

Conceptualising animal exploitation in capitalism: Getting terminology straight

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Abstract

In the last three decades, the interchange between Marxism and critical human–animalism has gratifyingly picked up. Scholars use Marxist categories to analyse and criticise the exploitation and oppression of animals in capitalism. But the application of Marx’s original concepts often rests on fragile analogies and judgements. To conceptualise the exploitation of animals accurately and substantiate the common class struggle for humans and animals theoretically, the present article serves to get the terminology straight with respect to four interrelated topics. First, the common charge against Marx’s theory to build on a human–animal dualism is refuted by showing that he understands the relationship between humans and animals as a historical materialist, socio-practical and dialectical differentiation. Second, based on a relational understanding of the capitalist mode of production, I argue that animals are not wage labourers, slaves or super-exploited commodities. Rather, as nature in general, they are super-exploited and despotically oppressed by the capitalist class. This capital–animal relation turns animals into private property and means of production at the hands of capital. It also has significant consequences for a value theory of animal labour. Animals, third, do not create value or surplus value and they do not produce commodities. They produce products and these as well as their labour are appropriated by capital for free. Finally, fourth, I defend the transfer of the concept of alienation to animals in general. But animal alienation has to be derived from the form of social labour as in the human case and it has to include the estrangement from body and life as well due to the special form of animal exploitation in capitalism.

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A just and free society in which the reciprocal relations between humans, animals and nature are reconciled does not emerge from nothing. It has to be developed under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the unjust and unfree society in its historically recent form. In other words, capitalist society is the inevitable starting point for the struggle for an animal friendly socialism. Thus, it is necessary to analyse and theorise the relations of animal exploitation and domination as the conditions of class struggle for animal liberation as best as possible.

In this spirit, a cautious rapprochement between critical human–animalism, preoccupied with understanding the miserable state of non-human animals, and Marxism, so far mainly (not only) concerned with various relations of exploitation and domination under capitalism, has taken place over the last three decades. Human–animal scholars have drawn upon Marxist terminology, for example, when it comes to the exploitation and oppression of other animals in capitalism (see for a small selection that I deal with in the present article: Benton 1993b; Bujok 2015; Gunderson 2011; Hochschartner 2014; Hribal 2003; Macdonald 2016; Noske 1997; Painter 2016, 2017; Perlo 2002; Peterson 2013; Torres 2007). However, the debate has not yet become sufficiently substantial and some key controversial issues are still to be sorted out to develop a sustainable theoretical basis for a socialist–animalist class struggle.¹

For instance, there is the quarrel about Marx's human–animal differentiation and, on that basis, about the usefulness and suitability of his historical materialism and critical theory of capitalism to analyse animal exploitation and oppression (see, for example, Benton 1993a, 1993b; Mütterich 2004; Rosen & Wirth 2013). Scholars have been debating the accurate scientific interpretation of the integration of non-human animals into capitalism: are they wage labourers, slaves, super-exploited commodities or something else (see, for example, Derrida 2009; Ducey 2017; Hribal 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012; Macdonald 2016; Murray 2011; Painter 2016, 2017; Perlo 2002; Torres 2007)? Furthermore, controversies have evolved around the question as to whether animals produce commodities, value and surplus value (see, for example, Ferrari 2017; Hochschartner 2014; Macdonald 2016; Murray 2011; Perlo 2002) and whether they are alienated like humans (see particularly Gunderson 2011; Mütterich 2004; Noske 1997).

These debates are as much about other animals and the form of animal exploitation in capitalism as about the qualities and potentials of classical Marxism to theorise the animal question, to wage socialist–animalist class struggle on the theoretical terrain and to inform a revolutionary pro-animal praxis. Generally, the efforts by (still few) scholars to make Marxism fruitful for a critical social theory of animal exploitation and liberation are an important step forward. However, for better or for worse, some analogies and judgements drawn in the wake of this endeavour, for example, regarding the similarity of the exploitation of wage workers and animals, seem to be fragile, as I demonstrate below. There is still much to be learned from Marx's rich theoretical fundus for a critical social theory of animal exploitation and for examining the aforementioned questions and problems.

Thus, in the remainder of this article, *some* of the most virulent issues in the debate on Marxism and non-human animals are addressed. I start with a condensed evaluation of the charges against Marx's theory to be anthropocentric and speciesist.² For if this was true, it would be necessary to base critical social theory on another approach. In the next chapter, Marx's social relational understanding of capitalism is outlined briefly to prepare the following discussions of three fundamental topics of Marx's theory, which are of central importance for a social theory of animal exploitation and liberation, too. First, an understanding of the capital–animal relation as a relation of super-exploitation³ is developed in contrast to conceptualisation of animals as wage labourers, slaves and super-exploited commodities. Second, I show why animals do produce use values gratis for capital, and why they do not produce value, surplus value or commodities. Finally, I reconceptualise animal alienation in capitalism by dealing with Barbara Noske's conceptualisation of animal alienation and Ryan Gunderson's critique of it.

With these analyses, I seek to create clarity in our theoretical understanding of how Marx's historical materialism and his critique of political economy can contribute to the development of a critical social theory of animal exploitation and liberation. Furthermore, the present article argues that getting the terminology straight can help us equip better for the class struggle for human and animal liberation theoretically, and on this basis also in the politico-economic praxis. Accordingly, I shortly point out the relevance of the respective topics addressed in the following to the case of a proletarian class struggle for animal liberation at the end of each subchapter.

The human–animal dualism and Marx's dialectical human–animal differentiation

Some authors raise serious doubts about the value of using Marx's theory as an analytical basis for theorising human–animal relations (see, for example, Benton 1993a, 1993b; Mütherich 2004; Rosen & Wirth 2013). They argue that Marx' historical materialism and his critical political economy inhere a human–animal dualism that needs to be rejected. Consequently, they accuse Marx of standing in the long tradition of Western dualist thinking and being speciesist and anthropocentric. This objection against Marx's theory is quite popular both in human–animal studies and among animal liberationists. Therefore, I consider it necessary to deal with it before some other hot issues at stake between Marxism and critical human–animalism are addressed.

