

# What is Vegan Sociology?:

Sociology for total liberation  
and a vegan world

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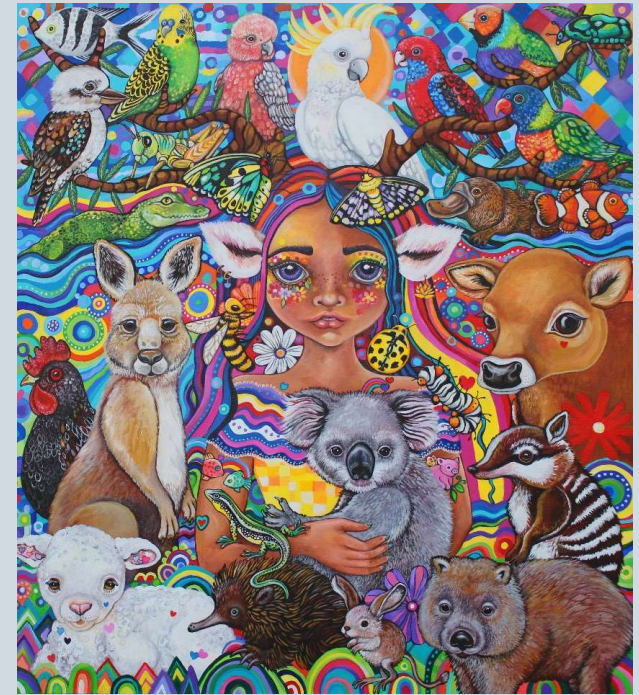
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# Objectives

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- ❖ Introduction to a **new field** of sociology
- ❖ A case for including **other animals**
- ❖ Suggestions for **veganizing your sociology**
- ❖ How might Italian sociology inform vegan studies?

# Building the Case

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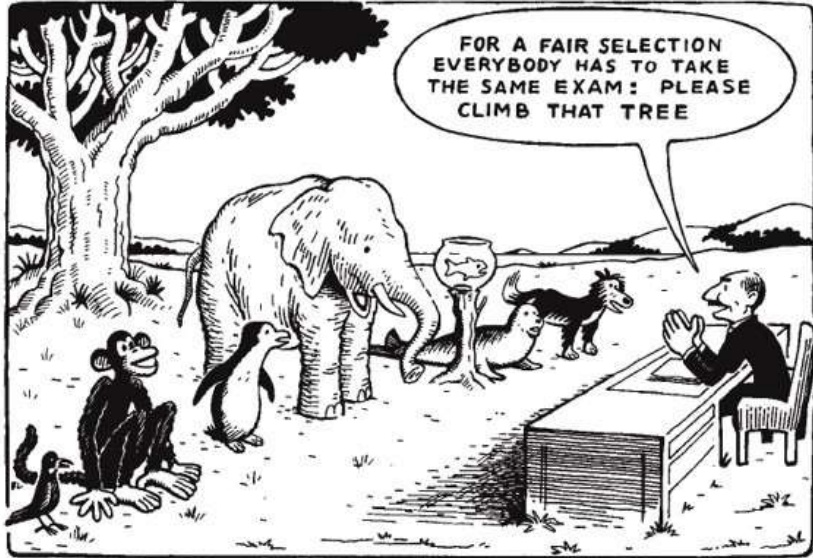
# Sociological Anthropocentrism

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- ❖ “...the systematic study of human society” (Macionis and Plummer 2005)
- ❖ “Sociology involves the systematic study of patterns of human interaction” (Cohen and Kennedy 2000)
- ❖ Weber: Sociology should also engage subjective meaning (animals supposedly lack this)
- ❖ Marx: Animals lack ability to contemplate and plan actions
- ❖ Mead: Animals lack capacity for significant symbols

# The Anthropocentric “Perspective”

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- ❖ Literally “humans at the center”
  - ❖ Others (re: animals) to the margins
- ❖ Human bias
  - ❖ Humans as taken-for-granted measure of perfection and importance
- ❖ Emphasis on rationality, culture, language, etc.

