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Issue Introduction: Motherhood Among Mammals and Keeping Families Together

Amber E. George

In the early 20th century, American President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation that designated the second Sunday in May to be Mother's Day (History.com Editors, 2019). Since then, this important day has gained worldwide prominence as a day to rejoice those who give us life and love. Typically Mother's Day is reserved only for human matriarchs despite the fact that nonhuman animals demonstrate the same tireless dedication to their offspring.

Rare are the human mothers who are forced to endure the reproductive subjugation and destruction of mothering relationships that cow mothers endure for the sake of human profit. Mammalian mothers, such as humans and cows, feel a natural desire to care for and nurse their babies into adulthood. When a calf is abruptly taken away from its mother, they have been reported to bellow for days, even weeks, for their baby's return. The bond between mother and baby is deliberately broken because the farmer wants the mother's milk – the milk that was intended to nurture its calf. The overarching theme is that money cannot be made without breaking up the cow's family.

For the past 40 years, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has protested the routine separation of calves from their mothers just days after being born (PETA, 2018). With all the press talking about the heartbreaking separations taking place at the U.S.- Mexico border, PETA Latino advocates extended support to families at the Humanitarian Respite Center (HRC) by handing out vegan ice cream and milk to those being held a detention center in Texas (PETA, 2018). Some of those being held there are among the thousands of families in which migrant children were separated from their parents. Despite the executive order signed by President Donald Trump to prevent families from being separated, U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents are still removing children from their mothers and fathers (Gomez, 2019).

To draw attention to the despicable practice of separating families, PETA ran a billboard ad paralleling the experience between mother cow and calf with that of separating migrant families. The article featured in this

issue, “Defending PETA’s Dairy/Migrant Families Advert: Mother-love as an Ethical Model” by Katherine Perlo discusses how a model of mother-love among human migrants and nonhuman animals alike can serve as an important ethical foundation for equity and care. Despite the controversy surrounding PETA’s advert “Loving mothers and their children should never be separated. Please go vegan,” Perlo discusses the valuable insights that can be gleaned from exploring the plights of mammalian matriarchs whose families have been torn apart by politics and greed.

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Defending PETA's Dairy/Migrant Families Advert: Mother-love as an Ethical Model

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Abstract

PETA's recent advert for veganism compares the separation of cow and calf to the separation of migrant mothers and children at the US border. The present article argues that the quality of maternal love, existing in cows and in humans as well as in other animals, if extended beyond the individual, is a model of the unconditional, universal compassion that our culture's theoretically altruistic ethos promotes. That model is defeated by the instrumentality that exploits some beings – in the present case, dairy cows and migrants – and judges them inferior to and less worthy of well-being than others. For the past several centuries, instrumentality has been maintained by rationalism, which has worked against animals, females, the body, equality, and emotion: all the components of mother-love. The current political ideal of intersectionality is similarly undermined by the exclusion of animals from left-wing support as a result of speciesist conditioning. Predictable objections to PETA's advert, illustrated here by an attack from a vegan social activist, expose in particular the speciesism of our society, but more broadly, society's rejection of the suggested ethical model in favor of invidious classification and the worship of reason.

Keywords: veganism, cows, migrants, mother-love, rationalism, intersectionality

Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. (*Suttanipata I. 8*, quoted in Rahula, 1967)

The Advert

“Loving Mothers and Their Children Should Never Be Separated. Please Go Vegan. PETA” is the message on a billboard proposed by People for the Ethical Treatment for Animals (PETA). Accompanied by a picture of a cow licking her calf, the slogan likens the separation of dairy cows from their calves to that of migrant mothers from their children at the US border. The advert generated accusations of exploiting the latter outrage, the *Wisconsin State Farmer* writing: “An animal activist group plans to capitalize on the separation of migrant families by running billboards near the U.S.-Mexico border suggesting that separating calves from their mothers is tantamount” (Kottke, 2018).

This issue first came to my attention when a vegan attacked the advert by posting on the Vegan Actions North East Facebook page. While it is only to be expected, on the basis of experience, that speciesists (that is, nearly everyone) would be offended by this comparison of humans with animals, especially when the humans in question are so grievously abused, it is more surprising, and worrying, that an ethical vegan, who might be expected to be non-speciesist, should be outraged by it. Yet, the report from the *Wisconsin State Farmer* is more restrained, being factual except for the tendentious words quoted above, than the post of Karla Rosa Vargas (2018), a “queer, vegan Xicanista born in California to immigrant parents from Central and South America” (The Woke, 2018). Vargas has “traveled across the U.S. and overseas working in community development, conflict resolution, human rights, animal rights, sexual and domestic abuse, and mass incarceration,” and is “available to speak at conferences, festivals, and other events interested in the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, health, food, and speciesism” (The Woke, 2018). Here are the key points from her Facebook post,

Dear PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals),

My name is Karla Rosa Vargas, and I am a vegan social justice advocate, and child of immigrants from Latin America. I’m writing to you because I am very hurt by your decision to run two

billboards near the US/Mexico border with the image of a mother cow and her calf next to a message that reads “Loving Mothers and Their Children Should Never Be Separated. Please Go Vegan.”

Though I understand the connection you are trying to make, and agree that both acts (separating immigrant families and separating cow families) should be condemned, I don’t appreciate the oversimplification of such a complicated conversation, and the negative effect this will have on my work bringing veganism to Latinx communities.

I am aware that you are an animal rights organization, and not a human rights organization. So I must ask, if you don’t identify as a human rights organization, why are [you] involving yourself in this issue? There is nothing wrong with sticking to the animals. But there is something wrong with co-opting an issue that you don’t intend to do something about in order to recruit people into yours.

