Contesting Moral Capital in Campaigns Against Animal Liberation

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This article addresses a countermovement to the animal liberation movement and its campaigns against vivisection, factory farming, and recreational hunting in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. As moderate welfarists, pragmatic animal liberationists (Singer 1975), and radical abolitionists who advocate animal rights, animal protectionists campaign for animals. The countermovement defends acts that animal protectionists decry. Meanwhile, sociologists accord little study to interplay between the movements (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). In Buechler’s and Cylke’s collection of 34 papers on social movements (1997), only one paper focused on countermovements, describing the connection between social movement and countermovement as “a continuous dialect of social change” (Mottl, 1980). Although extensive writings exist on the main campaigns of the animal liberation movement, little scholarly material exists on the defenses mounted by the countermovement. This article examines key elements of a values war, a struggle over moral capital waged by animal protectionists and their countermovement opponents.

According to Klandermans (1990, pp. 122-123), social movement scholars would provide better explanations of the way social movement organizations mobilize resources, use opportunities, and exert influence if they paid more attention to the multi-organizational field of movements. For Klandermans, the multi-organizational field consists of an alliance system (supporters) and a conflict system (opponents, as in countermovement organizations).

Countermovement tactics listed by Klandermans (1990) include (a) criminalizing social movements and their activities; (b) undermining their organizational strength; and (c) using repression, threats, anti-propaganda, and litigation. Crucial to the backlash against animal liberation, the tactics are also effective in “undermining the moral and political bases of [a] social movement organization” (p. 128). Singer (1975) has argued that the animal movement stands or falls on its capacity to occupy “the moral high ground.”
In mobilizing support for their respective causes both the animal liberation movement and its corresponding countermovements are involved in moral entrepreneurial activities designed to build moral capital. In their quest for respectability, both sides engage in the "social construction of moral meanings" (Douglas, 1970). Animal movement activists seek to stigmatize and mark as deviant what many people perceive as normal, legitimate, mainstream activities such as raising animals for food, hunting wild animals for pleasure or profit, and conducting experiments in the interests of scientific research on animals kept in laboratory environments. In doing so, the campaigners confront not only the vested interests behind these enterprises—the scientific/medical fraternity, agribusiness, and the hunting and gun lobbies—but also the individual who sees nothing wrong with using nonhuman animals to provide for human needs and wants.

The animal movement must transform the moral meanings associated with the worst of these practices, redefining them as socially irresponsible. When animal activists challenge any of the uses to which animals are put, however, vested interests—individuals who profit from animal exploitation or animal industries and lobbyists—attempt to protect their investments by mobilizing public sentiment. The appearance of adversaries represents both a sign of success and an important test of the original movement's effectiveness (Dowie, 1995). In short, a countermovement signals that the social movement is doing its job. For example, Putting People First (PPF) was formed in 1991, when its founder objected to the claims made by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) at her daughter’s primary school in Washington, D.C. The founder, Marquardt, has attacked both animal rights and environmentalists as “cultists” and the Humane Society as “a radical animal rights cult … a front for a neo-pagan cult that is attacking science, health, and reason” (Deal, 1993, pp. 83-84). According to Deal, Marquardt is the rising star of the Wise Use movement, a lobbyist for businesses that use animals for food, research, recreation, clothing, and entertainment. She claims, however, to speak for “the average American who drinks milk and eats meat; benefits from medical research; wears leather, wool, and fur; hunts and fishes; owns a pet; goes to zoos, circuses, and rodeos; and who benefits from the wise and rational use of the earth’s resources” (Deal, 1993, p. 83).

Mottl (1980) defines a countermovement as “a response to the social change advocated by an initial movement [that] mobilizes human, symbolic, and material resources to block institutional social change or to revert to a previous status quo.” This article argues that, in the controversy over animal rights, moral resources or moral capital are more pertinent. Contemporary initial movements against which
countermovements have been mobilized include gay rights, animal rights, gun control, and cigarette smoking (Meyer et al., 1996). In analyzing movement-countermovement conflicts as well as cross-national studies of movements for social change and their countermovements, this article also addresses organized opposition to animal liberation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

**Moral Capital in the Animal Liberation Movement**

Goode (1992) has claimed that widely enjoyed practices such as those listed by PPF severely restrict the animal movement's capacity to accumulate “moral capital” or “moral resources.” Animal activists sometimes speak of a reservoir of goodwill or people’s level of compassion for animals. Activists believe they can draw on a considerable reserve of moral capital and goodwill in their anti-cruelty campaigns. A prominent critic of animal rights suggests that a remarkable result of the animal movement has been the extension of a “shadow citizenship” to animals in modern democracies, where they have become part of “the web of public concern” (Scruton, 1996, pp. 103-104). Animal welfare organizations like the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals epitomize the respectability of the widespread concern for animals that is manifested in anti-cruelty campaigns especially in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia.

