

Find a Therapist (City or Zip)



Marc Bekoff Ph.D.
Animal Emotions

Animals in Irish Society, Anti-Speciesism, and Globalization

A new book highlights Ireland's many contributions to animal welfare.

Posted November 21, 2021

Reviewed by Jessica Schrader



I recently read Dr. Corey Wrenn's wide-ranging book *Animals in Irish Society: Interspecies Oppression and Vegan Liberation in Britain's First Colony* and learned a lot about the complex relationships among cultural values and climate change, public health, and animal welfare and how much there is to learn from looking at the place of nonhuman animals (animals) in the history of Ireland's remarkable changes. It reminded me of another book on the [broad relevance of vegan ethics in everyday life](#) and how veganism isn't a radical view, but rather a practical one that informs the fair and just choices people constantly make. Here's what Corey had to say about her landmark book.

Marc Bekoff: Why did you write *Animals in Irish Society*?

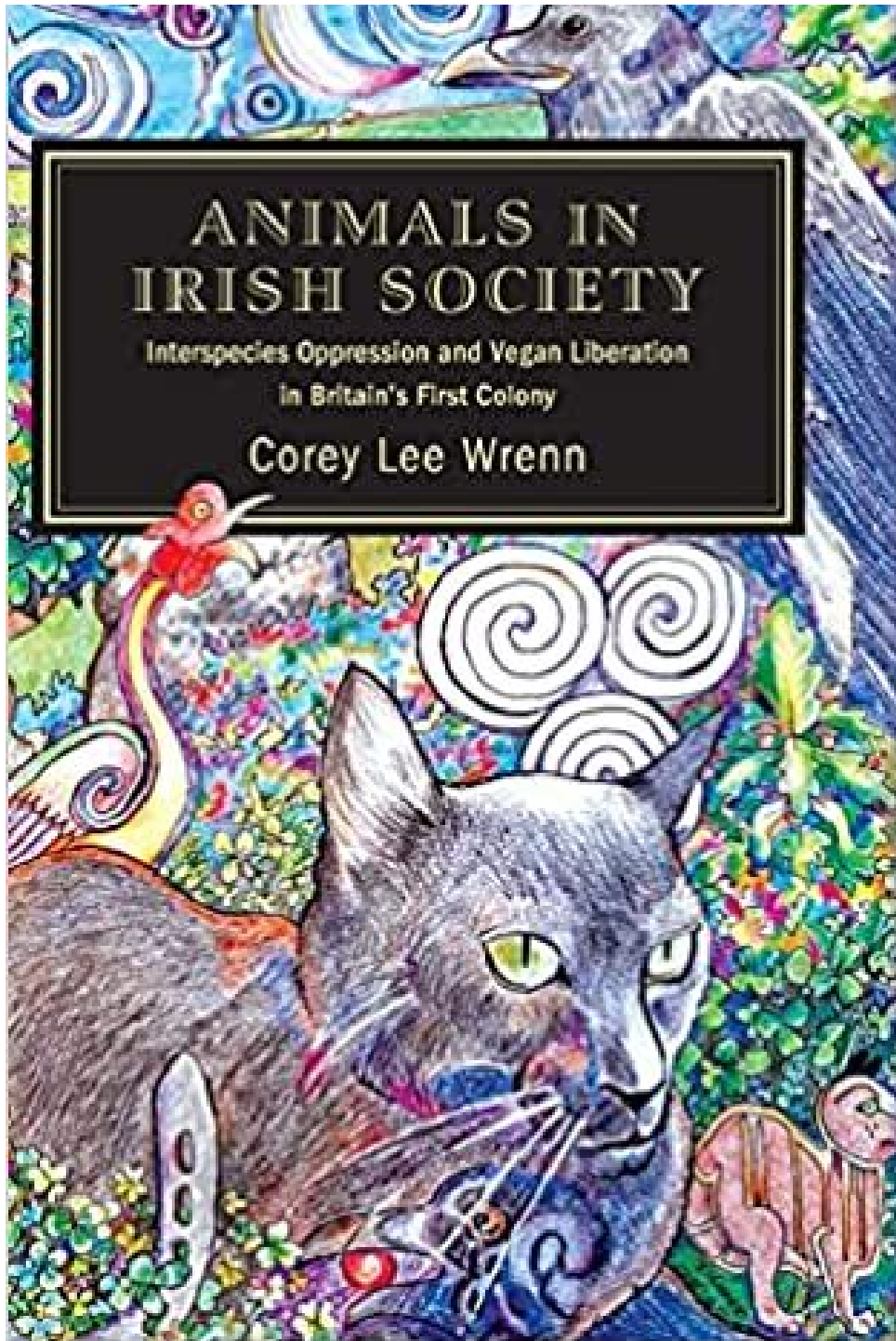
vive as a vegan in the 'land of meat and potatoes.' I was surprised by that because the Ireland I'd come to know is a rather international and modern country. It's dealing with a lot of colonial stereotypes that pit it as backwards, rural, and simple. Most vegan studies and animal rights history work centers on the U.S. and the U.K., overlooking the little country in the middle with so much to offer. Not only was Ireland central to the development of modern animal rights, but its colonial position offers something unique to the field.

MB: How does your book relate to your background and general areas of interest?