Most prominently, the charge of Marx's alleged human–animal dualism was made by the British professor emeritus of sociology and 'first-stage ecosocialist' (Burkett & Foster 2016: vii) Ted Benton (1993a: 23ff.). His assumption basically refers to Marx's early work, particularly *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (MECW 3: 299–348, *Paris Manuscripts* in the following). However, Benton (1993a: 35) is convinced that Marx changed his approach to the human–animal differentiation from dualism to a naturalistic but non-reductionist continuism during his life, especially after the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

In his famous essay, *Marx on Humans and Animals: Humanism or Naturalism*, Benton (1993a) considers Marx's 'central organizing concepts in the *Manuscripts* – species-being and estrangement' to be 'developed in terms of a fundamental opposition between

human and animal nature' (p. 2.). For Marx, Benton (1993a) suggests that other animals 'are characterized by a certain fixity in their mode of life' (p. 32). 'By contrast, human beings act upon the external world in a way which is free, self-conscious and socially coordinated' (Benton 1993a: 32). Following Benton's interpretation of the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx contends that humans are reduced to the condition of animals by capitalist estrangement from their species-being. Thus, Benton (1993a) assumes that Marx draws on 'an absolute and universal, not a provisional and historically transcendable opposition between the human and the animal in grounding his ethical critique of the capitalist mode of life' (p. 25f.) as a labour regime of private property. Finally, Benton (1993a: 32) argues that Marx conceives human emancipation as progressing on the basis of a steadily increasing domination of nature to the benefits of humans. They thereby fulfil their species-being and restore the proper difference between them and other animals (Benton 1993a: 26). The British sociologist (Benton 1993a) concludes that Marx's early vision of emancipation is not only 'anthropocentric' but also 'a quite fantastic species narcissism' (p. 32). In this respect, 'Marx's attempt (. . .) to provide an account of human nature in terms of a thorough-going opposition between the human and the animal is very much in line with the mainstream of modern Western philosophy' (Benton 1993a: 33).⁴

Other authors suggest that Marx even in his main oeuvre *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (MECW 35–37) makes use of a human–animal dualism. In the still young human–animal studies in Germany, Aiyana Rosen and Sven Wirth (2013: 21f.), for example, raised this accusation. According to these authors, there is a continuity in Marx's works concerning his human–animal dualism, from his early writings like the *Paris Manuscripts* to *Capital*.

The argument by Rosen and Wirth is not only similar but also different to that of Benton. In their essay *Tier_Ökonomien? Über die Rolle der Kategorie 'Arbeit' in den Grenzziehungspraxen des Mensch-Tier-Dualismus* (Rosen & Wirth 2013),⁵ the authors state that Marx 'impressively linked the question of the concept of labour with the construction of a specific and historically powerful human–animal boundary' (p. 21). They lament that Marx categorically draws an ontological line between *the* human and all other animals although he assumes a human–animal continuity and considers human history to be part of the history of nature. As a proof for their assertion, they point to a section in the first volume of *Capital* in which Marx (MECW 35) *presupposes* 'labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human' (MECW 35: 188). Furthermore, Rosen and Wirth (2013) criticise Marx for considering animals to be 'instruments of labour' (p. 22). In their present form, they are 'the result of a gradual transformation, continued through many generations, under man's superintendence, and by means of his labour' (p. 188). With reference to the *Paris Manuscripts*, they continue to argue that Marx attributes the ability to produce consciously only to humans and therefore creates a dualism of human society and nature. In this view, he ascribes 'divine traits' to the human subject of labour (Rosen & Wirth 2013: 23). Finally, Marx supposedly derives from humans' unique labour that 'solely "the human" is able to create history by means of his actions' (p. 23). Rosen and Wirth conclude that animal labour is excluded by Marx's concept of labour and thus devalued and made invisible. Hence, they propose to reshape the concept of labour to include the labour of non-human animals.

However, both Benton's and Rosen and Wirth's arguments are based on a mistaken interpretation of Marx's work. They do not grasp the dialectical, historical materialist and socio-practical differentiation between humans and animals on which Marx's early and late writings ground. In what follows, I briefly outline this differentiation to reject the allegations by the three authors.

Marx assumes that all natural beings, including humans, maintain a metabolism with the rest of nature through social praxis, that is, labour, to reproduce themselves. Humans and all other animals transform nature to get products to satisfy their needs. In his *Notes on Adolph Wagner's Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*, Marx (MECW 24) explains that humans 'begin, like every animal, by eating, drinking, etc., that is not by "finding themselves" in a relationship, but actively behaving, availing themselves of certain things of the outside world by action, and thus satisfying their needs' (p. 538).

By the reproduction of their labour processes, humans and animals do not only transform external nature but also themselves, in other words: their biological and their social capacities on one hand and their species-specific and interspecies social relations on the other. Over the course of history, the evolution and co-evolution of humans' and animals' labour processes along other natural developments have led to different socio-natural forms of species-specific labour processes, socio-natural capacities and relations. Therefore, Marx and Engels (MECW 5) state in the *German Ideology*,

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life. (p. 31)

Thus, Marx and Engels find the reason for the evolving differentiation between humans and animals and the rest of nature precisely in social species labour, that is, social praxis, and its further development over the course of time.

This is not a conceptual or a dualist ontological differentiation made by Marx and Engels. Rather, they differentiate between forms of species-specific social labour according to their manifold evolutions in praxis throughout human *and* natural (including animal) history. In the *Paris Manuscripts* as well as in *Capital*, Marx acknowledges this real historical process of differentiation as it manifests itself at a given socio-natural constellation in time and space. In this vein, he highlights at least four undeniable facts. First, non-human animals do have their own 'life activity' (MECW 3: 276) or 'instinctive forms of labour' (MECW 35: 187). They do work, and they have different historically and socially contingent species-specific life activities and according species-characters (which in the human case is species-being). Therefore, second, animals have always made and will always make their own history. Third, humans are part of nature and natural history, including the history of animals, whatever form their species-specific social history may take. This means, fourth, that the evolution of human history on one hand and of natural history in general and animals' histories in particular on the other hand always take place in mutual dependency on each other.

