

Having Our Dogs and Eating Them Too: Why Animals Are a Social Issue

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Abstract:

Until recently, the study of people's relationships and interactions with other (nonhuman) animals has received scant attention from the social sciences. The preceding articles in this issue illustrate some of the important insights such studies can bring to the field. Animals, by their nature, occupy an intermediate boundary zone between the world of human subjects and the world of insensate objects or "things." This ambiguity allows us to exploit most of them with relative impunity, while simultaneously endowing some of them with the status of quasi-human social partners or even kin. It also confronts us with fundamental questions about what it means to be "human" and how far, if at all, our moral responsibilities should extend beyond the taxonomic limits of our species. Our efforts to reconcile these competing and opposing perspectives have generated extraordinary inconsistencies in attitudes and behavior toward animals: inconsistencies that pose significant challenges to current understandings of human psychology, sociology, and morality.

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