Yet according to Goode (1992), the moral boundaries drawn by the movement are hopelessly out of kilter with those of the general public. Therefore, many of the animal movement’s appeals for public support lack moral capital, in that their arguments do not resonate with what most people believe and with how most people behave. Thus, many individuals who dislike the vanity of fur will welcome the utility of leather. An abhorrence of the Draize test—observing the effects on the eyes of rabbits in order to test the safety of cosmetics—need not translate into a rejection of animal experiments that might lead to improved human health and happiness. Public disquiet over the worst excesses of factory farming is not likely to change the dietary habits of a lifetime, although it may lead to the elimination of such cruelties as debeaking, cattle branding, and tail-docking.

As animal protection leaders are quick to point out, the movement can cite many real reforms that refute Goode’s thesis: the worldwide decline in fur sales; the ban on animal testing by several international cosmetics firms; the ban in many jurisdictions on use of wild animals by circuses; opposition to the confinement of dolphins and other sea creatures in aquaria; and the mass support for the protection
of charismatic wildlife and endangered species (1992, pp. 461-463). Most of these issues were, at one time, considered beyond the reach of the animal movement or, arguably, constituted appeals that did not resonate with what many people consider reasonable. Some of our most pleasant pastimes—eating a ham sandwich, visiting the zoo or McDonald's; going fishing or duck shooting; displaying a leather sofa; and even keeping pets—have become less innocent than they used to be. Attitudes toward animals have changed profoundly.

In liberal democracies, a strengthened public goodwill toward animals has compelled opponents of animal rights to adopt novel tactics in their campaigns to defend the use of animals in science, agriculture, and hunting. In a recent study of the protagonists involved in the controversy over laboratory animals, Groves argued that "whereas animal rights activists rationalize their emotions for animals, pro-researchers emotionalize their rationality" (1997, p. 14). The present study confirms this analysis with respect to the pro-hunting, pro-meat eating, and the pro-research lobbies. And for the ordinary citizen who is subjected to the tactics of both movement and countermovement, Wright's experience rings true in that both reason and emotion play a part in the way people think about animals (1990).

Although Wright (1990) finds the stridency in many animal rights campaigns obnoxious, he acknowledges the moral strength of animal liberationist defence of animals as sentient beings (Singer, 1975). Wright expresses what many thinking individuals seem to be saying at the end of the 20th century: "I still eat meat, wear a leather belt, and support the use of animals in important scientific research. But not without a certain amount of cognitive dissonance" (1990, p. 20). These sensibilities, changing attitudes, and practices underpin a "web of public concern" for animals (Scruton, 1996). Together with the steadily increasing popularity of vegetarianism among young people in the West, this concern constitutes the growing reserve of moral capital from which the animal movement can draw. Although Goode's thesis to the contrary is unconvincing, groups opposing animal liberation understand that no animal protection strategy will succeed if it is perceived by the public as detrimental to human interests and well being. A movement, that is, will not attract moral capital if the majority of its supporters are thought to come from the ranks of misanthropic animal lovers. These are individuals who love their pets more than babies, to paraphrase a common charge against the antivivisectionists in the last century (French, 1975; Buettinger, 1993), and these sentiments are recycled in contemporary countermovement rhetoric.

In its critique of instrumentalism and its challenge to anthropocentric thinking (Jasper & Nelkin, 1992), the animal movement has been condemned as inimical to
human welfare, particularly when it campaigns against animal experimentation or the rights of indigenous peoples to hunt for food and fur. Even when animal protection social movement organizations extend their frames to include human welfare—such as the Australian Association for Humane Research's emphasis on human health and well-being in its anti-vivisection campaign in Australia—they attract criticism from those who want to put animals in their place (Leahy, 1991; Wolfe, 1993).