Thus, Marx conceptualises the human-animal relation dialectically. There is a trans-historical socio-natural unity that humans share with other animals. Humans as

‘natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective’ beings are ‘suffering, conditioned and limited’ creatures ‘like animals and plants’ (MECW 3: 336). They depend on nature and on a (rationally organised) metabolism with nature. However, within this unity, humans have developed particular socio-natural capacities and relations with each other and with nature. These have evolved through their non-fixed species-specific forms of social labour – alongside the development of other animals’ capacities and forms of being. This process has led to a qualitative difference between humans and other animals and to a relatively independent path of human development. The difference between humans and all other species is, thus, a socio-natural difference of historical praxis within a common socio-natural unity. This difference-in-unity has evolved over time and will further develop in the future in the process of co-evolution. Therefore, there is no transhistorical, absolute and universal opposition between humans and non-human animals in Marx’s thinking but a scientifically justified dialectical differentiation.

It is this historical materialist and socio-practical human–animal differentiation on which Marx builds his presentation and critique of the historical-specific capitalist form to organise social labour and the related problems of alienation and species-being. With respect to these issues, Marx differentiates between human and animal labour because he wants to point out at least three interrelated aspects.

First, he aims to show that the capitalist mode of production is not a natural unchangeable thing but the result of *human* relations. That is, capitalism is human-made. The corresponding historical-specific social relations that inhere exploitation and oppression of humans, animals and nature are not made up by nature or animals but by humans. They are implemented and maintained under the leadership of the capitalist class, which consists of humans. To point this out, it is necessary to abstract scientifically from non-human animal labour. This is what Marx does in *Capital*. He does not conceive human labour as the ‘real labour’ (p. 26) in opposition to animal labour, as Rosen and Wirth (2013) suggest. Instead, he analyses the real historical social relations which make up capitalism at its core and which do not include animals. In other words, the exclusion of animal labour from productive labour that is reflected in *Capital* is an exclusion (which goes along with a special reintegration by relations of super-exploitation, see below) made by capitalist praxis, not by Marx or his concepts. As Marx (MECW 6) notes in another context, ‘The cynicism is in the facts and not in the words which express the facts’ (p. 125).

Second, it is Marx’s intention to describe and criticise this historical-specific capitalist form of human relations to each other and to nature. It inheres a specific mode to estrange humans from their products, their process of production, from society (other humans) and from their human species-character, that is, species-being. The description and analysis of these capitalist relations do not downgrade animals or reduce humans to the condition of animals. Instead, Marx points out that capitalist social relations result in the fact that humans as a species are cut off from those capacities which they do not have in common with non-human animals. In capitalism, humans only dispose over those activities and capabilities which they share with other animals. The rest is integrated or absorbed by the capitalist social structures and put in service for the capitalist class. Furthermore, Marx’s depiction of the capitalist form of labour in *Capital* demonstrates that Marx is a thorough historical materialist. For example, the exclusion of care and reproductive labour which is mostly done by (human) women and takes place outside

the capitalist social relations is not evidence for Marx conceptual deficiency but evidence of his anti-speciesist and non-anthropocentric understanding of capitalism. For it proves that Marx only considers specific (not all) human relations and accordingly a specific form of human labour, that is, productive labour, to be capitalist. Thus, it is not human labour as such and in opposition to animal labour which Marx depicts in *Capital*. The exclusions Marx makes are not because of his conceptual preferences but due to the historical-specific form of social labour that capitalism builds on. Therefore, it is not necessary to change or expand Marx's notion of (social) labour. It is rather about time to revolutionise the real capitalist social relations that reduce social labour to productive labour done by wage labourers.

Third, Marx's purpose to reveal the human and the capitalist character of the current mode of production also serves to outline some unique potentials humans have. Given their socio-natural capacities, Engels (MECW 25: 329f.) points to the different qualities and scopes in which humans and other animals can change nature. In so doing, humans are not only able to destroy the earth, as we know it. They are also capable to overcome capitalism and reorganise social labour in a way that reconciles humans with each other, with animals and nature. This implies obviously the possibility to abolish all relations in and by which animals are treated as means of production as it has been the case throughout the history of class societies. Animals are not able to do this on their own. They may refuse to cooperate with their exploiters and oppressors. But they lack the abilities to organise themselves collectively and to consciously revolutionise the dominant form of social labour. It is noteworthy in this context that Marx did not think at all that an ontological difference between humans and animals has to be restored by establishing a communist form of social labour, as Benton (1993a: 26) suggests. Rather, humans could realise their full socio-natural potentials and, therefore, themselves as human animals for the first time in history.

To sum up, neither in his early writings nor in his late works, Marx has made use of a human-animal dualism. His concepts of labour, estrangement or species-being are not speciesist or anthropocentric. They are historical materialist and socio-practical. He acknowledges different forms of social labour by different species, which have co-evolved into different development paths over time. By way of the analysed dialectical differentiation between humans and animals, it is possible to conceptualise both human-animal unity and their qualitative difference at the same time and as unchangeable related to each other. By conceptualising capitalist social labour, Marx points out the human-made character of capitalism (the historical-specific form of human labour) and the possibility to revolutionise the capitalist organisation of social labour. He does not do so to exclude other forms of human or animal labour. Instead, Marx outlines what kind of labour is actually treated as productive labour in capitalism and what is not. The exclusion of other human as well as non-human animal labour is an outcome of capitalist social relations, not of Marx's concept of labour.

At least two important conclusions can be drawn from these insights. Since Marx's critical social theory is neither speciesist nor anthropocentric, it is therefore permissible to consider it as a theoretical basis for an analysis and a critique of animal exploitation in capitalism. Thus, animal liberationists dispose over tools to understand the historically particular conditions of socialist-animalist class struggle today, expanding its terrain and

broadening its understanding. The liberation of animals becomes a question of how to organise the social relations of labour.

A social relational understanding of capitalism

Against this background, I shortly outline the relevance of a *social relational* understanding of the capitalist mode of production for the analysis and critique of animal exploitation. A social relational concept of capitalism does not only help to theorise the capitalist mode of production, but it also allows to cope with the central problems in the Marxist–animalist discourses.

