

Corey Wrenn

Dr Corey Wrenn is a lecturer on animal rights, environmental politics and vegan sociology, and Co-director of the Centre for the Study of Social and Political Movements at the University of Kent. She was elected Chair of the American Sociological Association's Animals and Society section in 2018 and co-founded the International Association of Vegan Sociologists in 2020. She is author of *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights: Extensions in Abolitionist Theory* (2016) and other works



Your first choice is *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation* by David Nibert – why did you choose that?

David Nibert is arguably the ‘father’ of vegan sociology and this book has had the greatest influence on my writing and thinking. I had been introduced to David Nibert and his work in graduate school in the early 2000s, a time when “animals and society” was just starting to be recognised professionally by the ASA and the BSA. Until then, I had not been aware that animals were a legitimate area of study. Nibert was actually a major player in organising the Animals and Society section of the ASA in 2001, serving as its first Chair. The publication of this book a year later provided the theoretical groundwork for the new sub-field.

Animal Rights, Human Rights argues that the oppression of all species (humans included) are deeply entangled. Of course, this intersectionality argument is not new (the influence of Patricia Hill Collins is evident in this book), but the inclusion of species, at least in the social sciences, was rather novel. Nibert’s work also contributes to ecofeminist theory (which has historically been more animal-inclusive) by introducing sociology’s critique of the state. The state, along with elites and industries, he argues, have an economic interest in exploiting marginalised humans and other animals, as well as the power to do so.

He traces this process of systemic discrimination across human history, noting how the development of sexism, classism and other forms of oppression emerged with speciesist economic modes of production. For instance, sexism emerged with hunting, given its male valorisation and gendered division of labour, while classism may have emerged with domestication, given its contribution to surplus food and wealth.

Moreover, it is not just a co-emergence but a co-mingling of oppression. The oppression of humans is often intimately bound to that of other animals, both physically and symbolically. Disabled people, women, and people of colour, for instance, are frequently objectified and animalised (as are non-human animals), which facilitates considerable systemic suffering.

While all animal-based economies, in the Marxian sense, create a culture that normalises species-based inequality, capitalism has truly expanded this process. Seventy billion land animals are killed for food each year, a staggering number. For Nibert, the path to a more just society will be radical vegan socialism. So long as speciesism remains unchecked, society will be structurally and ideologically founded on inequality, thereby sustaining human oppression as well. It is a thought provoking read that encourages the reader to see other animals as communities worthy of sociological inquiry and to revisit anthropocentric interpretation of material history.

What made you choose your next selection, *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out* by Aph Ko?

The work of Aph Ko is a more contemporary take on the vegan intersectional theory. I met Aph in the early 2010s through our shared blogging work. We both wrote on feminist issues in the non-human animal rights movement and we shared space on a few blogs. Ko is an American woman of colour and was coming to the discourse fresh from a communications masters program. She was brimming with innovative ideas from critical race theory and she was one of the most well-read and critically minded early 20-somethings ever to grace the scene. Because she was not coming to the dialogue as an animal rights activist, but rather from critical race discourses, her perspectives were

a breath of fresh air and, for me, really mind-blowing.

Ko’s work draws heavily on postcolonial theory and, in an Elias Norbert type argument, identifies the category of ‘animal’ as politically potent. With colonialisation, slavery and the institutionalisation of racism came the installation (and enforcement) of the human/non-human binary. Western white men (those who essentially controlled society) are subsequently framed as human, while all others are deemed less civilised and animal-like, regardless of species. Indeed, the animalisation of people of colour is profound and perpetuates considerable state-supported violence, including oppressive (often fatal) policing and disproportionate incarceration.

Ko’s book takes this animalisation argument further, suggesting that people of colour are subject to the “witchcraft” of white supremacy which essentially colonises their minds and bodies. She draws on the metaphor of taxidermy to illustrate. First, she observes that taxidermised animals are often present in popular media to cue the audience to the racist predications of white males and white spaces (suggesting that taxidermy has symbolic meaning in a white supremacist culture). Secondly, like non-human animals, she argues, people of colour are gutted and emptied by an oppressive society, then refilled and repurposed for the dominant class, essentially robbing them of their essence and agency. Like Nibert, Ko argues that this intersectional oppression will require intersectional resistance and examines some of the reasons why anti-racist organisers and animal rights campaigners so often fail to collaborate. The historical animalisation of people of colour has understandably discouraged many from associating with the non-human animal rights movement, and this is aggravated by the predominance of white culture in animal rights campaigning.