Apart from the critics of the philosophy of animal rights, formidable organized groups and countermovements seek to subvert animal liberation as a political movement. According to Meyer and Staggenborg (1996, p. 1635), countermovements emerge under three conditions: (a) when the movement shows signs of success; (b) when the movement's goals threaten vested interests; and (c) when political allies are available to the countermovement. Each of these preconditions was found to exist in the recent movements against animal liberation.

**Staging Counteroffensives**

"In an activist society like ours, the only way to defeat a social movement is with another social movement" (Ron Arnold, in Tokar, 1995, p. 151).

Just as the emancipation of blacks and women has led to a backlash, social movements in defence of nature and animals have spawned virulent countermovements that defend anthropocentrism and speciesism in the simple "common sense" language of the common man: "There is nothing greater on Earth than a human being. A turtle can't build a ship or read a blueprint, can he?" (Harding, 1993, p. 45-47). PPF is one of many countermovements that has been mobilized to protect vested interests in government, the medical-scientific fraternity, and in the corporate-commercial sector. Staging counter-offensives in the United States are the National Cattlemen's Association; the Safari Club International; the Texas Wildlife Association; the National Rifle Association (NRA); the Cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance Association; the American Medical Association (AMA); and universities such as Stanford and Berkeley. It is from this cluster that countermovements are formed to challenge the claims of animal protectionists in their specific campaigns against factory farming, animal experimentation, and recreational hunting.

Although countermovements take different forms in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, they represent essentially the same interests. In the
campaign against blood sports, the NRA in the United States, the British Field Sports Society (BFSS) in the United Kingdom, and the Sporting Shooters’ Association in Australia represent the main countermovement organizations. The pro-hunting lobby, although well organized and resourced in all three countries, pales in insignificance compared to the wealth and power of the medical-scientific establishment and the commercial interests of agribusiness. All three countermovements have adopted a strategy of survivalist anthropocentrism to appeal to the widest possible constituency.

Countermovements launched by the medical and scientific fraternities represent a response to the animal movement’s success in threatening the continued use of animals in scientific/medical experiments. The pro-research lobby frames its counterattack against animal rights as literally a matter of life and death. Countermovements in defence of the ancient pastimes of hunting and meat eating are framed as a values war in which the “salt of the earth” is pitted against “animal rights-vegetarian activists from hell” (Vidal, 1975). These countermovements use a survivalist rhetoric similar to that of the scientists when they emphasize quality-of-life issues in hunting and standard-of-living arguments in eating meat. Unlike the more focussed, human welfare campaigns of the pro-research movement, the countermovements in defence of hunting and agribusiness are designed to contest broader social values such as freedom of choice, which allow their claimmakers to appeal to a wider constituency.

Suffering for Science

Organized opposition to the animal movement is especially strong in the biomedical fraternity and is motivated by all three criteria identified by Meyer and Staggenborg (1996): a) The animal liberation movement has succeeded in building moral capital; b) the animal liberation movement threatens research interests; and c) the countermovement is appealing to elites. Not surprisingly, therefore, the backlash against animal rights has been well organized and widespread within the pro-research fraternity. Arluke and Groves (1998) have identified categories of oppositional groups as grassroots, patient-originated, advocacy, and professional. They include Putting People First, Americans for Medical Progress, the incurably ill for Animal Research (iiFAR), the National Association for Biomedical Research, the AMA, and the National Institute on Mental Health (NIMH).

In a detailed study of how medical scientists seek to build moral respectability in their profession, Arluke et al. argued that they primarily attempt to construct a

Society and Animals

Volume 7, Number 1
“moral identity that is superior to their opponents” (1998, p. 145). This strategy is evident in some of the countermovement campaigns. Adams (1991) claims that during the 1980s, animal rights, more than any other grass roots movement in the United States, attracted the best financed, most concerted and consistent opposition to its objectives. Adams identified the AMA, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the giant pharmaceutical company, Procter & Gamble, as the movement’s main adversaries in the United States. According to the AMA’s own action plan outlined in a brochure obtained by Adams, the AMA sought to deplete the animal movement’s moral capital by demonizing it as anti-scientific, violent, and threatening to the public’s right of free choice. The brochure went on to list a number of actions that could be taken against the animal rights movement, the objective of which Adams (1991) suggested, was to shift public opinion, which has tended to favor the animal movement.