# Human Primacy Politics

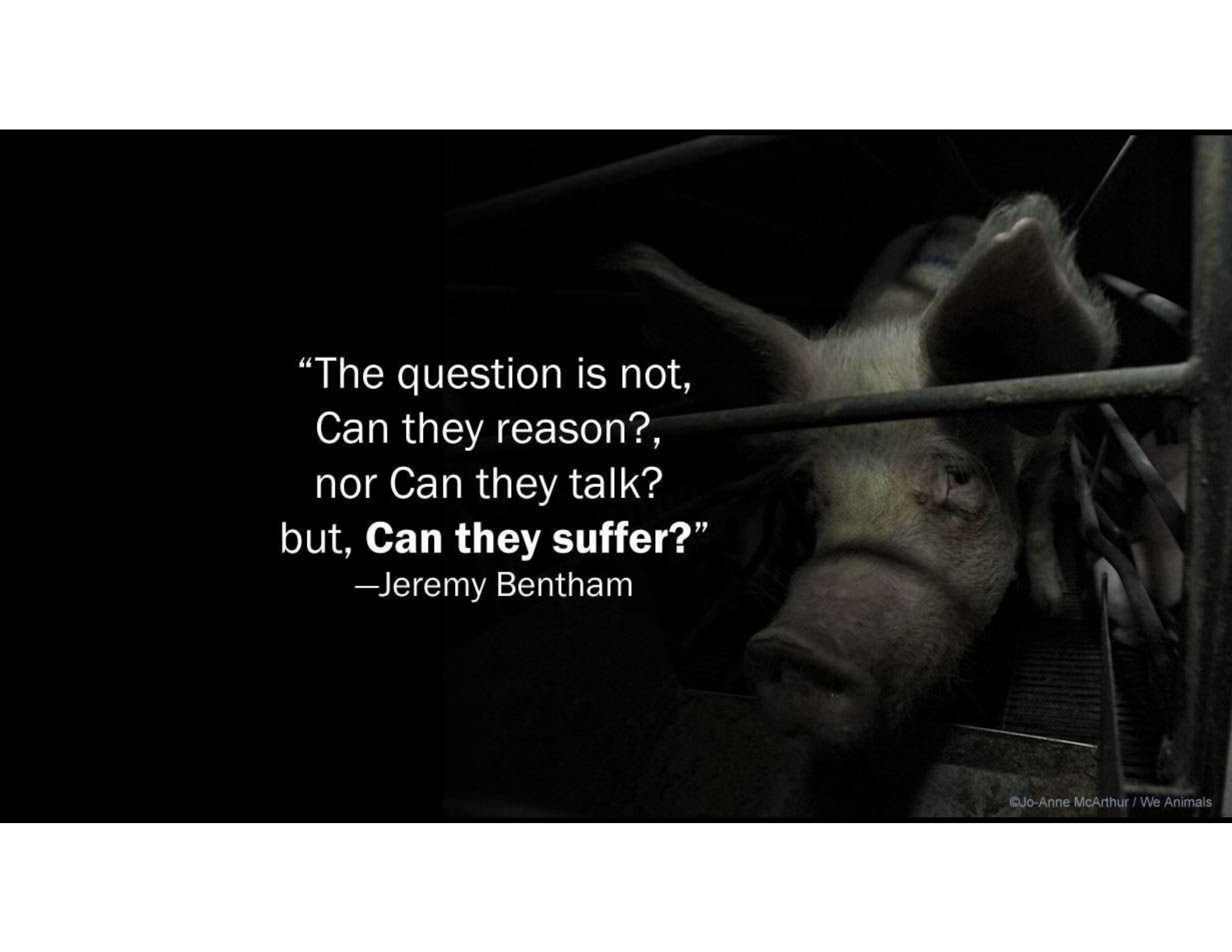
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“Although organic differences exist among all animals (human and nonhuman), the ‘key’ division between human and nonhuman animals is founded in scientific categorizations of hierarchical differences that are a display of human identity, since hierarchical distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are founded in, I argue, judgements and choices rather than in naturally occurring scientifically verifiable hierarchical divisions.” (Peggs 2009: 86)

# Human Identity Politics

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- ❖ Humanity as a performative identity
- ❖ Animality as a symbolic category
- ❖ Hierarchical ordering of identity
- ❖ Binaries (us/them, human/animal)

A dark, grainy photograph of a pig in a confined space, likely a cage. The pig's head is visible, looking towards the camera. Its front paws are pressed against a horizontal metal bar. The background is dark and indistinct.