CW: I specialize in both historical and contemporary animal rights mobilization politics. I had been aware of several key leaders in the movement who were either Irish, Anglo-Irish, or American Irish who were also responsible for some of the first animal rights laws and leading animal rights organizations. Yet, the mainstream discourse had generally failed to acknowledge these contributions as explicitly Irish, instead absorbing them into the dominant American and British narratives. It was the work of David Nibert that guided my case study in Ireland. Nibert has identified the role of capitalism and colonialism in spreading speciesism and the interconnectedness of that oppression with the suffering of colonized humans. This was clearly relevant to Ireland.¹

MB: Who is your intended audience?

CW: I expect this book will be of interest to anyone who is Irish or interested in Irish history and folks in vegan studies and critical animal studies will also be interested. More



Source: SUNY Press, used with permission

broadly, this book is important for reimagining Ireland for the future: anyone interested in how veganism can be aligned with traditional cultures and current climate change challenges may find this book useful.

CW: My main argument in this book is that the way we eat, the way we think, and the way we organize our society is directly relevant to power relations. In the case of Ireland (and many other colonized spaces), the most fundamental relationship is that between humans and other animals. As Ireland faces up to the climate change crisis and support for animal equality increases, it would be helpful to recognize that the speciesist practices that currently dominate in Irish society are largely manufactured by several waves of colonialism (including the influence of the early Christians, Vikings, Normans, and, most importantly, Britain).

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Not only did these colonial invasions disrupt traditional foodways, but they also successively animalized the indigenous Irish as “other,” “wild,” “barbaric,” “savage,” and in need of outside rule. Just as Ireland was colonized to accommodate animal agriculture for empire, Irish people were ideologically animalized to justify this oppression. Speciesism against humans and other animals, in other words, facilitates a system of domination. It is not surprising, then, that free Ireland de-

pathways but it was also keen to demonstrate its humanity via its domination over other animals.

Indigenous Irish diets were actually plant-based; as a cattle society, cows were more valuable alive than dead and dairy was a precious commodity. Diets were mostly comprised of oats and other grains, hazelnuts, fungi, fruits, seaweeds and other wild-growing greens, and a wide array of additional non-animal sources. The 21st-century plate loaded up with animal products is not quintessentially Irish, but instead a legacy of colonialism. Millions of Irish people were displaced to make room for British meat and dairy production, a million starved on meager rations while land that could be used to feed and house humans went to grazing cows and other animals. I don't think there could be anything more Irish than dumping this exploitative colonizer diet and revisiting sustainable, healthy, animal-friendly plant-based eating.

MB: What lessons can people learn from your historical and modern-day discussion?

CW: A climate-friendly, plant-based diet is not foreign to Ireland—it is already embedded in Irish traditions and need only be revisited and reapplied. I think vegetarianism has been inappropriately associated with famine times when people had little else but cabbages, potatoes, and foraged plants to eat. The forced vegetarianism of colonialism is not at all like that of precolonial Ireland. That food heritage is rich and should be celebrated. The Irish state would also benefit from transitioning animal farmers (who actually suffer quite a lot to make a living and rely on state subsidies to sustain) onto industries that are more indigenous, like oats, seaweeds, mush-

mals alike.

I also think animal rights historians would do well to recognize the amazing contributions of Irish activists over the centuries like Jack McClelland the first celebrity vegan athlete, Frances Power Cobb who was responsible for the first anti-vivisection act in Britain and the formation of two still-existent animal rights charities, and Humanity Dick, a Galway MP who created the first modern animal welfare law. Ireland's case is particularly interesting given that all of these achievements took place under colonialism.

References

In conversation with Dr. Corey Wrenn.

1) I had previously come across Bernard Unti's dissertation on animal welfare work in 19th century America and read some interesting accounts of how the working class Irish (who were a prominent immigrant minority group at that time) had been stereotyped as particularly problematic in their animal-like living conditions and treatment of other animals. Henry Bergh of the ASPCA was even believed to have maintained a special file on the 'crimes of the Celtic Race.'

Bekoff, Marc. [The Broad Relevance of Vegan Ethics in Everyday Life](#). (A new book shows that many ethical decisions center on how animals are treated.)



ADVERTISEMENT

About the Author



Marc Bekoff, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Online: marcbekoff.com, [Twitter](#)

Read Next



How Animals Flirt and What We Can Learn from Them



Enriching the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Lives of Cats

Most Popular



Ten Ways Boundaries Can Change Your Life for the Better



One Personality Trait Distinguishes Gifted People



When Being Married Is No Longer Fun



Building Exceptional Relationships

5 Ways Your Ancestral Past Is Messing with Your Love Life



The Fantasy Connection We Keep With Our Parents

Find a Therapist

Get the help you need from a therapist near you—a FREE service from Psychology Today.



Cities:

- Atlanta, GA
- Austin, TX
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Brooklyn, NY
- Charlotte, NC
- Chicago, IL
- Columbus, OH
- Dallas, TX
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Houston, TX
- Indianapolis, IN
- Jacksonville, FL
- Las Vegas, NV
- Los Angeles, CA
- Louisville, KY
- Memphis, TN
- Miami, FL
- Milwaukee, WI
- Minneapolis, MN
- Nashville, TN
- New York, NY
- Oakland, CA
- Omaha, NE
- Philadelphia, PA
- Phoenix, AZ
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Portland, OR
- Raleigh, NC

San Antonio, TX

Tucson, AZ

San Diego, CA

Washington, DC

San Francisco, CA

Are you a Therapist? [Get Listed Today](#)



[Subscribe Today](#)



Psychology Today © 2021 Sussex Publishers, LLC