In 1989, the medical fraternity resolved to go on the offensive by denouncing animal protectionists when NIMH claimed “the movement’s philosophy is based on a degradation of human nature” (Adams, 1991, p. 130). The NIMH went on to list a dozen tactics for members to use to replace the passive “bunker mentality” that had been the medical fraternity’s response to attack by “the animal people.” Procter & Gamble took a similar offensive stance when it sought the cooperation of other large corporations—Gillette, Eastman Kodak, Monsanto, Colgate Palmolive, Lever Brothers, IBM, and Johnson & Johnson to name a few. These would form an industry coalition on animal testing that would counter to the animal rights movement by improved public relations and lobbying efforts in support of animal testing.

The threat to big business posed by the animal movement can be gauged in a proposal dated June 9, 1990, which set out a detailed 3-year plan that was estimated to cost the bigger companies somewhere between $35 and $250 million (Adams, 1991, p. 310). Adams pointed out that “the big three” adversaries had strikingly similar plans to attack the animal rights movement and, most importantly, sought to unite against the threat to their continued use of animal tests. The coalition was meant to work with existing pro-research organizations such as the Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR) and the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR), although its proposed budget underwrote a vastly more ambitious plan of attack. According to Animals’ Agenda, the FBR compiled a 290-page resource kit that advertises videorecordings, publications, and other materials that can be used to promote vivisection and attack the animal rights movement (Church, 1997, p.31).
Groves (1995) suggested that social movement theorists have generally neglected the role of emotions in the lives of activists, although elsewhere (1997), he noted that pro-research activists rely on mothers with sick children, patient groups, and so on to promote their causes. In their promotional literature, he suggests, animals and children are often represented as objects of compassion (Groves, 1997, p. 163). In borrowing some of the tactics of animal protection campaigns such as the image of suffering innocents, pro-research bodies like the NABR and the AMA have recently used the politics of emotion to convince the public that animal experimentation saves the lives of children and HIV/AIDS sufferers.

Images of innocent children make for good television and print copy as Newsweek demonstrated with its cover story (McCabe, 1988), “The Battle over Animal Rights: A Question of Suffering versus Science.” This story featured a young mother, Jane McCabe, and her 9-year-old daughter, Clair, who was suffering from cystic fibrosis. McCabe’s personal story makes a strong, emotional appeal for animal research. According to her mother, Clair would not be alive without pancreatic enzymes from pigs and antibiotics tested on rats. Clair’s mother responded to the animal rights bumper sticker—“Lab animals never have a nice day”—by asking “Why is a laboratory rat’s fate more poignant than that of an incurably ill child?” (McCabe, 1988).

One of the United States’ senior medical officers, Goodwin, a U.S. DHHS official claiming to speak for 100 percent of his scientist colleagues, insisted that “there is no middle ground as to whether or not animals should be used biomedical research. Either it is ethical or it is unethical” (1992, p. 10). For him, the issue is not whether, but how animals should be used in research. He encourages scientists to get out of the bunker and defend their work, for example, by insisting that the role of animals be explicitly mentioned in public relations communications. He goes on in his speech to recommend the involvement of patient groups: “[T]hey speak with an authenticity and passion that is hard to rival” (1992, p. 10). Living, speaking symbols of medical progress are powerful tools exploited by research bodies in the form of patient testimonials.

Jasper and Nelkin (1992, p. 133) noted that the FBR uses a similar style of propaganda to their animal rights opponents when it puts patients on display alongside Hollywood celebrities and famous transplant surgeons as testimony to the achievements of animal research. The most dramatic example of patient testimonials comes from iiFAR, which is funded by the AMA. Individuals in wheelchairs or on life-support systems make compelling proselytes for their
medical saviors. Nonetheless, animal protectionists have retaliated with the claim that the funding for animal experimentation could be better spent on alternatives to animal research and on preventive measures. And it does seem that an organization whose several thousand members are “incurably ill” is hardly a good advertisement for either animal research or medical progress.