Capitalism is, systematically speaking, a political economic system based on historically specific and practical social relations. There are two social relations that are dialectically related and form the core of the capitalist mode of production independently of their historical, social and geographical particularities: the market relation and the relations of production.⁶

In the sphere of circulation, the agents sell and buy commodities, including labour force. Both social labour and its products are organised and distributed via the market. There is no social democratic process to decide what is produced, how and for whom. Commodities are determined by their double character: they have a use value and a(n exchange) value. As a use value, the commodity is an object that satisfies needs, just as any product in any form of society. The value of a commodity, on the contrary, arises in and through the market relation. As market agents buy and sell commodities, they treat the latter as equals despite the different use values. Asking what it is that makes commodities exchangeable as equivalents, Marx has analysed that they share the trans-historical feature of being products of labour.⁷ In capitalism, this common characteristic turns into the social form of the products by buying and selling them. Thus, products get a value and turn into commodities. On the market, the value of a commodity is always quantified in relation to other commodities. Their value is measured by the labour time which is socially necessary for their production. The quantified value of a commodity is the exchange value, which is the first value form (money and capital are the other ones).

Out of the manifold sales and purchases emerges a universal equivalent for all commodities, which itself is a commodity and a second form of value: money. While buyers purchase commodities to consume them, vendors sell them to get more money back than they originally spent on it. However, as Marx (MECW 35: 176) indicates, it is not possible to systematically increase the value in the hands of sellers in the sphere of circulation. To find out where the surplus value comes from, he therefore turns to the relations of production.

In the sphere of production, capitalists who own the means of production and wage labourers who own nothing but their labour power get together. Both capitalists and wage labourers are formally politically free. There is no direct political domination of one over the other as, for example, in feudalism. However, the proletarians are forced to sell their labour power to the capitalists on the market to get the commodities necessary to reproduce both their labour power and themselves. Once sold, the capitalists can dispose over the consumption of the labour power in the sphere of production.

This is of particular importance because the labour power of the wage workers is the only commodity which can create new value during its consumption. When wage labourers produce new commodities, they do not only reproduce the value spent by the capitalists on labour power (expressed in wages) and means of production, but they also produce what Marx calls a surplus value, which is appropriated by capital. To realise the surplus value that is objectified in the produced commodities, the capitalists have to sell the commodities on the market. Thus, the process of making a plus with the invested money is mediated through the production of surplus value. Marx calls this whole process the valorisation of value or capital. The capitalists, the class that disposes over the means of production, pursues this process of capital accumulation.

In short, the process of capital accumulation can neither be reduced to the sphere of production (with its hierarchical and exploitative relations between capital and labour) nor to the sphere of circulation (where agents formally relate to each other as equals). Without market relations as the dominant organiser of social labour and distributor of the social product, there is no (exchange) value, money or capital. Without the capitalist relations of production, labour power does not turn into a commodity, commodity production (as the dominant form of production) and value creation do not take place. For capital to circulate and accumulate, both the production of surplus value bearing commodities *and* the realisation of this value on the market are necessary as the process of capitalist production as a whole.

One central implication of this is that capitalists and workers are not merely formally equal agents on the market but also related to one another as exploiters and exploited. Thus, the relation between capital and labour comprises both the market relation and the relations of production. But what role-play animals in this dialectical interplay of relations?

Neither wage labourers nor slaves or super-exploited commodities: the capital–animal relation

The short answer is: none. But the correct answer is, obviously, more complex. And the social relational understanding of capitalism can help us to understand and conceptualise how animals are integrated into capitalist social formations, how their exploitation works and to whose interest. Until now, within critical animalist discourses, there are several approaches to this endeavour which oscillate between three ideal-typical solutions.⁸

The first camp gathers around the idea that animals are wage labourers and that they actually ‘are part of the working class’ (Hribal 2003: 435, 2012: 2). As its leading exponent Jason Hribal (2012) prominently argues,

First, animals played an indispensable role in the development of capitalism. [. . .] Second, their indispensable role was that of laborers. Animals worked on the farms, in the factories, and in the cities. They, as much as humans, built the modern world. Third, through the process of the aforementioned revolutions [in the era of mass enclosure and the destruction of the commons; C.S.] and through their indispensable labor, animals became part of the working class. (p. 2f.)⁹

A second group of scholars considers animals to be exploited as slaves, that they perform slave labour (Ducey 2017: 1f.; Macdonald 2016: 29; Murray 2011: 95ff., 103;

Painter 2016: 332, 2017: 233, 236, 239). French philosopher Jacques Derrida (2009), for example, writes that non-human animals are 'enslaved instrument[s] of work' (p. 12).

A third approach stems mainly from the US-based 'social anarchist' Bob Torres (2007: 3), who argues that animals are neither wage workers nor slaves. Instead, Torres (2007) writes,

[W]hile animals have traditionally occupied a historical role in the development and maintenance of industrial and agricultural capital that looks a bit like outright slavery and a bit like wage slavery, it may be useful to be a bit more specific about how we conceptualize the role of animals within capital, rather than relying on the working class designation or the simple designation of slavery. As neither exactly like human slaves or exactly like human wage laborers, animals occupy a different position within capitalism: they are superexploited living commodities. (p. 39)

In fact, all these ideas shed light on one specific element of the relation of exploitation animals have in capitalism. However, they are not sufficient to conceptualise it.

As many of these writers point out, it is obvious that the relation between capital and animals and between capital and labour are not identical. Most importantly, animals do not sell their labour power on the market. They do not receive a wage. In addition, they are not 'free' individuals politically speaking. Correspondingly, animals are at the complete disposal of the capitalists as beings. The facts that animals normally work longer days and under worse conditions than human wage workers are only some of the consequences. To capital, they are furthermore means of labour, which means that they work and are being worked on.

Hribal's characterisation of animals as working class lacks a socio-economic analytical framework according to which he defines what the working class is. His definition is based on rude historical parallels between animals and workers. Indeed, animals have worked throughout their history, they have done indispensable work for capitalists and contributed to the production of capitalism in various ways, as Hribal (2003: 437–444) argues. In this general sense, they are labourers. But these features alone do not make them a part of the working class. Assigning them this attribute means giving up the very content of what wage labour means in capitalism as defined in the section above: being politically free (not subjected to direct political domination) and economically free (not owning means of production and selling one's own labour power as a commodity). Aside from the socio-economic determination of the working class, animals are also not part of the proletariat in the sense of political agency. They do have the abilities to interrupt their exploitation, as Jason Hribal (2010) has shown. But they are unable to organise collectively to consciously resist and overthrow the capitalist mode of production. Thus, in a word, animals are not part of the working class.