With what I know about your history as an organization, I think it’s safe to assume that you don’t plan to do anything about the atrocities at the border, and these billboards further indicate to me that you don’t know our history, or our present day reality. You speak about us as if our experience is the same as cows – it is NOT. However, it does come from the same colonial place....

Do you understand this country’s history in exploiting black and brown bodies for profit? Do you understand how these billboards continue that practice? To be very clear, the profit here is not financial, but ideological.

Do you understand how these families are also separated in order to grow and pick our vegan food? What are you doing for the farm workers ...?

Immigrants will not be able to drink your donated soy milk while they are trapped behind bars, or trying to assimilate into U.S. culture out of a fear and need for survival (which includes USDA recommendations to drink cow’s milk three times a day, ...). So what are you doing to liberate them, and make veganism more accessible?

... Do you understand how this hurts me, my work, and yes, the animals? Black and brown people will not be receptive to your message – do you care?

You do not represent me, or the animal rights movement. But

I can, and will, continue working towards a world in which all animals, including humans, are free.

It is important to address Vargas's arguments because they reflect a reaction against PETA's comparison which may be shared by other vegans who endorse intersectionality. However, this version of intersectionality may damage both animal rights and intersectionality itself – in the latter case, by rejecting an equal valuation of two different victims of oppression. Furthermore, the theme of motherhood endorsed by the advert is especially pertinent to this analysis because its moral context addresses a wide range of issues affecting both animals and humans.

Criticisms may be made of PETA's varied tactics, past and present. Its sexism has offended supporters; Francione has denounced it for welfarism and profiteering, writing that "it is easy to understand why PETA devotes the effort that it does to these welfare reform campaigns. It is easier to cater to a 'compassionate' donor base than to a vegan one" (Francione, 2012). Black vegan activist Aph Ko observed, "When you say 'vegan,' a lot of people tend to only think of PETA, which doesn't reflect the massive landscape of vegan activism" (Severson, 2017). In the present case, the reaction against the advert recalls the much greater outcry about PETA's earlier *Holocaust on Your Plate* exhibit, which was banned in Germany, and for which PETA eventually apologized. This was much closer in structure, message, and likely effect on the public to the dairy/migrant families advert.

In a similar, lesser-known incident reported by Karen Davis, president of United Poultry Concern, her article entitled "'The Hen is a Symbol of Motherhood for Reasons We May Have Forgotten, So Let Us Recall' was rejected by a progressive publication for implying similarities between human mothers and chicken mothers. The editors considered the comparison a slur against women" (Davis, 2018). But the rejection on feminist grounds was also a reflection of speciesism since the alleged slur consisted of presenting women as similar to animals. As with Davis's article, what is noteworthy about PETA's current advert is that it likens human to animal suffering within the context of motherhood. This is appropriate, since veganism, besides being opposed to all animal exploitation, is inextricably linked to motherhood.

Veganism

A survey of 726 vegan Australians found that “the majority turned vegan for the animals” (Hesham, 2016). In other words, they are ethical vegans. On a theoretical level, adoption of veganism solely for health or environmental reasons can be compatible with speciesism, and so cannot be defined as ethical, though it is not necessarily unethical, depending on the individual’s other views. The health vegan might be receptive to findings that a certain amount of meat, fish or dairy was beneficial for certain conditions, while the environmentalist vegan might be receptive to technofixes that could make meat or dairy production “sustainable.” An ethical vegan, even if primarily motivated by health or environmental concerns, would reject both these arguments. But veganism “for the animals,” where that is the primary motive, promotes the important analytical link between veganism and motherhood presented in PETA’s advert. To further expand upon this link, it is first necessary to outline the diverse kinds of ethical veganism.

1. Dietary veganism ... practitioners avoid other forms of animal abuse, such as leather and animal-tested products, but activities mainly center on food.
2. Abolitionist or animal-liberationist veganism ... practitioners oppose all animal abuse, but describe themselves as vegan since this is seen as an umbrella term, and is particularly significant because of representing the last step on the dietary level.
3. Intersectional veganism ... practitioners oppose all oppression. This category combines (1) and (2) but might omit “animal” from its main description, possibly using “total liberationist” instead.

PETA qualifies as representing (2), because its core principles reject all animal usage (“Animals are not ours to experiment on, eat, wear, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way”: PETA website), despite inconsistently engaging in collaborationist welfare and single-issue campaigns. While PETA is by definition an animal-rights organization, the advert bases its vegan claims on an appeal to sympathy with humans, which may be interpreted as arguing intersectionally against all oppression. This suggests that veganism is being used as an umbrella term for opposition to oppression. Such a position is justified by veganism’s linkage to motherhood, because, as will be argued, the unconditional love felt by a mother for her child, when translated beyond the individual case into an ethical principle of unconditional compassion, is opposed to all invidious distinctions of species, sex, race, class, ability, or other conditions. In the present context, it is

particularly opposed to speciesism, Richard Ryder’s term introduced in 1970 “to describe the prejudice against other species, and to draw the analogy with other prejudices like racism and sexism” (Ryder, 2013) – the analogy drawn, more immediately, by PETA in its comparison of cows with migrant mothers.