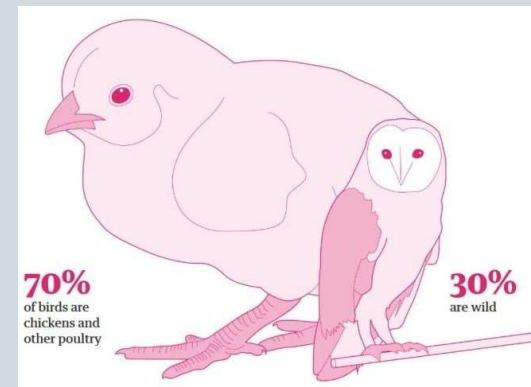
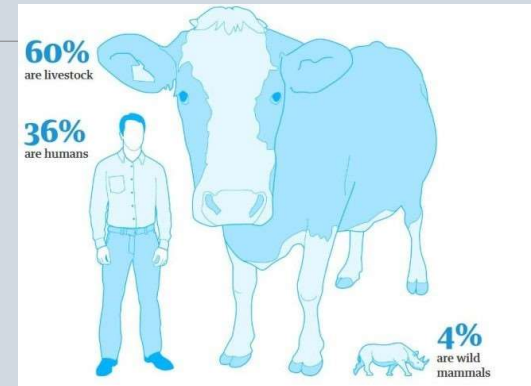
“The question is not,  
Can they reason?,  
nor Can they talk?  
but, **Can they suffer?**”

—Jeremy Bentham



# Why Should Sociologists Care?

- ❖ Nonhumans are integral to the **development** and **maintenance** of human society
- ❖ **Largest minority/oppressed group**
  - ❖ Most mammalian biomass is nonhuman (Bar-On et al. 2018)
- ❖ Human oppression and nonhuman oppression are **entangled** (Nibert 2002)
- ❖ Key to our intimate **family** and **social** lives (Irvine 2004)



Bar-On, Y. et al. 2018. "The Biomass Distribution on Earth." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 115 (25): 6506-6511.

Irvine, L. 2004. *If You Tame Me: Understanding Our Connection with Animals*. Temple University Press.

Nibert, D. 2002. *Animal Rights/Human Rights*. Rowman & Littlefield.

# Introducing the Field

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# The Field

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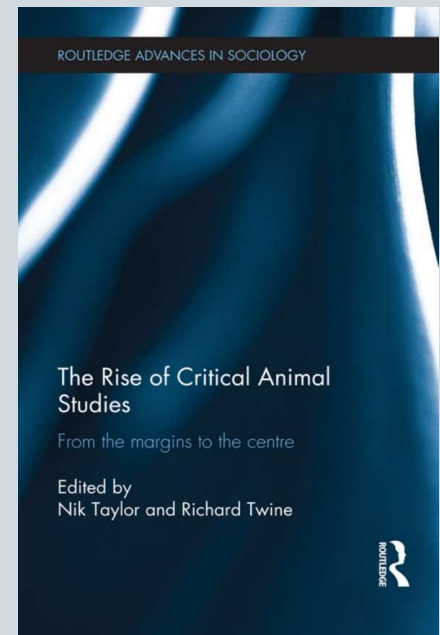
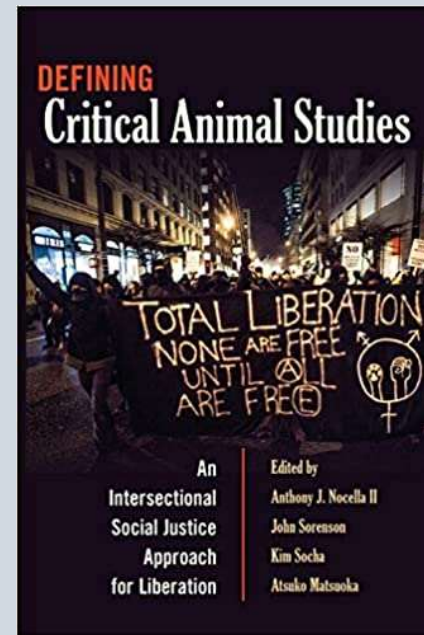
- ❖ Animal Ethics
- ❖ Ecofeminism
- ❖ Human/Animal studies
  - ❖ Posthumanism (Donna Haraway)
  - ❖ Animality Studies (Michael Lundblad)
  - ❖ Vegan Studies (Laura Wright)
  - ❖ Critical Animal Studies (CAS)
- ❖ Critical Sociology
  - ❖ Society & Animals
  - ❖ Intersectionality
  - ❖ Environmental sociology