As regards the 'animals as slaves' thesis, slaves and animals do have in common that they are politically unfree and appropriated as means of production. In *Grundrisse*, Marx (MECW 28) writes, 'In the relation of serfdom, he [the slave; C.S.] appears as an integral element of landed property itself; he is an appurtenance of the soil, just like draught-cattle' (p. 392). He goes on to explain that,

[i]n the relation of slavery and serfdom [. . .] one part of society is treated by another as the mere inorganic and natural condition of its own reproduction. The slave [. . .] is placed along

with the other natural beings such as cattle as an inorganic condition of production, as an appendage of the soil. (p. 413)

Slaves and animals do not sell their labour power, they get no wage in return. ‘The slave did not sell his labour to the slave owner, any more than the ox sells its services to the peasant’, (p. 203) Marx (MECW 9) observes in *Wage Labour and Capital*. In *Capital*, he (MECW 35) unambiguously states, ‘The slave–owner buys his labourer as he buys his horse’ (p. 272). In addition, animals and slaves are not free – not even in the reductionist bourgeois sense of the term. Marx hence conceives human slaves and animals to be private property that allows their owner to sell them. In socio-economic terms, they are both exploited as a part of nature. This sounds quite like Derrida’s (2009) notion of the ‘enslaved instrument of work’ (p. 12).

However, there are significant differences between the slavery of humans in capitalism and the state animals are in. First, the oppressed and exploited human classes have already accomplished historically that slavery is not the dominant human class relation any more in socio-economic, political and ideological terms. They have changed from pre-capitalist to capitalist ones including the progression from slavery/serfdom to wage labour as the central form of social labour. Thus, the organisation of social labour is arranged to include humans in capitalism at least as proletarians. Principally, it is possible to integrate human slaves as wage labourers into the capital relation. But, whether slaves turn into wage labourers or not depends on shifts in the power relations between the classes, that is, on the outcome of socio-economic, political and ideological class struggles in those places where human slave labour continues to exist.

In contrast, animals in particular and nature in general cannot be integrated as wage labourers into the capitalist social relations even if class struggle would be expanded to non-humans. Other animals – in their overwhelming majority – are not able to sell their labour power to capitalists, go to work and produce commodities, receive a wage and sell it to buy commodities to satisfy their needs. Perhaps, there could even be ways to develop models to proletarianise some animals with the support of humans. However, still it would be impossible to do so with all animals. How do you proletarianise a bee or millions of cows? Long story short: The capitalist social relations are incompatible with the proletarianisation of animals even if their well-being would be included as an objective of class struggle from below.

Furthermore, it is necessary to evaluate the political agency of the oppressed and exploited in the class struggle. As mentioned above, animals are not capable of consciously organising a collective resistance to their exploitation and domination by capital or by pre-capitalist ruling classes. As a consequence, the exploitation and domination of animals differs from human slaves, who are abused as in the case of domestic, sex or prison workers (ILO 2017: 33, 39, 42), and even killed, for example in the Thai fishing industry (Dow 2019). Non-human animals, in contrast, do not only work around the clock. In most cases, they are raised to be killed on an industrialised level to be further processed into animal-based commodities. Thus, due to these differences, slavery is not the right concept to understand animal exploitation in capitalist societies.

This leaves Bob Torres’ notion of super-exploited living commodities as a potential term with explanatory power. In fact, there are good reasons to believe that this is a

fitting term to grasp the exploitation and domination of animals in capitalism. Animals are super-exploited in a double sense. First, they are completely appropriated by capitalists from their first day on earth and either they work or get worked on, for example, in vivisection, to their death or they die through the hand of a slaughterer. Second, the status quo of animals with regard to the bourgeois social relations guarantees capitalists that there are no discounts of profits in favour of animals. They work for free and the animal products are gratis for the capitalist as well. Thus, the capitalist class benefits economically from the fact that animals are not part of the capital relation and that they are not earning anything. In addition, Torres' approach seems to be obviously right because animals themselves or parts of them are even processed to components of different commodities, from the fur coat to the steak. Since animals are super-exploited beings, and since the commodity is the basic unit of capitalism, it seems plausible to call animals' super-exploited living commodities.

However, non-human animals as such are not commodities. Mostly, they, parts of them or the products of their labour are components of the use value of commodities. What transforms an animal or an animal product into a commodity is, as generally outlined above for all commodities, the expenditure of wage labour on it: raising it, milking it, experimenting on it, killing it, processing its parts and so on. Furthermore, prioritising the commodity form to conceptualise animals is not accurate since it obscures the relation which makes animals and their parts a part of the use value of a commodity. An analysis of animals' role in capitalism has to consider the actual relation between animals and capitalists, which enables the latter to make the former a part of a commodity, to understand the form of capitalist exploitation of animals. Torres does not grasp this. Therefore, Torres's concept, too, is not fully adequate.

If other animals are neither wage labourers nor slaves or super-exploited living commodities, what else are they? As Marx presents them in *Capital*, animals enter a relationship with capital as a part of nature – in the strict socio-economic sense of the term – although animals differ from the rest of organic and inorganic nature. This concerns their capacity to suffer, their interest in life and so on. Thus, the relation between capitalists and animals – the capital–animal relation – is a part of the relation of the capitalist class to nature.

Economically, it is a relation of super-exploitation compared with the exploitation of human wage labourers and even to human slaves. Their exploitation of animals as the appropriation and management of animals' social and natural lives, that is, including killing them systematically, has no limits. Capital abstracts from the inherent qualities of animals, their relative autonomy, the consequences of production and circulation for them and their own forms of reproduction (see Stache 2017: 533). Furthermore, animals do not sell their labour power or get any form of remuneration for their work. Resigning from animal exploitation or just remunerating animals in any way – which is not to say that exploitation ends with wages – would mean unnecessary subtractions from the generated profits for capital. Capitalists strive to avoid that at any cost. As a part of the capital–nature relation, the capital–animal relation is integrated into the capital relation and, thus, in the process of capitalist production as a whole.