Ethical veganism depends entirely on resisting the separation of calf and cow, along with rejecting products obtained by this process. Of course, many people are motivated to go vegan by other related evils such as factory farming, premature slaughter when the cow is past her prime, slaughter of surplus males, damage to the environment, and aggravation of world hunger. The difference is that many of these evils can be avoided by other measures, whereas mass production of dairy products requires the separation of cow and calf. It is true that some farmers leave the calf with the cow for a longer time, but such a practice still implies the right of the human to use and potentially hurt the animal for human purposes. Regardless of the kindlier practice, early separation remains the favored method of producing dairy profit efficiently. Further, cows and calves may also be separated for slaughter, because without this process, no meat would be harvested. Thus, for the ethical vegan, it is necessary to reject dairy products along with meat since both are products of this separation.

PETA’s advert urges people to go vegan in order to combat the cruelty of separating mothers from children. As that act is indisputably cruel and can be rejected by adopting at least dietary (and preferably all-encompassing) veganism, the issue is most relevantly examined in the light of the byproducts of motherhood which include eggs and dairy. Vomad (2019) discusses the problems with eating the products of nonhuman motherhood by stating, “I watch my ‘feminist’ friends eating eggs and dairy, literally the products of an abused female reproductive system.” Indeed, Davis (2018) notes

The resentment of some core feminists toward any suggestion that their suffering and other experiences are comparable to those of nonhuman females. They believe that cross-species comparisons crimp their identity as unique. They do not want to share the “privilege” of oppression.

Despite these attitudes, Hesham M. found that about 80% of vegans are female. In addition, the majority of animal rights campaigners are too,

although the imbalance is not as significant as assumed (see Animal Rights and Sociology, n.d.). Spinoza sneered at “womanly compassion” for animals; early anti-vivisection campaigners were notably female. One might speculate that women, as potential mothers, are more inclined than men to care for helpless beings, while the political causes in which men seem to predominate, such as socialism, center on the more empowered adult human worker of whichever gender. The role of pregnancy and lactation in creating the mother-child bond (obviously more the case for animals than for humans) might also be emphasized. But this statistic and these historical associations and speculations do not, in either theory or practice, exclude men or non-binary persons from the category of loving parents or persons of compassion toward the helpless, including animals. Motherhood B (explained below), as an ethos of unconditional compassion, can be embodied and performed by anyone.

Veganism being therefore related to motherhood, PETA’s linkage of the specific animal and human cases portrayed in its advert is so appropriate as to be immediately apparent to all but the most confirmed speciesist. So it is strange that Vargas, as a vegan, should address PETA, about the atrocities at the U.S. border, “You speak about us as if our experience is the same as cows – it is NOT.”

However, many who have worked with bovines have discovered that their experiences during separation can seem just as intense. One might wonder whether Vargas is suggesting, along neo-Cartesian lines, that the mental experience of separation among species is different. Perhaps she believes that cows do not experience the same degree of “aversiveness.” However, there are several indicators that the behavior of the cow and the calf are sufficiently similar to that of the separated mother and child to refute such a claim. A farmer observed, concerning a cow whose calf had been taken that morning and whose cries could be heard all over the countryside, “She’ll go on like that for a day or two and then she’ll forget” (pers. comm.).

But the claim of forgetfulness is challenged by the story of a cow who hid her calf even though she was living in a sanctuary, having had other calves taken from her previously. In fact,

Dr. Temple Grandin has said that the fear memories of cattle can never be deleted. This fact was made true in Clarabelle’s case when a dairy farm worker (from where Clarabelle came) told the sanctuary that the cows remembered which vehicle came and took

their baby away shortly after birth. Their behavior would turn nervous and anxious as they looked for their missing babies. (Hogan, 2015)

Even if the cow did forget, she would have to go through the same heartbreak every year. And while most might suppose that the cow does not suffer, as the human mother does, from the anticipation of a future deprived of her child, the cow's grief, based on her own experience, is severe enough to justify PETA's analogy and arouse anger on the part of any humans whose feelings are not suppressed by speciesism. Animal farmers themselves, whose whole way of life is sustained by speciesism, display defensiveness about the suffering that they cause, showing that they are well aware of the disruption that separation can generate.

Moreover, there is one species-related factor that renders the two kinds of suffering different – but not in the way Vargas meant, because it creates a kind of suffering that is worse for the cow. That factor is the cow's ignorance. As shown by the incident described above, she is sharply aware of the factors immediately surrounding her circumstances: previous experience of removal of calves, the farmer, the van, possible hiding places. But the larger context is a mystery. The human mother, with awareness of social and political circumstances, and with a concept of right and wrong, knows she is being done an injustice, knows who is doing it and why, and knows that there might exist avenues for contesting it, however hopeless it seems at the moment. For the cow there is nothing but bewildering, overwhelming anguish. Without concepts of cause and effect, she cannot ask "Why are they doing this to me?" Thus, the case of the woman and that of the cow deprived of their respective children, although not the same, are equitable, and it is this that is denied by Vargas's words "it is NOT." What mainly differentiates the two kinds of suffering is the human attitude that encourages compassion toward one being's suffering and dismissal of another's. This is similar to the xenophobic implication that the migrant mother's attachment to her child matters less than that of a U.S. citizen.

Racial xenophobia in humans may be expressed in legal, hence rationalistic, terms. A political poll related to the family separation of non-legal citizens from their children put the following question to citizens:

As you may know, some families seeking asylum from their home country cross the U.S. border illegally and then request asylum. In an

attempt to discourage this, the Trump administration has been prosecuting the parents immediately, which means separating parents from their children. Do you support or oppose this policy? (Matthews, 2018).