# Developing from Critical Animal Studies

## ❖ Sociologists at the forefront of CAS

- ❖ Yet ultimately multidisciplinary
- ❖ And not always vegan

“Once sociology opened up to studying food and animal issues, and specifically veganism and farmed animals, vegan studies in sociology could emerge” (Cherry 2021: 152)



2014

# Developing from Animals & Society

❖ Animals & Society Section of **ASA** forms in 2001

❖ Animal/Human Studies Group of **BSA** forms in 2006

❖ Sociology & Animals thematic group of **TASA** forms in 2017

❖ Animals in Society research cluster of **CSA** forms in 2019

❖ Section of Interspecies Relations of the Polish Sociological Association in **2020**

❖ International Association of Vegan Sociologists forms in **2020**

May 2001  
Volume 1, Issue 1

## Animals and Society

An American Sociological Association Section - in-Formation

### Join the New Animals & Society Section

David Nibert

At last we have achieved section-in-formation status! Thanks for everyone's help and support. Our next step is to recruit 300 members into this important new section. If you have not already joined the new section, please do so when you pay your ASA dues. Since we are a section-in-formation, dues are only \$5.00. If you have already paid your ASA dues for 2001 but missed joining the section, send \$5.00 to David Bachman, ASA Section Coordinator, and ask him to add you to the Animals & Society Section. (David Bachman, American Sociological Association, 1307 New York Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005-4701.) Please encourage anyone who may be interested to do the same. And please try to join us at the 2001 ASA meetings in Anaheim for our first promotional and organizational meeting.

### Welcome!

David Nibert & Anna Williams

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the American Sociological Association's Animals and Society Section Newsletter. As befits such a new endeavor, the format of this edition is highly provisional. Since this newsletter is intended to provide a forum for section members to share information and ideas, we welcome your input and encourage you to share your thoughts on what you'd like to read in these pages in the future (please e-mail your comments and suggestions to Anna Williams at [anawill@home.com](mailto:anawill@home.com)). It seems appropriate to begin this first issue of the Animals and Society Section Newsletter with a brief reminder of the prehistory of our group. After three years of work and two petition drives the ASA Council approved section-in-formation status for Animals & Society at its August 2000 meeting in Washington, DC.

The establishment of this section reflects the increasing popular and scholarly attention being devoted to the relationship between humans and other animals for well over two decades. Philosophers, feminists, anthropologists, psychologists—and, increasingly, sociologists—are examining the complex, profound and entangled relationships of humans and other animals. For instance, the current environmental crisis has produced a sudden decline in biodiversity, while global production saturates our lives with an enormous array of animal commodities, in the forms of food, pets, medicines, clothing and entertainment. At the same time, cultural perceptions of other animals are dramatically changing. This perceptual shift is evident in the increasing scientific rejection of the concept of other animals as instinctively driven bodies—exemplified by Descartes's metaphor of other animals as clock- or impenetrable black boxes, and the emergence of models that describe them as socially engaged agents. Although there is no consensus on the ethical implications of this reevaluation, writers with differing political views nevertheless agree that other animals are cognitive subjects that exist in specific lifeworlds. *Continued on back cover*

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## BSA BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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### About

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## About

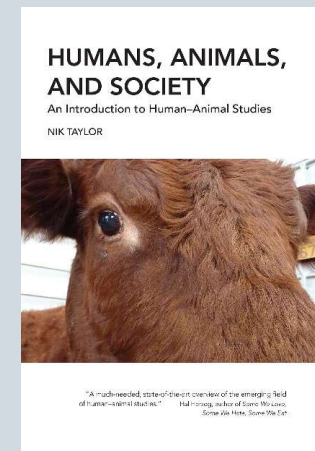
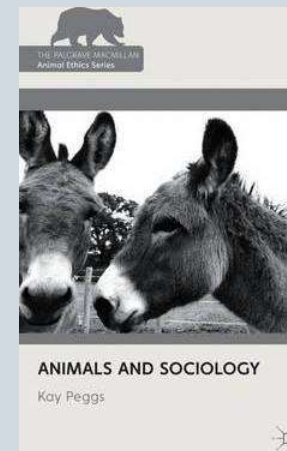
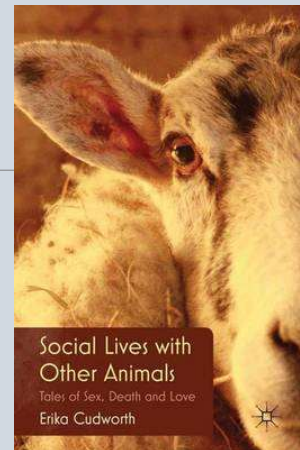
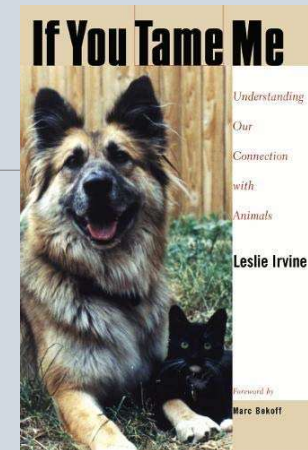
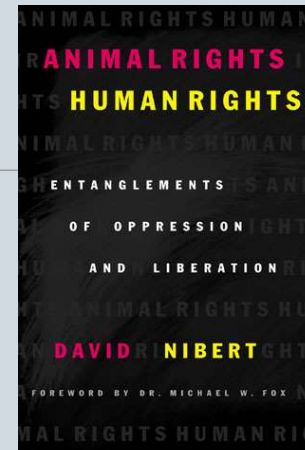
The BSA Animal/Human Studies Group will enable both current and future sociologists to put non-human animals on to the specialist and mainstream sociological research agenda, thus ensuring that animal-human studies becomes a viable and significant area of sociological study. [References](#)

