenged. The inherent psychologism of current approaches to human-animal abuse links has ensured that the majority of analysis occurs at an individual, and usually familial, level (individual companion animals and individual human family members) and focuses upon the utility of such links to humans. To be sure, those who work within this area cite animal welfare as a concern but as a secondary concern behind any positive outcomes for the humans in the situation. If sociology is to address human-animal abuse it would do well to begin not from the need to substantiate anecdotal data that such links exist but to analyse them from a broader – truly sociological – perspective. When done so, it becomes apparent that the study of human-animal relations actually highlights the inherent anthropocentrism of sociology at a fundamental level. A level which must change if we are to meaningfully remove the various interlinked oppressions in modern societies. Whether or not sociology, with its own inherent anthropocentrism, can actually achieve this remains to be seen. But it is definitely the case that sociology is well placed to contribute to a meaningful analysis of ‘the link’ on a broader, societal and cultural, level as opposed to an inherently psychological and individual level.

### **Towards a Sociology of Human-Animal Abuse?**

**4.1** In most discussions concerning the nature of man (sic) and society, a principled distinction is assumed between humans and animals. The characteristics that are taken to be fundamental to human beings and the social life they lead together are precisely those, it is assumed, that distinguish them from animals, and make the human world different from the animal world. Notwithstanding the emergence of Darwinian Theory, this assumed distinction between the human realm and that of animals is a persistent theme in social thought.

**4.2** Perhaps for this reason, the question of animals has never been systematically addressed from a sociological perspective. Social thought has tended to emphasise the idea that animals are ‘outside’ the

human, and thus, *social* realm. Thus the overwhelming presence of animals in modern society is largely taken for granted by sociologists who either ignore animals completely or make the base error of assuming the very thing (animals) that they claim to investigate in the first place. Ultimately, the pragmatic and conceptual importance of animals in society, and especially that of companion animals, is an issue which the social sciences have virtually ignored.

**4.3** This neglect can be explained in part by the post-Cartesian legacy which pervades sociological thought and which denies corporeality and posits a distinction between objective and subjective worlds. This has ultimately led to a post-Enlightenment sociology which sees “itself in terms of man’s ascent from animality” (Murphy, 1995: 689). This has resulted in the social-natural relationship being characterized “in terms of unidirectional causality from the social to the natural” (Murphy, 1995: 690). Historically, human interaction with animals in the west has always been based on the notion that animals are ‘other’ to humans, and, furthermore, that they are inferior ‘others.’ Stemming first from the ideas of Aristotle who argued that nature was an ordered hierarchy whereby those with less reasoning ability existed for the use of those with more reasoning ability, Western ideology concerning animals and their relationship to humans has cast animals firmly in the role of ‘other.’ With the advent of theological thought concerning animals this message was reaffirmed when it was accepted that God had ordained the world with a fixed place for all creatures with humans having dominion over all other species.

**4.4** This prevailing essentialist belief regarding differences between humans and animals was embedded in sociology by the ideas of Mead who argued that symbolic interaction could only take place when the interactants possess a sense of self, a sense of self which was limited to adult humans only. Whilst Mead may have “extend[ed] the frontiers of sociology into an explanation of the interior and the subjective” (Collins, 1989: 1) he refused to acknowledge that this could apply to human-animal interactions because of his adamance that language was central to the full realization of an individual’s selfhood. For Mead, only humans, because of their ability to use language and interpret the gestures of others, could be considered capable of *social* interaction.

**4.5** Throughout the history of Western thought, and particularly sociological thinking, this idea has never been subject to serious challenge. Even Darwin’s evolutionary theory which arguably held the greatest promise of challenging these ideas, failed to do so in any real sense. Despite Darwin’s insistence on both the physical *and mental* continuity between humans and nonhumans, as evidenced by the ‘anthropomorphism’ which pervades his writings (Crist 1999), modern (western) ideologies of humans and animals only (tentatively) accept the physical continuity he proposed. Thus, any real challenge Darwinism offered to prevailing Cartesian/mechanistic attitudes towards animals has been nullified and animals remain firmly ‘Other’ to their ‘superior’ human counterparts.