It is perhaps for this reason that some pro-research groups are changing their tactics, including the use of vilification, which was a feature of the vivisection controversy in the 19th century (Munro, in press). According to Vanderford (1989), vilification in the abortion debate served a number of functions. It identified abortionists as “them” and anti-abortionists as “us”; it cast abortionists in an exclusively negative light, attributing diabolical motives to them and magnifying them as a powerful enemy capable of doing great evil. In the vivisection debate, both sides have attempted to delegitimize each other by one or more of these means. Not surprisingly, research on the controversy indicates a gap in communications between animal rights campaigners and scientists as well as a strongly “us versus them” mentality in the two fraternities (Munro, 1993; Paul, 1995). Americans for Medical Progress, the self-proclaimed key watchdog over the animal rights agenda, has sought to discredit America’s leading moderate animal welfare organization—the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)—by linking it with the more radical agenda of PETA. Sinister reports and images of “animal libbers” on the wrong side of the law make for good media stories—even in far-off Australia.

**Raids and Devices**


This is how the Police Commissioner in the Australian state of Victoria describes animal liberationists in defending covert police operations against community groups like the Coalition Against Duck Shooting (CADS) during the 1990s. In October of 1997, *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne revealed that a secret police surveillance unit had infiltrated a number of community groups they considered to be a threat to public order. Many of the people targeted were environmentalists and animal rights campaigners including Peter Singer and Laurie Levy, Director of CADS. One man on the police's list of suspected deviants was an anti-war campaigner who had been awarded the Order of Australia for services to peace! Another had been singled out 10 years earlier for having won the right as a school student, in 1987, to obtain documents on animal experimentation in Victoria.
In *The Age* article (1997, p. 19), the Police Commissioner chose to invoke the exploits of the notorious Animal Liberation Front (ALF) to support his case for spying on animal welfare groups. He pointed out that ALF is an anarchist-based organization in the United Kingdom and claimed that their Australian disciples had been active in 96 criminal incidents (from 1982 to 1996) in Melbourne, attacking butcher shops, furriers, and clothing outlets. The Commissioner noted that ALF members were subsequently charged, and the bomb-making equipment was seized.

Although ALF engages in unlawful activity in Australia and elsewhere, it is a mistake to confuse Animal Liberation branches in Australia with the infamous ALF which does not share the non-violent philosophy of the mainstream animal liberation movement. Yet, police surveillance of animal protectionists in Australia and elsewhere and the surreptitious labeling of movement leaders as “terrorist extremists,” blurs this distinction in the public mind. Countermovements are thus provided with an additional weapon to devalue the mainstream animal movement’s moral currency.

**The Defense of Meat: McLibel and the “Veggie Libel Laws”**

Two recent events on both sides of the Atlantic highlight the vulnerabilities of the meat industry to the slogan “Meat is Murder!” Needless to say, anyone who openly attempts to reveal the dark side of “Hamburger Heaven” runs up against the unpleasant prospect of having to deal with the ubiquitous Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP), which powerful interests are increasingly using against their critics. Beder argues that “companies and organizations taking this legal action are not doing so in order to win compensation, but rather their aim is to harass, intimidate, and distract their opponents” (1997, p. 64).

This seems to be the motivation in the case against Morris and Steel in the trial involving McDonald’s versus the vegetarian activists known as the McLibel Two. As the activists were virtually penniless, McDonald’s could not hope to gain monetary compensation for the alleged libel. In fact, some of the McLibel Two’s colleagues had agreed to apologize to the company for distributing an offending leaflet in order to avoid litigation and possible financial ruin. Morris and Steel, the “animal rights vegetarian activists from Hell,” were the exception in that they were prepared to go to court to defend their right to free speech. The McLibel trial turned out to be the longest trial of its kind in British history. Although McDonald’s prevailed, some of the activists’ most important charges were upheld (Vidal, 1997).
A similar U.S. case revealed the depth of the beef industry’s sensitivity to unfavorable commentary. The Texas Cattlemen’s Association instituted a multimillion dollar lawsuit against television personality Oprah Winfrey who told an April 1996 worldwide television audience that stories of mad cow disease had turned her off hamburger. The Cattlemen invoked food disparagement laws. A Texas jury, however, found for the right to free speech, particularly on matters involving public health, and acquitted Winfrey.

The two cases demonstrate that vested interests in the animal food production industry do not take kindly to their critics. The cases also suggest that opponents of animal protectionism who are unable to gain the high moral ground will resort to legal processes to silence their critics. McDonald’s and The Texas Cattlemen were unlucky in that their respective targets had the backing or resources to fight back. In most cases, however, SLAPPs are the equivalent of a secular fatwa, allowing corporations to deter potential critics from speaking out in public.