Why did you select for your third book, *Our Children and Other Animals* by Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart?

As Ko's taxidermy analysis indicates, the field of vegan sociology has much to glean from critical media studies. Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart are specialists in this area; they have been major influencers on my own work as well as dear mentors. Their work has spanned a variety of media and channels, but these efforts have culminated in *Our Children and Other Animals*. This book examines processes of socialisation that render some animals "sensible" while pushing others beyond human sensibility. In line with Nibert, this presence or non-presence usually banks on the use value of other animals. Food animals are largely segregated from humans and are heavily commodified, so they are less easily noticed by most. Companion animals, on the other hand, often share our homes and are more likely to be granted some semblance of personhood. Non-human animals who trouble these socially constructed boundaries, such as foxes who enter human communities from the anonymous "wild" spaces to which they've been relegated, are frequently subject to human violence in an effort to police categories.

Active boundary maintenance of this kind is important in upholding this social construction but, as Cole and Stewart note,

socialisation is more insidious in reproducing speciesism. We are taught from an early age to internalise these species distinctions. Children's books, films, cartoons, toys and games create mental schemas that organise other animals according to their utility. Even "cute" animal depictions, they warn, can be problematic by infantilising and misrepresenting their real-life counterparts. The end of *Our Children* examines the possibility of disrupting the manufacture and maintenance of speciesism through vegan alternatives. Precious little sociological research had considered disrupting speciesist socialisation processes, but there is an emerging body of research on vegan childhood and family studies, which is poised to extend the utility of Cole and Stewart's early work.

Your fourth choice is *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domestecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict*, by David Nibert – why this book?

It might be tacky to choose two books from the same author, but that's just how influential I've found David's writing. Published a decade after *Animal Rights, Human Rights*, this book ambitiously revisits the many courses of human societal developments. Domestecration (a euphemism he explains is more accurately described as domestecration) is identified as a pivotal point in human/non-human relations. Here, the bodies of other animals are manipulated for economic gain, and this exploitation is linked to the commodification of other marginalised groups such as women, peasants and slaves. As societies shifted to animal-based pastoralism or animal-based agriculture, resources were rapidly depleted (animal-based foodways are far less sustainable than plant-based alternatives), necessitating raids and warfare. Plant-based societies, which tended to be more egalitarian, were especially vulnerable as the conflict approach of animal-based counterparts came to structure global social relations.

Colonialism, as examined in my other book selections, would also emerge from the expansion of domestecration. Nibert theorises that the expansion was central to colonial conquest in Scotland, Ireland, the Americas and beyond. Indeed, this book would be a major motivation for my own case study of colonialism and human-nonhuman relations in Ireland.

Your last book is *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, edited by Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan – what led you to this?

Although ecofeminism (particularly vegan ecofeminism) had been arguing for some decades that the experiences of women and other animals were deeply entangled, scholarship in the animal rights movement still had a long way to go in developing these connections.

I began teaching gender as a PhD student at Colorado State University and, suddenly, all of these very clear similarities between the social construction of gender and species were emerging as I prepared lectures and lesson plans. Around that time, I discovered this book and found it to be immensely helpful in legitimising my concerns but also expanding the realm of possibility in vegan feminist thought. The editors, Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan, are considered "mothers" of animal rights theory, but contributions appear from all of the major theorists of the era, including Joan Dunayer, Lynda Birke, Marti Kheel and Brian Luke. It was then a very groundbreaking book but, even today, remains one of the 'go to' references in critical animal and gender studies. Topics include entanglements in oppressive language, the politicisation of 'freedom of speech' politics in pornography and anti-hunt protest, masculinity and speciesism, and the connections between men's violence against women and companion animals in the home.

And for your luxury?

My dog Mishka and cat Keeley Jr. Sometimes I feel we're already stranded on a deserted island amid all these coronavirus waves that have me hiding at home!

Correction

In an early version of the Desert Island Discourse feature by Oli Williams in the last issue of *Network*, a sentence was inadvertently carried over from a previous issue and should not have appeared. Readers are asked to disregard the words "...realism. I have so far only dipped a toe or two in the world of metaRealism. But there's still time." if they feature in any downloaded copy.

Dr Wrenn's choices:

1. *Animal Rights, Human Rights*, by David Nibert (2002) Rowman and Littlefield
2. *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out*, by Aph Ko (2019) Lantern Books
3. *Our Children and Other Animals*, by Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart (2014) Ashgate
4. *Animal Oppression and Human Violence*, by David Nibert (2013) Columbia University Press
5. *Animals and Women*, edited by Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan (1996) Duke University Press