**4.6** This notion of animals-as-other is reflected in many walks of life. For example, the appellation of ‘beast’ to humans who commit certain kinds of criminal or deviant acts; the general and uncritical acceptance of animals as a source of food; the acceptance of animals as a source of pleasure (pets) or of entertainment (zoos and circuses) and the lack of serious critical discussion concerning the use of animals as sport (hunting). Humans have created an ontological classification of ‘human’ versus ‘animal’ based largely on a line drawn arbitrarily between the species, and have worked collectively to maintain that line. This neglect of the human-animal relationship as an area of study can be at once both accounted for by, and seen as culminating in, an anthropocentric stance in sociology. Even when sociology has attempted to analyze animals in any serious way it has done so by treating them as objects, or it has done so anthropocentrically.

**4.7** Despite its initial contribution to this thoroughly modernist way of seeing animals, sociology may be uniquely placed to remedy this apparent deficit in intellectual thought. Following in the footsteps of phenomenological, anti-humanist thought ethnographic methods can be utilized to elucidate the ways in which people *do actually* treat animals and interact with them, and thus reflexively define them. This latter strategy draws on the tradition which sees the mind as a social construction rather than a biological given. These sentiments sustain the perception of the social world as intersubjectively experienced (e.g. Coulter, 1989; Schutz, 1967). The relevance of this line of thought to the study of animals within human culture is

that seeing the world as intersubjectively constituted allows us to include animals. The proposition here, then, is that we can empirically investigate the role of animals in society by addressing human-animal interaction. The last decade or so has seen significant intellectual movement towards this largely based on the work of several key symbolic interactionists such as Goffman (1963, 1967). Goffman's analysis of the interaction order and the joint labour that individuals are involved in throughout that order has been extended to analyse caretaker-dog relationships (Sanders 1993), shelter staff-cat relationships (Alger & Alger, 1997, 2003), and emotional management in animal shelters (Arluke, 1991) to name but a few. Recent studies from this field have demonstrated that human caretakers often attribute 'personhood' to their nonhuman charges (e.g., Sanders, 1993; Taylor, 2007a). This is predicated upon the notion that both parties in the interaction are 'co-present' (Goffman, 1963), that is, minded actors who possess agency (Weider, 1980). Here, agency is defined as the propensity for self-willed action (Irvine, 2004). This argument rests upon the notion of intersubjectivity, i.e. metaphysical typifications of essentialist agency are sidestepped in favour of arguments regarding the intersubjective achievement of agency through performance. A fundamental problem with this line of thought, in the context of the current argument, however, is that it rests upon an entirely asymmetrical – *human* - interpretation of the situation, in this case human interpretation of animal agency. Thus humans are considered to 'bestow' agency on their animal counterparts.

**4.8** For example, Alger & Alger (1997, 2003) have argued that by observing animals making choices and interacting with humans it is possible to gain insight into their minds. This can be achieved in part because their chosen method – ethnography - allows access to other humans (in this case shelter workers) with whom interpretations of animal behaviour, motivation, personality and so on can be checked. It is here that such arguments become problematic. These interpretations may just as readily be evidence of cultural assumptions, beliefs and taboos about animals as they are about animal minds. This is not to say that animals are not minded agents – anyone who spends time with a companion animal can clearly see that they are – it is simply to point out that such theories still rest upon *human* interpretations. It is not possible to move away from this; after all we cannot categorically know the mind (or intersubjective reality) of other humans with whom we share the linguistic ability that lets us explain our intersubjective states. Logic dictates that it would be more difficult therefore, to achieve this with other species. Even if this were achievable any interpretation would be open to the criticism that it is simply that – a human interpretation of animal mind/personality/agency etc.