SLAPPs put would-be activists on notice that they too could end up in court, Beder (1997) points out, transforming a public issue into a private, legal adjudication. The corporation has the advantage of wealth and power, and the defendant has the most to lose. Yet litigation can be counterproductive for the claimants as well. Writing in *The Ecologist*, Lilliston & Cummins (1997, p. 219) observed that the food industry in the United States plans to block food safety activists by introducing food slander laws in 50 states but is reluctant to do so. The action could give the activists their day in court and result in unfavorable publicity.

Beder notes that, in the United States, environmental and animal rights controversies are among the most common issues in which SLAPPs have been used (1997, p. 66). Interests that have the most to lose in animal rights campaigns against factory farming include the National Farmer’s Union (NFU) in the United Kingdom and its equivalents in Australia and the United States. Johnson pointed out that the NFU did not welcome the introduction of Welfare Codes designed to give farm animals a number of basic protections after Harrison exposed the worst excesses of factory farms in her 1994 book, *Animal Machines*. He noted that it took the British government 25 years to act on the recommendation to ban veal crates, in a country where the veal industry is a fairly soft target (Johnson, 1991, p. 206). More formidable adversaries for the animal protection lobby are the bacon and egg producers in the United Kingdom. As an illustration of their power, Johnson describes the failure of Compassion in World Farming and other animal protection organizations to place advertisements in the media on the plight of battery hens.
Agribusiness is much greater than the farming lobby and, indeed, most of the animal protectionists I have interviewed are not critical of individual, small-scale farmers at all. What concerns the animal liberation movement is the increasing intensification of farming in which the family farmer becomes a victim no less than the animals. Agribusiness incorporates a large number of interests and therefore potential adversaries of the animal movement who include feed suppliers, machinery and farm equipment manufacturers, agricultural chemical suppliers, fertilizer suppliers, and farm laborers, as well as the many scientists and research assistants employed in the agri-technology industry. To this incomplete list can be added the increasing number of researchers in bio-technology and genetic engineering industries who may be counted on to support any group that will make the world safe for science.

Finally, Lilliston et al. (1997, p. 220) highlighted the movement-countermovement dialectic. They point out that food safety advocacy and the natural/organic food movement are on the rise, and so too are agribusiness lobby groups that seek to weaken federal regulations to the advantage of food multinationals.

**Hunting Rights: The Countryside Movement and Wise Use**

“Eat British lamb. 50,000 foxes can’t be wrong” (Marcher’s placard).

Although there are many pro-hunting organizations in the United Kingdom, the United States, and, to a lesser extent, in Australia, two movements against animal liberation campaigns to ban blood sports typify the countermovement against animal rights: Countryside Movement in the United Kingdom and the Wise Use movement in the United States. Wise Use has a longer history of opposition to animal rights and environmentalism.

In England, the defense of traditional values has led to the formation of the Countryside Alliance, an amalgamation of the BFSS, founded in 1930, and the recently formed Country Business Group and the Countryside Movement.

Soon after the Labour Party was elected in 1997, a Countryside rally was held in Trafalgar Square to persuade the new government that its inclination to ban hunting with hounds was ill-conceived. One media report claimed the rally attracted 100,000 hunt supporters and was the largest mass meeting since Dunkirk. The keynote address at the rally by Baroness Anne Mallalieu captured what was at stake for the hunting fraternity. In her impassioned speech to the converted, the Baroness described hunting as “our music, it is our poetry, it is our art, it is our pleasure . . . . It is our whole way of life.” In short, the hunting issue in the United
Kingdom has become a weapon in the values war over the ancient pastimes of the English countryside.

What is striking about this call to arms is the frequent reference to lifestyle, livelihood, and life itself that, according to the BFSS, depends on the death of wild animals for its survival: “Our communities and way of life [are being] destroyed… it is about the… people who live in the countryside … people who know, love, and live among animals … those who hunt have been their guardians and protectors over generations” (BFSS, 1997).

Anti-hunting and anti-factory farming campaigners tend to believe that these traditional guardians of farm animals have been responsible for the Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis, while, as protectors of wild animals, their conservationist claims rest on the dubious notion of culling wildlife. On the other hand, their conservationist credentials have to be acknowledged in that they are primarily interested in conserving what they see as rural values and what remains of the traditional country pastimes like hunting.