A majority of Democrats and Independents opposed the policy, but “by a large, 20-point (55 percent to 35 percent) margin, Republicans supported the policy” (Matthews, 2018). This legalistic approach was adopted by Trump himself, who said: “I don't want children taken away from parents,” but “When you prosecute the parents for coming in illegally – which should happen – you have to take the children away” (BBC News, 2018). The legalism conceals the long-standing racist prejudice of some Americans toward all Latinos, whether citizens or not, as expressed by the woman who shouted at (third-generation) Nick Valencia: “Go home! ... Why don't you go back home to Mexico before you ruin this country like you ruined your own!” (Valencia, 2011).

There is a parallel with speciesism here in that its rationalist valuation of cognition, along with concepts such as “personhood” and “self-awareness,” is used to conceal the entrenched human contempt for creatures who are different and over whom humans have power. Thus, suffering, discrimination, and the related structures of oppression link the nonhuman animal and human cases.

The oppressive structures that make speciesism and xenophobia possible are rooted in rationalism. When humans want or need to kill human or other beings for food, to exploit for labor services, to steal land or goods for gain, or to destroy simply out of unwarranted fear borne of harsh and insecure living conditions, they draw upon the many forms that rationalism has taken throughout history to denigrate various identities, through (in this case, oppressively) intersectional approaches. For instance, women and animals were historically conceptually associated in order to disparage both. As Donovan observes, “From the cultural feminist viewpoint, the domination of nature, rooted in postmedieval, Western, male psychology, is the underlying cause of the mistreatment of animals as well as of the exploitation of women and the environment” (1990, p. 360). The domination of nature need not be seen as a gendered phenomenon, except insofar as its values and psychology are linked to gender stereotypes. In the modern era, women can and often do conform to the power-seeking male stereotype, whereas in the

past they, along with powerless men, were excluded from it. Federici discusses how capitalism required that male wage-laborers be reduced to their animal-like instincts and women diminished to a particularly egregious animal-like state:

In an era that was beginning to worship reason and to dissociate the human from the corporeal, animals, too, were subjected to a drastic devaluation – reduced to mere brutes, the ultimate “Other” – perennial symbol of the worst human instincts. ... the surplus of animal presences in the witches’ lives also suggests that women were at a (slippery) crossroad between men and animals, and that not only female sexuality, but femininity as such, was akin to animality. (Federici, 2014, p. 194)

Rationalism schematically classifies all identities including species, races, and nationalities into a social pyramid that privileges those at the top. Aristotle’s decision to place humans near the top of the hierarchy, just below supernatural beings, was worked out in greater detail by Linnaeus, who gave greater authority to the “natural” order of human domination. Although some have viewed Darwin’s account as conferring equality on humans and animals, and “the science of natural selection is quite distinct from the theory of the great chain,” Darwin still, according to Preece, places humans – and white humans at that – at the top (Preece, 2005, pp. 31-32). Regarding species inequality, Preece notes: “not only did Darwin use ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ with great frequency in *The Descent of Man* (1871), but he continued to do so in the second edition of the *Descent*” (1874, p. 33). Speciesism is given an even more modern turn with the anthropic principle. This theory deems humanity the very *raison d’être* of the cosmos, which exists because humans observe it – suggesting more than a “confused memory of Berkeleyan idealism” (Midgley, 2000, p. 82). Midgley remarks that this is “in no sense science,” but “wild metaphysics” (p. 83); yet it relies on the prestige of quantum mechanics for its influence.

Race, too, is subject to scientific hierarchical classification:

Beginning in the eighteenth century, at the height of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, these ideas [of race] were applied to explaining the diversity of humankind, driven in part by the experiences with new peoples during colonial exploration, the need to rationalize the inferiority of certain peoples as slavery took hold in

European colonies, and the development of a new science to assess and explain diversity in *all* species (Yudell, n.d., p. 2).

While nations have always invaded and enslaved “foreigners,” and citizenship has always been reserved as a privilege for some, in modern times we have the complex system of passports, visas, work permits, immigration quotas, and categories of “migrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” “illegal alien,” etc., designed by pen-pushers and enforced by thugs – a neatly rational design taking priority over “sentimental” considerations of love, family, and human need. Furthermore, politicians responding to protests about injustices are apt to dismiss the case sneeringly as “this emotive issue.” Josephine Donovan (1990) notes how the best-known early modern exponents of animal rights theory, Singer and Regan, both stressed that their arguments were entirely rational. Regan argued as follows:

Since all who work on behalf of the interests of animals are ... familiar with the tired charge of being “irrational,” “sentimental,” “emotional,” or worse, we can give the lie to these accusations only by making a concerted effort not to indulge our emotions or parade our sentiments. And that requires making a sustained commitment to rational inquiry (Regan, 1983, quoted in Donovan, 1990, p. 351).

Of course, rationalism can be used to counter speciesist and racist claims; it thus has its place as an implementer of our emotionally inspired goals and defender of our emotionally inspired moral values. But speaking pragmatically, when we are faced with a racist expression of gut aversion to migrants, like that aimed at Valencia, or the typical speciesist declaration “You care more for rats than for children,” rational arguments such as “Migrants are economically valuable” or “Many more effective alternatives to animal experiments exist,” are likely to be just as ineffective as any emotional appeals. When scientists demonstrate that animals suffer (either in general or from specific practices), the argument against animal cruelty is still vulnerable to being theorized away in psychological terms, simply dismissed, as in Vargas’s comment on animal experience “it is not” (the same), or contradicted by a different scientist. Then, by the rationalist ethos, we would be expected to simply ignore the cries of the animal and our apparently invalid reactions to them.