The socio-economic purpose of the super-exploitation of animals is the same as in the relation between capital and human slaves or in general – making as much profit as

possible. It is necessary to create profits even though animals do not produce profit themselves (see next chapter). They merely contribute to the production of the commodities' use value which bear the profit. But for animal capital, they are necessary to create profits. Like nature in general, animals and their labour are 'free gifts' (MECW 37: 733) for the capitalists.

Politically, the capital–animal relation is a despotic relation. Expressed in legal terms, the very rare court decisions in the world to acknowledge particular animals (limited to higher mammals that are not farm animals!) as persons under specific circumstances are the exceptions that confirm the rule. As indicated above, animals are not politically free, not even in the formal bourgeois sense. They are not acknowledged by capital as free individuals, oppressing them with nearly all forms of open and indirect violence. Capitalists can and do appropriate animals as they please. On one hand, this is due to the above-mentioned inability of animals to organise and resist consciously as a collective. On the other hand, this specific form of oppression is possible because the exploited and oppressed humans have not yet included animals decisively into the class struggle from below. Except the organic sector which is actually a new field of accumulation, the ruling capitalist class has an objective interest in acting against any basic adjustments to the benefit of animals – even within the current relations of super-exploitation of animals since this would undoubtedly lead to subtractions from their profits.

The meaning of my proposed solution of the conflict about the roles of non-human animals in capitalism for the cause of an animalist socialism is at least twofold. On one hand, a Marxist analysis of animal exploitation in capitalism reveals its specific form which is pursued by capital (not humans), its difference to and interconnection with the capital–labour relation. The exclusion of animals from the capitalist social relations and their reintegration into the capitalist production process as a whole for super-exploitation are based on the bourgeois property relations. On the other hand, my argument demonstrates that the capital–animal relation of super-exploitation is the pivot point to fight animal exploitation, which cannot be dissolved without transforming the property relations.

A value theory of animal labour? Commodity production, value and surplus value creation

The particularity of the capital–animal relation has numerous theoretical consequences for the conceptualisation of animals in capitalism. Some of these contradict common positions of critical human–animal scholars. In the following, I address three of these contradictions which regard Marx's value theory of labour and which are closely interrelated.

A first argument is that animals are exploited and oppressed in capitalism to *produce commodities*. Torres (2007), for example, argues that animals are 'producing commodities (as in the case of milk, eggs, leather, wool, and such)' (p. 19). For Torres, there are only two paths that animals can follow in capitalism, namely, to 'labor to produce commodities or to be commodities' (Torres 2007: 66). In a similar vein, Murray (2011) argues that animals act '[a]s commodity producing commodities' (p. 97).

Second, critical human–animal scholars assume that non-human animals act as 'producers of value' (Macdonald 2016: 28). They are 'turned into simple machines for

the production of value' (p. 39), as Torres states. In the words of Jason Hribal (2012), 'the labor of other animals' injects commodities 'with their value' (p. 22).

Third, it is assumed that other animals do not only create value but also surplus value. Hribal (2012), for example, thinks that surplus value is 'being taken from both' (p. 12) humans and animals. Hochschartner (2014) suggests that both animals and wage labourers work longer than necessary for the production of the commodities that are needed for their reproduction so that they do create surplus value which capitalists can appropriate. Murray (2011: 98) and Perlo (2002: 307) basically agree with this argument. Ferrari (2017) adds that 'the ability to extract surplus value by exploiting nonhuman animals absorbs their entire life' (p. 198).

In contrast to these positions, I argue that there are necessary preconditions for being a value-creating wage labourer: first, the non-disposal of means of production. Second, one has to sell one's labour power to capitalists and to buy the commodities to reproduce oneself and one's labour power on the market. Only under these relational terms, labour is acknowledged as a part of socially necessary labour and, therefore, as value producing wage labour or 'productive labour' (MECW 35: 510) in capitalism.

The relation of animals to capital in the process of capitalist production is different. They do not privately own means of production and do not get a wage in return although they work for capital. As outlined above, they are super-exploited in production as means of production privately owned by capital. Furthermore, they are in no way agents in the market relation. They do not sell their labour power nor do they buy commodities. Thus, animal labour is neither organised by the market nor acknowledged as a part of socially necessary labour in capitalism. This implies that, even though animals often work around the clock and under full use of their bodies, they do not produce value or exchange value. For only the labour power that is bought by capitalists on the market and, thus, organised by the market, is value-creating labour.

This is not in the first place a question of species since there is also human labour which is not (acknowledged as) wage labour through purchase by the capitalists and there are human labourers who are not wage labourers. For instance, when reproductive and care work (mostly) done by women is not included in the capital circuit, that is, when it is not done for the profit of a capitalist, it is not waged and not included in the capitalist relations of production. The same is true for the labour expended by the still existing about 40 million human slaves on the planet (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2017: 5). Whether or not someone is a wage worker and whether or not labour creates value depends on the real socio-practical relations – not on the belonging to the human species.

This does not mean that slaves, women, animals or nature are not exploited socio-economically or that capitalists do not benefit from the exclusion of them from the capital relation and their reintegration by relations of super-exploitation. Rather, it means that their exploitation is different from that of wage labourers.

If non-human animals do not perform wage labour and do not create value, they cannot produce commodities. Commodities, as developed above, do not only have use values but also values or exchange values. Thus animals, like nature, produce products, that is, use values. Nature, for example, has produced fossil fuels. Animals produce flesh,

milk, eggs and so on. Capitalists appropriate their bodies and lives as well as the products of their labour 'gratis' (MECW 35: 599). The animal products only get a value or exchange value and, therefore, are transformed into commodities if wage labourers expand labour for their production as well.

It follows that animals certainly do not create surplus value, even if they work side by side with wage labourers and under, in parts, worse conditions and even if they are exploited as long as they live, which is the case for most of the cows, hens or pigs in capitalist societies.