Mocking the Turtle

While the Countryside Movement is a recent development, the Wise Use movement in the United States has followed a much more aggressive anti-environmental agenda since the 1980s. The term “wise use of resources,” first used in 1907 by the first head of the U.S. Forestry Service, has come to represent the interests of a coalition of industrial, agricultural, and conservative political groups. They seek to protect private property and private enterprise from excessive interference by green groups. Wise Use is supported by a multitude of special interests—anglers, off-road vehicle enthusiasts, real estate developers, and hunters and trappers, as well as industry groups such as chemical and pesticide manufacturers and the timber industry. Arnold and Gottlieb founded Wise Use in 1988 and coordinate the movement’s activities from their “educational foundation” at the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise. Populist in tone, the movement claims to occupy the middle ground between the extreme environmentalism of “eco-freaks” and the most rapacious forms of capitalism. According to Beder (1997, p. 56), however, the Wise Use agenda, as the name of its propaganda wing at the educational foundation implies, has a corporate agenda making the ostensibly grassroots movement a front for big business. It is a coalition of conservative interests with no formal structure. Its cohesion derives from its common enemy, the environmental and animal rights movements.
Arnold, who had previously worked at the Sierra Club before it became “environmental,” has adapted the tactics of the greens and grassroots activists in promoting Wise Use’s anti-environmentalist agenda by the use of direct mail. This medium provides an effective form of fundraising as well as a tool for managing emotions in controversial public issues. Arnold, however, tends to target individuals, anonymous and otherwise, rather than issues. The Australian Wise Users do this with stickers on their four-wheel vehicles that urge supporters to “Fertilize the forest and bury a Greenie!” In Australia and the United Kingdom, environmentalists and animal liberationists tend to be portrayed as “ferals,” “dole bludgers,” and “no-hopers” by their critics, whereas in the United States, Wise Users paint them as “elitist” and “overeducated” city people (Beder, 1997, p. 51). In both cases, the stereotyped group is one that is easy to vilify or hate.

Arnold believes that “fear, hate, and revenge are the oldest tricks in the direct mail handbook” (Tokar, 1995) and has argued that there is no room for compromise with greenies and animal libbers, that they must be dismantled and replaced (Beder, 1997, p. 51). A Wise Use tactic is to highlight the most extreme elements of these groups to mobilize rural people, whose interests are threatened by animal rights, anti-hunting, and gun control campaigns (Beder, 1997, p. 51). Beder argues that the Wise Use movement uses an anti-city rhetoric to appeal to the anti-intellectual tradition of the American West where “common sense” is valued more than book learning and where farmers and hunters know how to manage the land better than any city-based critic or professional (1997, p. 52). The same rhetoric was used by the pro-hunting lobby during the emergence of the Countryside Movement in the United Kingdom when Edelstein, hunting correspondent for The Times, wrote,

We get homilies via the media, not least from adulterous politicians telling us to be kinder to our fellow creatures, diktats from distant bureaucrats, whose secure employment and overheated offices it is our privilege to underwrite, of how we should organize our lives, care for our livestock and make our livelihoods. We get hoodlums, of both sexes, informed, it seems, by hatred and ignorance in equal parts, trying to destroy our ancient pastimes (1995, p. 17).

Here we see, in summary form, the main grievances of the movement as a counter to animal rights claims about factory farming and fox hunting. It is a classic framing of the city versus country divide, as a war over values in which the politics of emotion feature prominently in countermovement tactics.
Like the Countryside Movement, Wise Use is unashamedly anthropocentric and places great emphasis on property rights and issues of livelihood: “Which would you rather have, a family wage or a kangaroo rat?” (Wise Use campaign proposition). Like the Countrysiders, Wise Users claim to be better stewards of the land than their green critics. On the other hand, the Countryside Movement is more genuinely environmental in that it wants to preserve the “remaining glories of the English countryside” (Waldegrave, 1998, p. 36). Wise Use movement is still fueled by the notion that it is America’s “Manifest Destiny” to conquer what still remains of the nation’s wilderness.

**Putting the Case**

In the age of downsizing and job loss however, the Wise Use movement in the United States, with its appeal to grassroots constituencies, has succeeded in scuttling environmentalism. Like the Countryside Movement in the United Kingdom, Wise Use puts its case in dramatic, survivalist rhetoric as in a recent campaign drive among various U.S. corporations: “Like it or not, we are involved in a war with the preservationists and animal rights radicals. To win this war we must gain control of the hearts and minds of the public” (Tokar, 1995). Tokar describes the increasing militancy of sections of the Wise Use movement and its success in using the mass media to publicize anti-environmental initiatives.