On the other side, emotions can support oppression. When that happens, we can only hope (a) that we might arouse good emotions in the

people in question, or failing that, (b) that in the course of history there will eventually come to be a majority of people who share the good emotions and the values they generate. Then reason and science can be used to find common ground between advocates of different methods to fulfill those values. But they cannot change people's minds or deep-rooted feelings, especially in the face of an inherent conflict of interests.

More to the point, apart from the question of efficacy, rational arguments may be morally irrelevant. When Ozan Varol (2017) observes that “we tend to undervalue evidence that contradicts our beliefs and overvalue evidence that confirms them,” he seems to be saying that we ought not to do this, but should give priority to the evidence, even when it goes against our strong moral feelings. However, the undervaluation of evidence might be seen as justifiable, because the emotion underlying liberationist moral preferences says: “Any other evidence is outweighed by the fact that the practice in question causes suffering and shouldn't happen.”

Against such emotions, rationalism, which potentially encompasses instrumentality and hierarchy, can do harm through its use as a tool of the powerful against the powerless, despite the façade of neutrality.

It glorifies the power of (human) cognition, thus downgrading animals, but also upholding human inequality. For example, “With the institution of a hierarchical relation between mind and body, Descartes developed the theoretical premises for the work-discipline required by the developing capitalist economy” (Federici, 2014, p. 149). Rationalism can support instrumentality, both by deeming the powerless less worthy and so eligible for exploitation, and by devising systems of control over animals and humans alike, which are celebrated for their greater efficiency. Thus the rationalism of Descartes evolves into the rationalization embodied in the automobile assembly line which Henry Ford, “had to admit ... was inspired by the overhead trolley in Chicago's meat factories” (Rehmann, 2016, p. 26).

But the main harm that rationalism can do is to undermine compassion by elevating reason at the expense of, and in opposition to, emotion. When animal liberationists appeal to emotion, their arguments are perceived as intellectually sloppy, ill-informed (with implications of low-class status), childish, and perhaps at a subconscious level in today's society, even “feminine.” In response to their arguments, organizations like PETA are repeatedly encouraged to “Think with your head, not your heart.”

So it is not reason itself, but rationalism as a world-view serving the interests of the powerful, that does the harm. It is in this context that the values of motherhood, and its strong ties to veganism, are contrasted with rationalism. Those who adopt vegan-inspired values place themselves at the mercy of official arbiters of our worth. In challenging them, it is imperative to recognize the importance of mother-love, since the mother protects her child for the child's sake, more than for her own. Mother-love can be seen as an ethical model stemming from our capacity for sympathy – thus, as a “grounded” model.

Motherhood

Motherhood can be perceived in two ways: one, as the thing itself, experienced by individuals (motherhood A); and two, as the capacity for unconditional love. This unconditional love occurs because sentient beings have an instinctual drive to secure the survival of their species. The instinctual drive then expands beyond the individual object to become a practice, a form of behavior, and an attitude toward the world (motherhood B, or mother-love). Thus, particularly in today's society, motherhood B need not be linked to the sex of the individual, while in religious culture, particularly in monasticism, an ideal of selflessness has been urged on both male and female practitioners. Motherhood B embodies the quality of unconditional compassion which can be extended to any being in need of it. It inhabits the consciousness of nearly all humans and many other animals, primarily female but also male, whether or not they have reproduced, because most have experienced a mother's, and often a father's, unconditional love.

On one side of the resulting moral conflict is motherhood B, derived from motherhood A, and on the other side is instrumentality – the need or wish to exploit – with its potential supporter, rationalism. Insofar as modern society claims to value altruism, the two sides might be briefly labeled good and evil. As implied, motherhood A, more than promoting altruism, primarily protects its own, sometimes at the great expense of other beings. If the scientists who inflict maternal deprivation experiments on animals (King, 2015), to prove what we already know, have experienced mother-love, they reserve its blessings for themselves and their species. By contrast, motherhood B does not suggest that one child is better than another, or that one child should be happy while the other suffers. It does not suggest that some creatures are just animals that humans can use as they please, while

humans are the pinnacles of creation. Nor does it suggest that some humans are just foreigners who must be kept out to protect a nation's goods, goods to which only citizens are entitled because they happen to be born here; nor does it allow the more privileged to use the supposed threat from foreigners to divert attention from their own exploitative greed.

In general, motherhood has suffered from the influence of rationalism. Human motherhood contains several traditional rationalist targets at once: femaleness, corporeality, emotion, and private care rather than exploitable public labor. Its unconditional love is sometimes treated with condescension, as something nice but reflecting comparatively low standards, compared with those of the judgmental, aspirational father. As Erich Fromm wrote,

Motherly love by its very nature is unconditional. Mother loves the newborn infant because it is her child, not because the child has fulfilled any specific condition, or lived up to any expectation. ... father has the function of teaching him, guiding him to cope with those problems with which the particular society the child has been born into confronts him.... In this development from mother-centered to father-centered attachment, and their eventual synthesis, lies the basis for mental health and achievement of maturity. (Fromm, 2008, pp. 38-40)

Present-day psychology, by contrast, assigns higher value to a parent's unconditional love as the basis of mental health through self-acceptance: "it's precisely because self-acceptance involves far more than self-esteem that I see it as crucial to our happiness and state of well-being. ... In general, similar to self-esteem, as children we're able to accept ourselves only to the degree we feel accepted by our parents" (Seltzer, 2008).