### Aims and Objectives

- To develop a sociological forum whereby animals and their relations with humans can be studied from a variety of sociological (and cognate) viewpoints, and to provide a specialist research forum for academics, researchers and students who share a professional interest in incorporating non-human animals into the discipline of sociology.
- To create a research database of animal-related research projects (including PhDs) carried out by sociologists initially in the UK. If you know of any such work please contact Dr Rebekah Fox who will be overseeing this particular project.
- To identify gaps in the emerging animal-human studies research agenda.
- To create opportunities for networking and research collaboration with colleagues from other social science disciplines (such as anthropology, cultural studies, gender studies, geographers, historians, law, philosophy, and psychology) who are interested in and actively researching animal-human related issues.

## Developing from Animals & Society

- ❖ ***Animal Rights/Human Rights*** – David Nibert (2002)
- ❖ ***If You Tame Me: Understanding Our Connection with Other Animals*** – Leslie Irvine (2004)
- ❖ ***Social Lives with Other Animals*** – Erika Cudworth (2011)
- ❖ ***Animals and Sociology*** – Kay Peggs (2012)
- ❖ ***Humans, Animals and Society*** – Nik Taylor (2013)



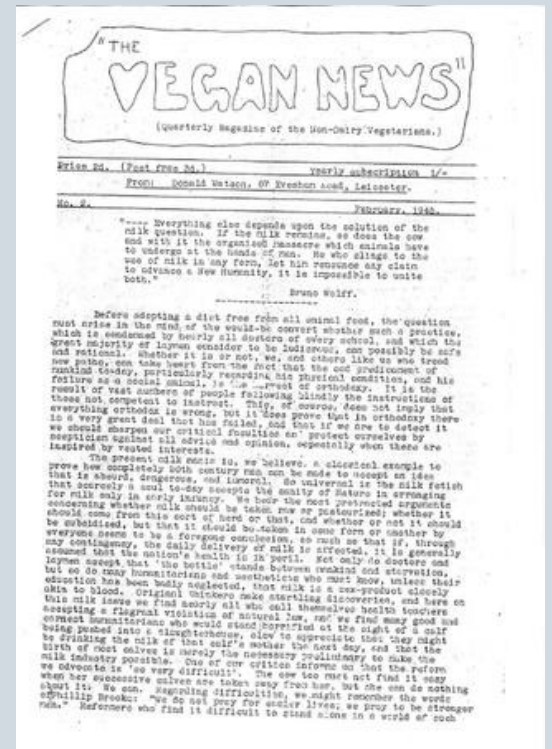
# Defining Vegan Sociology

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# What is Veganism?

“Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.”