To sum up, all three hypotheses brought forward by critical human–animal scholars are based on the same misunderstanding of the value theory of labour and, relatedly, the fundamental relations of capitalism. Animals cannot be theoretically considered as wage labourers. Animals do work, they produce products or provide services for free and they are super-exploited by the capitalist class. However, they do not produce commodities, create value or surplus value. It can be concluded that these concepts of Marx's labour theory of value cannot be transferred to animals.

However, as it is the case of nature in general, the specific role of animals implicates at least two strategic insights. First, to tackle animal exploitation, it is necessary to deal with the wage labourers of animal capitalists since they are the ones who produce surplus value, that is, the elixir of life of animal capital. On the other hand, without proposing to price animal life or animal labour power, immediate measures that lead to subtractions from animal capitalists' profits in the name of animal liberation could be successful means in conflict with the animal industries.

Human alienation – animal alienation

So far, it has been possible to create clarity regarding the anti-speciesist character of Marx's theory, the integration of animals into capitalism via their relation to capital and the role of animals in the labour theory of value. In this last section, a last Marxian concept is examined with respect to animals: alienation.

At the end of the 1980s, Dutch anthropologist Barbara Noske (1997) introduced the then avant-gardist notion of 'animal alienation' or 'de-animalization' (p. 18) in the first edition of her famous book *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*. Since this publication, her work has found wide distribution among human–animal scholars.¹⁰

To the best of my knowledge, Noske (1997: 12–21) was the first to transfer Marx's early concept of alienation from the *Paris Manuscripts* to animals. She argues that animals, as Marx did first with respect to wage labourers, are alienated from their product, from productive activity and from their species-being, which includes the estrangement from nature, and from each other in capitalism. She associates alienation with the Taylorist organisation of the capitalist labour process and the related dull, monotonous and inhuman labour conditions (Noske 1997: 12, 14).

Her thesis was not endorsed by all critical human–animal scholars. A minority raised some objections. Among them, Ryan Gunderson (2011) brings forward two considerable arguments. First, he states that 'Marx's theory of human alienation presupposes that humanity's "essence" is to create and perfect social life through free, reflective, and creative labour, but capitalism has stunted and distorted this opportunity' (p. 266). In other

words, Gunderson thinks that the human species-character, his species-being, is the condition for being alienated. Gunderson (2011) goes on writing that

a coherent theory of animal alienation [. . .] would surely have to go back to early domestication and artificial selection and would need to take into account the natural behaviors of the species in question in comparison to its behaviors in human-mediated conditions. p. 266)

Since this is not done by Noske, Gunderson (2011) concludes that the concept cannot 'be carried over into the nonhuman animal realm without significant theoretical and practical problems' (p. 266).

I find some aspects in Noske's and Gunderson's interpretations worthy of consideration. But I do not agree with the baselines of their arguments. In both cases, the problems seem to revolve around the understanding and explanation of alienation in Marx's writings.

For Marx, the historically specific form of social labour is the reason for alienation. The capitalist relations of production and distribution cause the estrangement of the wage labourers because they include that the workers produce but the product is no longer theirs. They are executing the labour process but they do not decide what or how to produce, the capitalists do. In addition, they do not have any say in the distribution of the product. The wage labourers do produce in groups (in parts in large groups) and capitalists distribute the products. But both processes are not carried out as a human or social collective of producers according to their specific human species' social-natural capacities (species-being). Finally, by being proletarianised, they are stripped of their relation to nature. Noske, in contrast, attributes alienation mainly to the Taylorist organisation of and the labour process itself, that is, a specific form of capitalist production process and without taking distribution into account. Furthermore, she emphasises inhuman working conditions as one indicating factor for alienated labour. Of course, the workers at the assembly lines in slaughterhouses, for example, experience alienation in the most brutal fashion. However, Marx's understanding of alienation is suitable for wage labourers in all forms of capitalist production. Even the most creative designers as wage labourers, for example, are alienated in Marx's sense even though they might not suffer in the same way as the precarious low-waged migrant who works in an abattoir under the direct command of his foreman repeating the same tedious operation all the day.

Gunderson, on the other hand, tends to overstate the connection between alienation and the human species-being. It is indisputable that Marx analyses the estrangement of human labourers to show the special socio-natural potentials which humans have as a species. The concept of alienation thus relates to the problem that capitalism prevents humans from living up to *their* potentials. Nevertheless, the concept of alienation does not necessarily have to be reduced to the limitation of human potentials. Cows, pigs and hens are indeed not capable of building a post-capitalist society. But, according to all we know by now, they could live according to their manifold socio-natural capacities, interests and sensations – their particular species-characters – if it was not for their exploitation and domination. Their species-characters are related to humans' species-being (see above), and they would have lived up to it, if they had been allowed to do so. But in capitalism, both animals and humans are denied to realise themselves. Thus, the critical

content of the term alienation can be extended, under the condition that the alienation of the specific human species-being is not disputed. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here that animal alienation is not self-imposed as it is the case of humans. Their interactions with nature and with each other is distorted because of the capitalist relations between humans.

Gunderson's second objection is, in my view, less plausible than his first one. He is right in that animals' species-characters was distorted, corrupted and negated in pre-capitalist social formations as well. The same is true for humans' species-being. But this is not a compelling argument against a conceptualisation of a capitalist animal alienation. Alienation, today, takes place within the modern bourgeois society and is the result of its economic law of motion. Thus, from a historical materialist standpoint, it is persuasive to analyse the historically particular form of alienation as a capitalist one.

To sum up, while Noske does not argue thoroughly why and how animals are alienated in capitalism, Gunderson's reservations can be refuted on the basis of historical materialism and a dialectical differentiation between animals and humans regarding the difference in their species-characters. To cope with the reductionist explanation that my critique of Noske's conceptualisation revealed, I consider it useful to go back to Marx's original conceptualisation of alienation. As I argued above, within the processes of production of capital as a whole, alienation of the human wage labourers emerges due to the capitalist relations of production and distribution.

In my point of view, the capitalist form of social labour leads to the alienation of animals, too, for it includes the despotic relation of super-exploitation between capital and animals described above. In this relation, animals cannot dispose over the products of their labour and their production or distribution processes. They cannot live up to their species-characters and they are not able to shape their relation to nature or to each other. Up to this point, the concept transfer from human wage labourer to animals is possible and valid.