It is this unconditionality that most strongly qualifies mother-love to serve as an ethical model. Through it, we need not argue that some animals should be spared harm because they are intelligent or valuable to the ecosystem, but rather because they are sentient and alive. Animal motherhood has the additional burden of being despised, dismissed, and unapologetically exploited due to the mother being an animal and outside the moral circle, mainly on the rationalist excuse that she fails to meet the condition of human cognitive ability. If sentience and existence are conditions, they are only tautologically so, since such qualities define the

animal, human or non-human. In the human realm, we should not impoverish some while enriching others on the grounds of their different intellect, skill, or beauty, for instance. All should have comfortable lives, and there are no undeserving (or indeed deserving) poor. Unconditionality suggests that even criminals should be rehabilitated, as the criminal's mother would wish for him/her, rather than punished.

In the case of human mothers, Andrea O'Reilly explores reasons why matricentric feminism, with its support for motherhood A, has been ignored by the women's movement. Suggesting that it is due to the association of motherhood with the oppressive conditions historically imposed on mothers, she argues: "the category of mother is distinct from the category of woman, and ... many of the problems mothers face – socially, economically, politically, culturally, psychologically and so forth – are specific to women's role and identity as mothers" (O'Reilly, 2014, p. 4). Others have discussed the importance of framing the role of women as different from the role of mothers. Citing the famous attacks on motherhood by Friedan and Firestone, O'Reilly writes:

The term motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled, and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word mothering refers to women's experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred, and potentially empowering to women. The reality of patriarchal motherhood thus must be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of feminist mothering (O'Reilly, 2014, p. 7).

Within the patriarchal framework of wage-laboring and motherhood, child-bearing is confronted with a mixed view of children. Some perceive them positively as future workers, while others suggest that children are impediments to consumerism and to their parents' status as present workers. Correspondingly, mothers are perceived positively as producers of future workers and as potential workers themselves, but also negatively since their ability to work is generally impeded by children. These contradictory values are to be neatly resolved by the dawn-to-dusk institutionalization of children, which indoctrinates and prepares children for the world of work, while "freeing" their parents for participation in it. These contradictory perceptions of child-bearing and motherhood make it difficult for pregnant women and mothers to secure public work outside of the home rather than work done

privately in the home. The work performed in the capacity of private parenthood (as distinct from the waged work of childcare outside the home) is considered merely a form of absence from the workforce rather than a suitable venue for monetary compensation. And, like human motherhood with its low status as an inefficient, barely tolerated source of fodder for the wage-labor economy, the cow's motherhood is valued only in its narrowest role of reproduction and lactation for human use. While the human mother hands her child over to the nursery and school temporarily, to liberate her body for work (never for leisure time), the cow's child is taken by the farmer permanently, to liberate her body for milk production.

But radical mothers are starting to assert themselves *as mothers* in movements such as Welfare Warriors with its publication *Mother Warriors Voice*. The women within this movement and others, including Single Mothers' Self-Defence and the E15 Mothers in London, support and advocate with poor women whose children are regularly taken by the state, and fight to secure decent housing. According to Amy Westervelt, "womanists," exponents of the perspective of women of color and other marginalized women,

saw in [the negative] interpretation of motherhood yet another way in which white feminists were ignoring their experiences, oblivious to the history of eugenics and forced sterilization that played into how women of color viewed reproduction. While white feminists often painted motherhood as the ultimate apparatus of patriarchy, many activist women of color saw in motherhood not only freedom but also agency (Westervelt, 2018).

The dual relationship of women to animal rights in general – some resisting a “degrading” comparison to animals, but others forming a conspicuous proportion of the animal rights movement – gives a further dimension to the diversity of contemporary women's relationship to motherhood A, with some rejecting it on the grounds that it relegates women's status to that of “breeding cows” rather than the much higher status of “workers,” while others fight for maternal rights. But despite such ambivalence, when Trump implemented the slogan “smash the family” at the U.S. border, over 1000 women from throughout the country staged a protest at the Hart Senate Office, with 575 women getting arrested (Panetta, 2018).

The above-noted racial diversity that can be found in women’s approaches to motherhood also exists in the vegan movement. For example, Vegan cooking and eating are having a renaissance among black Americans, driven in part by movements like Black Lives Matter, documentaries like “What the Health,” and a growing cadre of people who connect personal health, animal welfare and social justice with the fight for racial equality (Severson, 2017).

Moreover, “health is often not enough of a reason for people to give up meat, she said. The challenges that come with being black in America can be. ‘When it’s bigger than you, and it’s political and it’s spiritual, that is an entrance point for people,’ she [chef and cooking teacher Jenné Claiborne] said” (ibid.).

In Mexico, also, veganism flourishes:

According to data collected by the Gourmet Show, a major Mexican food festival ..., 20 percent of Mexicans identify as vegan or vegetarian. And, according to Maria Fernanda, manager of Villalobos Vegan Inc., the majority of these people are women, representing between 60-70 percent of this vegan demographic. Alfredo Cordero, creative director of Tradex, Mexico’s leading organizer of trade and consumer events, says the change in eating habits is also driven primarily by younger consumers who are motivated by a variety of reasons such as health, environmentalism, and animal rights (Smith, 2018).

This trend carries over to the U.S., where “the number of Latinos choosing vegan food is on the rise, particularly in Southern California” (Smith, 2018). Thus, there is a strong intersectional character within these movements that embodies ethnic diversity accompanied by ideological diversity. Within the latter is resistance to white domination of the vegan cause: “Aph Ko got tired of hearing that eating vegan was something only white people did. So in 2015, she created a list of 100 black vegans for a website” (Severson, 2017). Regarding Latino veganism, “[I’m] happy to not have white hipster vegans run all the vegan stuff,” remarked one Santa Ana festival goer, Josh Scheper” (Smith, 2018).