In the Countryside Movement, there are also signs that the ideological war is heating up. On March 1, 1998, the second Countryside March took place in London to warn the British government that they should “listen to the countryside.” *Country Life’s* March 5, 1998, cover story (Mitchell, 1998) on the march claimed that 300,000 took part in the good-natured event but suggested that the mood in the countryside could turn sour if rural people continued to be ignored. The accompanying editorial noted that the most memorable placard of the day conveyed this message with the words, “Civil Rights not Civil War,” an ominous warning of the rural uprising to come.

Rural people in England perceive several threats to the countryside—farmers being forced off the land, ramblers, more houses on greenfield sites, the ban on beef on the bone, and, of course, hunting. Prime Minister Blair admitted that hunting was a major concern of the Countryside Movement, but added that he could not believe support for the private member’s bill to ban hunting with hounds could be equated with the end of the countryside (*Country Life*, 26 February, 1998).
By framing its agenda in terms of freedom of choice, the Countryside Movement and Wise Use have effectively used survivalist rhetoric to contest the moral capital of movements that attempt to defend the rights of nature. Thus, no one should underestimate the power of elite groups involved in making the English countryside safe for hunters. Nor should anyone underestimate the appeal to ordinary people of anti-liberationists who—in vivisection, factory farming, and recreational hunting—put the interests of humans ahead of those of nonhuman animals.

Conclusion

This article draws attention to the neglect of countermovements by social movement scholars who focus on “initial” movements rather than on those emerging in response or in opposition to the original social movement. In taking up Meyer & Staggenborg’s (1996) call for more cross-national studies of movement-countermovement conflicts, I have attempted to show that the backlash against animal liberation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia is characterized by the common rhetorical strategy of survivalist anthropocentrism. I have argued that the moral capital accrued in animal liberation campaigns has been vigorously contested by various countermovements in the case study countries.

Where the pro-research lobby argues its case as a life and death matter, the meat and agriculture industries and sport hunting fraternity use standard of living and quality-of-life arguments in defense of their activities. All three countercampaigns, in defending the use of animals for science, food, and sport, seek to undermine the animal movement’s moral capital by a variety of tactics that include the use of emotion, condemnation, and vilification. These countercampaigns display images of suffering children and the incurably ill in the pro-research campaign. Mass rallies by hunting enthusiasts condemn the condemners by vilifying animal activists as “terrorists” and “extremists”, while McWrits are increasingly used by agribusiness to silence the claims by opponents of the meat industry that “Meat is Murder”.

The three countermovements discussed in this paper have assumed the characteristics of a moral crusade and have adopted some of the moralizing tactics borrowed from the animal activist toolkit. These tactics include the use of emotion, negative labeling, atrocity stories, protest rallies, and direct mail, which typically features images of suffering innocents ranging from sick children to long-suffering farmers and country folk. Such tactics are used by both sides in the animal rights controversy and, indeed, in all three case-study countries. Clearly, these tactics are
not the exclusive monopoly of any single country or countermovement. The politics of emotion ranges from the rhetoric of vilification to the mass protest rally. Even so, the paper has identified cross-national differences. The United States and American companies use litigation. The United Kingdom, where grassroots activism is common, uses participation in mass protest rallies. The politics of emotion is evident in Australia, as demonstrated by the attacks of the elites and police authorities against animal rights “extremists” and “terrorists”

Emotion, as Groves (1995; 1997) has argued, is an important, but neglected, component of social movement activism. Mottl (1980) notes how countermovements seek to mobilize human, symbolic, and material resources against their opponents but fail to include moral resources such as feelings, emotions, and sensibilities. This article has shown that moral resources or moral capital—in the form of people’s compassion for animals—is contested by opponents of animal liberation who appeal to the anthropocentric inclinations of ordinary people to put their interests before those of other animals. By “mocking the turtle,” they hope to deplete the animal movement’s moral capital in ways that are, in the main, predicated on emotional rather than rational, economic, or legal grounds. For in the final analysis, the competition for moral resources is not about winning minds, it’s about winning hearts.

Note

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