However, first, Noske actually describes aspects of animal alienation that cannot be conceptualised with the classical Marxist term. In contrast to wage labourers, animals do not even have their bodies and their lives at their disposal. This reflects a particularity of the capital–animal relation and goes beyond what Marx outlines for humans. Thus, the notion of animal alienation has to include these two additional forms of estrangement as well instead of subsuming them under the existing categories.

The central aspect of the present discussion of animal alienation which points beyond the revised and deepened conceptual explanation and acknowledgement of animal alienation is the reinforcement of the imperative to overthrow all relations in which man *and* animal are debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable beings. If animal alienation exists and has its fundament in capitalist form of social labour, there is another reason why human–animalist needs to act in concert with the broader socialist movement.

Conclusion

The analysis in the present article leads to the following theoretical conclusions: neither Marx's original theory nor his concept of labour is speciesist or anthropocentric. On the contrary, they are historical materialist and anti-speciesist. Based on a

relational and dialectical understanding of capitalism, animals are exploited within the capitalist mode of production because of the historically specific capital–animal relation. This is a despotic relationship of super-exploitation by which animals are integrated into capitalism. Thus, animals are neither wage labourers nor slaves or super-exploited living commodities. They are treated as private property freely given to capitalists by nature and being deployed as means of production. As super-exploited beings, animals do labour and produce products for free to the benefit of capital. But they do not produce value, commodities or surplus value. Finally, animals are alienated similarly to human wage labourers. They share the four forms of estrangement described by Marx although the difference in their species-characters between humans and other animals have to be taken into account. Furthermore, animals are estranged from their bodies and lives due to the historical-specific form in which they are integrated relationally in the capitalist mode of production.

Based on these findings, the mutual theoretical rapprochement of Marxism and critical human–animalism as well as the common class struggle against the capitalist class can be further deepened. The capital–animal relation indicates the leading actor and profiteer of today’s animal exploitation and thus the opponent in the animalist socialist struggle. The analysis of human and animal alienation on one hand and capital–animal and capital–labour relation on the other shows that labourers and animal liberationists are exploited differently, but in one process of capitalist production as a whole. Therefore, they need to fight side by side. The determination of animals with respect to value production gives hints to how to make the life of the animal industries difficult immediately, generating subtractions of profits in the name of animals. The capital–animal relation and animal alienation, though, bring to the surface the strategic goal to revolutionise capitalist social labour. Literally, there is a world to win – not only for humans.

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Notes

1. I limit the discussion in the present article to four aspects of the Marxist animalist debate which, in my opinion, are central issues and have been contested until now. Obviously, there are other topics which could have been included as well, for example, the role of ethics in a critical social theory of animal exploitation and liberation or the understanding and application of Marx’s concept of fetishism by animalist scholars.
2. Speciesism is defined as ‘the practice of treating members of one species as morally more important than members of other species’ and also as ‘the belief that this practice is justified’ (Duignan 2013) in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. I rather consider speciesism to be a bourgeois ideology affirmatively describing, justifying and obscuring animal exploitation by referring to non-human animal species as minor value. It has its roots in the antagonistic capitalist social relations. Furthermore, the term designates an ideological form of the cultural mode of life (in the Gramscian sense) in bourgeois society.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, anthropocentrism is the (philosophical) viewpoint ‘that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world’ (Boslaugh 2016). Conceptually, I would adjust this definition in a similar way as in the case of speciesism.

3. The term super-exploitation is used in the first instance in a Marxist analytical sense here which has to be differentiated from a primarily moral or political one. However, it is evident that denoting a relation as one of super-exploitation has moral and political connotations and implications. Here, super-exploitation means that the exploitation of animals by capital exceeds the average exploitation of wage labourers by capital. For a more detailed explanation, see the section on the capital–animal relation of the present article.
4. For a more detailed presentation of Benton's argument and a more extensive refutation of Benton's thesis, see Stache 2018.
5. Animal Economies? About the category of 'labour' in the boundary drawing practices of the human–animal dualism. All English translations of German texts in the present article are made by the author.
6. The architectonics of the three volumes of Marx's main work *Capital* reflect these two main relations of the capitalist mode of production and their interrelation. The first volume of *Capital* is about the process of production of capital, the second volume is about the process of circulation of capital and the third is about their dialectical interrelations (see Wolf 2013).
7. Marx (MECW 35: 48) immediately states that the common feature of commodities is that they are the product of *human* labour. At this point of the present article, I skip this aspect, which is of particular importance for the analysis of animals in capitalism, because it is going to be discussed later and because the focus is on the relational presentation by Marx.
8. In fact, the majority of pro-animal authors mixes up the different concepts so that animals are wage labourers, slaves and/or commodities at the same time. Thus, there are hybrid positions on the issue. German sociologist Melanie Bujok (2015: 137, 145), for example, is convinced that animals are in slavery like labour relations characterised by capitalist as well as pre-capitalist features. Even Jason Hribal (2003) describes animals as part of the working class but also as 'unwaged labor' (p. 436) without drawing any theoretical conclusion from this observation. A completely different view on the topic is John Sanbonmatsu's. Sanbonmatsu (2015: 52) conceptualises the exploitation of animals as one between humans as a class and animals as a class of their own. Why I refute these positions, becomes evident by the discussion above as well.
9. Similar to the work of Perlo (2002: 306f.), Hribal's hypothesis is not that clear as it seems at first glance. Hribal (2007: 102, 106, 2012: 3) is explicit on this point, defining animals as a part of the working class with reference to the relation they have with their owners. But in his review of the discussion about his hypothesis, Hribal (2012) repeats his position, first formulated in the original essay in 2003, that the '*unpaid* labor of animals has been the foundation upon which human labor has been built' (p. 24, emphasis C.S.). As in his original essay, he does not see any problem in the fact that animals are unpaid workers regarding their definition of being part of the working class. Nevertheless, I take up Hribal's original idea here to elaborate on the understanding of what animals are in capitalism.
10. See, to name a few, Cochrane (2010: 106f.), Gunderson (2011: 265f.), Hribal (2012: 21), Painter (2016: 333f.), Perlo (2002: 307), Peterson (2013: 164ff.), Petrus (2015: 39f.), Torres (2007: 39ff.).

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