Thus the linkages between gender, motherhood, race, and species, that emerge from the issues raised by PETA’s advert – with its visible images of cow and calf, and its understood images of migrant mother and child – show its implicit fulfillment of the leftist imperative of intersectionality and inclusion.

This imperative is undermined by four specific claims that Vargas makes. She argues (1) that an animal-rights organization which does nothing for humans has no right to invoke human suffering to call attention to the suffering of animals; (2) that the experiences of the cow and the human are significantly different; (3) that exploitation of humans is maintained by comparing them to animals; and (4) that PETA’s advert will offend people and put them off veganism instead of promoting it. All these statements serve to establish Vargas’s credentials as a loyal member of the human species, and she presumably hopes, through them, to promote veganism through the ideological back door.

In support of Vargas’s first claim that an animal-rights organization which does nothing for humans has no right to invoke human suffering to call attention to the suffering of animals, she writes, “...if you don’t identify as a human rights organization, why are you involving yourself in this issue? There is nothing wrong with sticking to the animals. But there is something wrong with co-opting an issue that you don’t intend to do something about in order to recruit people into yours. ... I think it’s safe to assume that you don’t plan to do anything about the atrocities at the border” (Vargas, 2018).

This claim suggests that PETA’s argument is legitimate when an intersectional campaigner supports it, but not when PETA does. In other words, the truth of PETA’s argument depends partly on the person or group who presents it. The underlying message is that PETA can be tolerated as long as it stays within its confines and does not presume to enter human territory.

Breeze Harper shows a similar concern with the source of an argument in her critique of a PETA exhibit that juxtaposed pictures of various atrocities against humans with the equivalent treatment of animals. Having read books by Marjorie Spiegel and Charles Patterson, she “could assume that PETA’s campaign was implying that the exploitation and torture of nonhuman animals come from the same master/oppressor ideology that created atrocities such as African slavery, Native American genocide and the Jewish Holocaust.” She objected that “Spiegel and Patterson provided

sensitive, scholarly explorations of these topics, whereas the PETA exhibit, and the ensuing controversy, were handled insensitively. The lack of sociohistorical context by PETA is perhaps what is upsetting to many racial minorities” (Harper, 2010, p. ix). While PETA’s methods for presenting arguments may be controversial, that does not invalidate the argument made by such adverts. One need not agree with everything PETA does, or its style of doing it, in order to appreciate a particular message that seems reasonable in itself. Nor does one require historical context to know that taking a child from its mother, of whatever species, or in the human case, of whatever ethnicity or nationality, is indefensibly cruel.

To see the weakness of argument (1), we might turn PETA’s dairy/migrant families comparison around, together with the attacks on it. Suppose a group campaigning against the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) put up a poster with two pictures on it: one of the cow and calf, the other of the mother and child. The poster would begin in the same way: “Loving mothers and their children should never be separated,” and would go on to urge the public: “Disband ICE.” For purposes of this analogy, two pictures would be needed, because the public would not automatically think of the cow and calf case, whereas the PETA poster only needed the cow-and-calf picture because the public was well aware of the migrant families case and would immediately recognize the reference to it.

It seems most unlikely that, in response to this hypothetical poster, vegan campaigners would object to the comparison on grounds that the anti-ICE campaigners only did things for humans and had no right to comment on animal issues. On the contrary; animal-rightists, all too accustomed to such analogies being indignantly rejected by human-causes campaigners, would be glad that the injustice done to the animals had received enough recognition to be used as an analogy. But to a speciesist, humans are dragged down by any comparison with animals. It is an arbitrary judgment designed to deter sympathy for animals by making the sympathizers feel guilty toward their own kind.

You can call such a view – endorsing anti-sexism, anti-racism, social equality, free migration, and so on – broad human left. But as long as animals have no place in it beyond the occasional nod to kindness, or attacks on class-related evils like fox-hunting, or environmental evils like poaching of endangered species, you cannot call it intersectionality. In implying support

for this broad human left position, once again Vargas aligns herself with the presumed speciesists whom she is trying to convert to veganism.

The second claim, that the suffering of humans and cows is not the same – and by implication, should not be compared – overlooks the fact that there can be differences between creatures and the details of their suffering, alongside sameness in the degree of it.

In her third claim, that the exploitation of humans is maintained by comparing them to animals, she asks PETA:

Do you understand this country's history in exploiting black and brown bodies for profit? Do you understand how these billboards continue that practice? To be very clear, the profit here is not financial, but ideological. Do you understand how these families are also separated in order to grow and pick our vegan food? What are you doing for the farm workers who will continue to fuel the vegan world you dream of? (Vargas, 2018)

Here Vargas is appealing to the typical stereotype of veganism as a privileged, expensive, white suburban fad. While veganism has indeed been commercialized and totes many expensive products on the market, any diet can be expensive and veganism need not be any more expensive than a meat diet. Moreover, far from exploiting black and brown bodies or expressing indifference to suffering humans, PETA's advert appeals to our sorrow over human suffering. In this case, humans are encouraged to think about the suffering of migrants and feel empathetic sorrow for animals when they are subjected to similar treatment. Rather than downplaying the suffering of human mothers, PETA invokes the outrage on their behalf to urge humans to give equal consideration to cow mothers. Unfortunately, the attribution of racism, classism, and xenophobia to vegans is a powerful weapon used by anti-vegans, so when a vegan evokes this weapon against PETA, she can establish herself with her target constituency as someone who is on their side. Further, Vargas's first claim represents the one-way intersectionality often used in the animal-rights movement (Vincent, 2017). Animal rightists are expected to support human causes, but campaigners for human causes are not expected to support animal rights. In some cases, human campaigners feel indignant about the animal rights movement's claims, perhaps even perceiving them as betrayals of or insults to human beings. Intersectionalist animal rights campaigners only ask for equitable, not superior, status for

animals within the broad struggle – yet most of the left rejects it.