# What is Veganism?

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- ❖ Political position
- ❖ Philosophy
- ❖ Lifestyle
- ❖ Identity
- ❖ Consumer choice



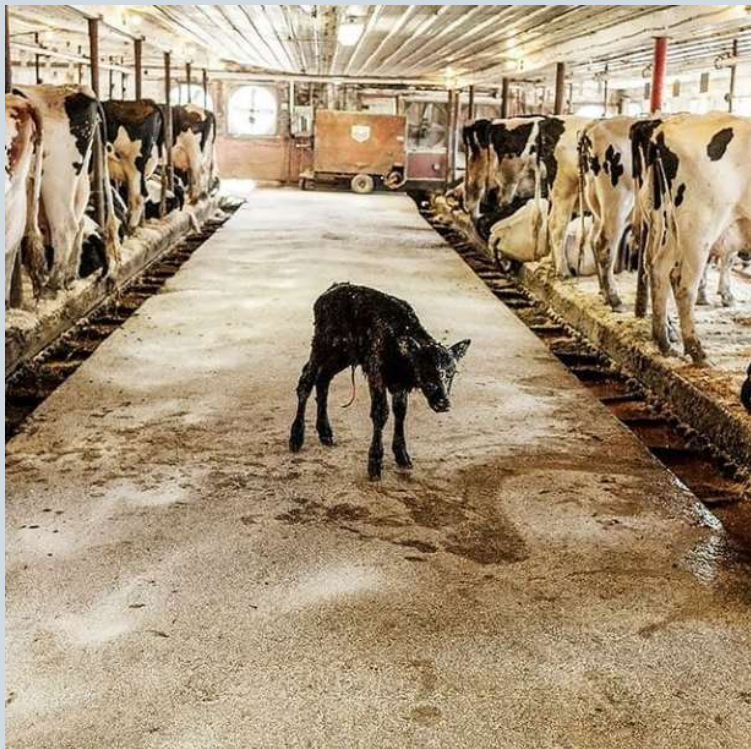
# What is Veganism?

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- ❖ Emerges in 19th c.
- ❖ The Vegan Society formed in 1944 UK
- ❖ Much older roots in African, Asian, and Latin cultural practices and religious/philosophic traditions
  - ❖ Eroding with Westernization
  - ❖ Although some regions are resisting this (O'Neill 2020)

# Why Not Vegetarianism?

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- ❖ **Does not cover** vivisection, entertainment, fashion, threats to wildlife, and many food industries
  - ❖ Are eggs and milk even vegetarian?
- ❖ **Misses many key intersections**
  - ❖ Exploitation of animals for breastmilk, eggs, and mothering is key to sexual politics
  - ❖ Dairy, leather, wildlife harassment have consequences for the global majority
  - ❖ Dairy, egg, and leather production also contribute to climate change

# What is Vegan Sociology?

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- ❖ Explicit recognition of **nonhuman subjectivity**
- ❖ And human **empathy** and **responsibility**
- ❖ Informed by **feminist** and **critical race** theories
  - ❖ And **environmental** justice

# What is Vegan Sociology?

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“Vegan sociology seeks to include nonhuman animals into the sociological imagination. We conduct sociological research and we use sociological theories to advance the cause of nonhuman liberation . We explore the intersectional oppression of speciesism, racism, sexism, and other forms of exploitation. We research vegan identity, vegan ideology, and vegan practice. But mostly, it means creating a cruelty-free world void of hierarchy, domination, and oppression for all, human animals, nonhuman animals, and earth.”

# What is Vegan Sociology?

- ❖ Animal-centered
  - ❖ Challenging human supremacy
  - ❖ Visibilizing animals
  - ❖ Effective social change
- ❖ Human-centered
  - ❖ Identity politics
  - ❖ Food culture
  - ❖ Motivations, attitudes, behaviors
  - ❖ Social movement politics



# Conclusion

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# Conclusion

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- ❖ A distinct branch of **Critical Animal Studies** that is firmly sociological and anti-speciesist
- ❖ If human **identity is performative** and the human/animal **binary is socially constructed**, it can be troubled
- ❖ Vegan sociology is a sociology for **total liberation** and a **vegan world**
  - ❖ Morally and **ethically driven**
  - ❖ Deeply **intersectional**





# Where is Vegan Sociology Going?

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- ❖ **Decentering whiteness** and the West
- ❖ Building **connections** with environmental and race/class/gender sociological collectives
- ❖ Expanding **classical theory**
- ❖ Building **new theory**
- ❖ Imagining anti-speciesist **futures**

# Veganize Your Sociology

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- ❖ **Visibilize animals**
- ❖ Consider **power relations** between humans and other animals
- ❖ Check **euphemistic** or **objectifying language** and references
- ❖ How does **animality** influence social relations?
- ❖ Recognize difficulties in obtaining **consent**
- ❖ Start an **animal group** for AIS

# ***International Association*** of ***Vegan Sociologists***



Vegansociology.com