**4.9** As useful as this may be in highlighting the deficiencies of current scientific practices/knowledge(s) it is highly problematic in that it invites anthropocentrism with its stress on *human* interpretation. It also reiterates the kind of dualistic, hierarchical thinking which is at the basis of modern oppressions of animals and which sociology needs to move away from if it is to truly be sociological as opposed to simply being another facet of an epistemology which ensures the purification of categories (Latour, 2004). For example, the Alger's argue "we believe that, at least in humans and domestic animals, an operative understanding born of long association and evolutionary similarity allows us to interact routinely in a manner that grants satisfaction to all involved" (1999, 120). Whilst not denying the possibility of this, the rejoinder must be 'what about other, non-domesticated, animals?' Are we simply to ignore and exclude them from our theories because we do not habitually interact with them? If this is the case then such a theory is no different from current, hierarchically-based theories. Surely, it simply extends the boundary of that which we designate as 'the social' to include some animals but not others instead of thoroughly interrogating the concept at a more fundamental level.

**4.10** Thus approaches such as these do not question, and indeed actually rest upon, prevailing anthropocentric ideas in that they turn upon human categories, meanings and definitions. That is, whilst animals are accorded a space within social thought, it is only a space granted by humans, and the importance attributed to animals by such conceptions remains tied to their importance to humans. Thus their interest remains firmly in terms of their extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, value and any analyses of nonhuman animals which do occur tend to centre exclusively on individual, usually domesticated, companion animals.

**4.11** For example, Cazaux (1999) points out that in the field of Criminology most studies addressing human-

animal abuse not only do not define animal abuse but proceed by assuming *companion* animal abuse only. She argues that not only are such studies interested in animals as a “peripheral phenomenon of (an incentive to) a criminal pattern or situation” but that they deliberately exclude the “large scale, institutionalized instances of animal abuse” (114) which are entirely more common than individualized acts of animal abuse. She further argues that individual instances of animal abuse are tied to those animals that are deemed subjects and that the vast majority of animal abuse takes place with animals that are deemed as object.

**4.12** In order to fully develop a sociological conception of human-animal abuse a broader perspective is needed: a wider framework which sees such links as symptomatic of an institutionalised attitude which condones, and indeed implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) supports, violence towards disenfranchised ‘others’. Those within the domestic violence sector will be well aware of the numerous examples of institutionalised violence towards women and children but may not be as aware of the myriad of examples of institutionalised violence towards animals. One recent example within Queensland, Australia was the Richmond townships bounty for feral cat pelts. While numbers of certain species (e.g., feral cats or cane toads) may need to be reduced – and this proposition itself begs analysis with its anthropocentric undertones - this should be done humanely and by qualified professionals. As it stands, offering incentives to members of the public to engage in deliberate harm to ‘inconvenient’ animals is at best negligent and at worst promotes the very type of harm to animals that research has shown as a risk factor for interpersonal violence. A broader, socio-cultural, perspective is needed, one which takes account of the institutionalised nature of such cruelties. This will allow us to move away from the individualising, victim blaming culture of which we are currently a part and thereby allow us to begin combating violence on a much wider scale. Additionally such an approach will ensure that we have to take account of, and ultimately change, the societal structures currently in place which allow and support violent treatment of oppressed ‘Others’, including nonhuman animals.

**4.13** Examples of the anthropocentric underpinnings of current approaches to human-animal studies are rife. For example, it has been argued that animal abuse may be usefully seen as a ‘red flag’ within the family setting, as an indicator that human abuses are also taking place. Whilst not denying the utility of this, it is the authors contention that such ideas inadvertently reproduce the oppressive practices they are seeking to eliminate by seeing nonhuman animals simply as ‘tools,’ as objects to aid humans rather than as subjects-in-themselves (e.g. Taylor, 2007b). Similarly, arguments regarding the potential wildlife management techniques of hunting nonhuman animals again see the needs of animals sublimated under those of humans thus re-producing the hierarchies of inequality and oppression which legitimate such behaviour in the first place. Without an integrated perspective – which sees such oppressions and inequalities as inextricably linked – any analysis is doomed to reproduce these inequalities, taking as a starting point, an epistemological and ontological framework which itself takes for granted hierarchical and dualistic frameworks. In other words if we are to move towards a *sociology* of human-animal abuse, and indeed a sociology of human-animal relations in their entirety, current anthropocentric epistemologies will need revising from the very ground up. This will necessitate starting from a position which has room to acknowledge that animals (and more broadly nature itself) are not solely of interest when they are of benefit to humans in some way.

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