Finally, the fourth argument offered by Vargas in her Facebook post, which will weigh most heavily with other vegans and animal-rightists is this: “Do you understand how this hurts me, my work, and yes, the animals? Black and brown people will not be receptive to your message – do you care?” For she is engaged in “bringing veganism to Latinx communities” – and no-one could object to that. But the evidence briefly offered earlier shows that black and brown people can consider new ideas and respond to illustrations of those ideas just as (some) white people do.

Nevertheless, some might argue that campaigners must be practical enough to put the animals first, ahead of ideological arguments. So vegan advocates themselves, deterred by the fear of putting people off, may refrain from mentioning the dairy/migrant families similarity to members of the public, despite the connection having immediately struck them on reading about Trump’s separation of mothers and children. However, campaigners should realize that it is because of speciesism that people are put off, and that this is why the comparison *should* be presented. Animal advocates must bring speciesism into the open in order to confront it, rather than trying to ingratiate themselves with speciesists by avoiding shocking – but all too accurate – comparisons.

Perhaps the fear of alienating people springs from a sense of weakness and hopelessness, and a belief that speciesism is so strong, dating from the dawn of humanity, that it cannot possibly be overcome. Indeed, most troublingly, this sense of weakness may reflect unconscious speciesism on campaigners’ part, due to conditioning in a speciesist society, so that they see their cause through others’ eyes as too extreme. If so, awareness of such feelings as the source of concern over offending people may help to strengthen our resolve as well as our arguments.

Summary and Conclusion

Comparisons made between human and nonhuman experiences will continue to be denounced like that of PETA’s dairy/migrant families advert, mostly out of arbitrary speciesist resentment unrelated to its actual message: that a brutal action against cows is just as brutal as a similar action against humans. PETA’s presentation of the message is emotive, as it should be. While the privileged suggest that reason should be the master of emotion, without the goals dictated by our feelings, reason would have no starting

point and nowhere to go. It is only long-entrenched speciesism that impedes the fulfillment of these natural feelings – feelings which PETA’s advert appeals to, not as part of a rhetorical trick, but as the reality in which its message is grounded.

Apart from this aspect, one of the criticisms made of the advert is that PETA, as an exclusively animal-rights group, has no right to express concern for human beings. This argument can be rejected as an invalid attempt to measure the truth of an argument by the credentials of the person putting it forward. Another objection, that the suffering of the animal and that of the human in the same situation are not the same, can be dismissed on the grounds of factual observation, in the sense that the suffering, while different in detail, is the same in intensity and in relation to the oppressive forces that cause it. The accusation of indifference to the oppression of minority groups has no substance given the advert’s invocation of the migrants’ suffering to call attention to that of the animals. The last claim, that the advert will undermine veganism through the outrage it provokes, amounts to an even clearer effort to propitiate speciesist sentiment.

But PETA’s dairy/migrant families advert has more than opposing arguments on its side. In addressing the critical violation of motherhood, this advert’s message rests on human appreciation of mother-love, which presents a universal ethical model of unconditional compassion. This model is set against its enemy: the model of exploitation, heartlessness, and hierarchical rationalist judgment which has always been part of human behavior. Whether an even more fundamental source of such behavior lies in scarcity, ignorance, or anything else, the ethical model has persisted alongside it in reformist and radical movements, including the animal rights movement. So the background to oppression need not be seen from a deterministic perspective, since a reaction to oppressive structures and conditions will always strive for agency. Sentient creatures seek their well-being and as long as that well-being is crushed and threatened, they, or others empathizing with them and acting on their behalf, will resist.

The model of mother-love politically supports all such resistance along with the intersectionality increasingly adopted by the left. However, many fractions of the left continue to be influenced by speciesist and rationalist discourse. Against the warning that, in pressing the animals’ claim to equal status in the precise terms of the PETA advert, animal rightists will offend people and defeat their cause, the model rejects false and conciliatory

arguments that keep compassion huddling indefinitely in the shadows as if in acknowledgment of its weakness.

In support of nonhuman animals, PETA's advert indicates a triple violation of mother-love's compassionate values. There is a contemporary violation of motherhood A that signals that the rights of two types of particular beings, human and animal, are null and void. Then there is a violation of the ethical model of motherhood B through the speciesism and xenophobia underlying both cases. In the reaction to this controversial comparison, there is the even greater violation of motherhood B and the ethical model it represents, in that most of the general public have denied a cow and her calf any acknowledgment of their rights. In the advert PETA challenges this violation in all three dimensions, bringing the claims of mother-love as an ethical model into the light.

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Author Biography

Katherine Perlo is the author of *Kinship and Killing. The animal in world religions* (Columbia University Press, 2009) and earlier articles in *Ecotheology, Society & Animals*, and *JCAS*. She has been an activist since 1983, recently in Ethical Voice for Animals (Edinburgh) and currently in Vegan Actions North East (Dundee).

JCAS Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal to facilitate communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American English grammar spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have no endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper

(of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation email address, and full contact details.

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