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CONTESTING ANIMAL RIGHTS ON THE INTERNET

Discourse Analysis of the Social Construction of Argument

DAVINA SWAN

JOHN C. McCARTHY

University College Cork, Ireland

This article examines contributions to argument on Internet sites concerned with animal rights. As this is part of a project examining how “rights” and “cases” are constructed and contested through argument, the texts considered are selected from sites that take an explicit stance for or against animal rights. Our reading of these texts highlights the strategies used by pro- and anti-animal-rights contributors. The pro-animal-rights side used two main argumentative strategies. The first constructed animal use as a moral problem by ascribing rights to animals in discourses of suffering, oppression, and depravity. The second constructed animal rights as mutually reinforcing of human welfare by presenting animal use as needless for, and dangerous to, human health. The anti-animal-rights side reconstructed animal use as necessary for reasons including human health, thereby situating animal interests and human welfare as incompatible, and make animal rights rather than animal use the moral problem. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: *animal rights; argument; argumentative strategy; dialogue; social construction; action-oriented; discourse*

The field of argumentation study is generally considered to include three main objectives (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1997). One objective is to prescribe argumentative practices so that people argue well. Some consider arguing well to be the capacity to reach agreement with an interlocutor; others consider it to involve the forming of a true or valid argument. A second objective is descriptive, that is, to understand real-life arguments. The third goal is evaluational or critical—to test and critique the soundness of arguments. In this article, we intend to examine one particular approach to

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argumentation and to argue that its normative and rationalist modeling of argument backgrounds features of everyday argumentation that may hinder our understanding of real-life arguments.

Van Eemeren and colleagues have developed a theory of argumentation based on speech act theory and whose main purpose is "the interpretation and evaluation of actual cases of argumentation in light of normative standards for argumentative conduct" (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, p. 480). Their model, used to analyze and reconstruct argumentative phenomena, is

an analytic description of what argumentative discourse would be like if it were solely and optimally aimed at resolving a difference of opinion. It specifies the resolution process, its stages and the various types of speech act instrumental in each particular stage (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, p. 480).

The model also makes a number of assumptions about people's orientations and goals in an argumentative interaction. It assumes that people are oriented toward resolving a difference of opinion and are committed to certain standards of reasonableness. Moreover, within the argumentative engagement, the arguer is seen to adapt rhetorical moves to comply with the audience's good sense and preferences. Such a model backgrounds the emotional, the sensual and ethical, and the perverse and playful aspects of argumentation. We only have to think of a flirtatious encounter to know that argument is often aimed at sustaining disagreement to playfully provoke an emotional engagement. Or think of a time when we were angry at someone and wanted to give them a hard time: Rather than adapting the argument to comply with the other's "good sense and preferences," we deliberately picked inflammatory, rhetorical strategies designed to seriously annoy them. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999) recognized such facets of argumentation, but their model remains premised upon rationalism, so nonrational goals are backgrounded as fallacies and obstacles to rational resolution of a difference of opinion.

Related to this is Van Eemeren and colleagues' view of argument as embedded within other sorts of interactional business, that is, "the analysis of any particular argument . . . is relativized, placed within some broader discourse context that guides the analysis by defining what is at stake" (Van Eemeren et al., 1997, pp. 218-219). The theory thus shows recognition of the situatedness of argument. This is evident also in their view that argument is adapted to the particular audience's good sense and preferences. However, this situatedness seems to be limited to their discussion procedure of four stages of locating and resolving a difference of opinion. They define argument as

a kind of interaction that arises in the context of other interactional business, when something said, implied, or otherwise conveyed makes plain

that there is a difference of opinion between two parties . . . the important, defining feature of argument is that it occurs as a means of addressing—and attempting to resolve a difference of opinion by means of exploring the relative justification for competing standpoints. . . . Argumentation is seen within the pragma-dialectical view as a discourse device for the regulation of discourse itself. It falls within the class of devices known as “repair mechanisms” and its function is to locate and resolve differences of opinion. (Van Eemeren et al., 1997, p. 218)

Thus, their view of context seems rather restrictive and, as Antaki (1994) noted, rather bloodless. It backgrounds the variety of interactional business in which argument may be embedded, such as the creation of the erotic, the provocative, the humorous, and the ideological. The model's boundaries limit its applicability to the riotous variability of everyday argumentation. Antaki (1994) pointed out that it is the job of the analyst to find occasions when the model's conditions are met that would allow the interpretation of an utterance as argument. But with the model's rationalist normativeness, only one kind of argument is likely to be open to explication—an intellectual discussion aiming to test the reasonableness of a standpoint.

Further, even if one accepted the model to be intended prescriptively, a position discussed by Antaki (1994), one may still question its wisdom. Its goal of teaching people how to advance argument toward a reasonable resolution would attempt to tutor people to be cooperative and academic and to operate beyond the emotional and the sensual. Its designation of deviations from the model as fallacies and obstacles means that it discourages any other interactional business outside of resolving a difference of opinion. Although we would not argue with the importance of being reasonable and cooperative, it is plausible to question the possibility and the desirability of its hegemony. Surely even a prescriptive model needs to take account of the sensual and the emotional. In general, our difficulty with Van Eemeren's approach is its constant foregrounding of the reasonable in argument, with the consequence that the emotional or playful aspects seem to be rendered illegitimate. In the analysis that follows, our aim is to demonstrate the interplay of the rational and the emotional in real-life arguments. Furthermore, as rationality is a discursive practice that evolves through time, as Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997) have acknowledged, a normative and prescriptive model may be too static and restrictive for guidance as well as analysis.

Also, argumentation takes place in various different media—face-to-face, by text message, via e-mail, over the telephone—that have different contextual constraints on the interaction. For example, argumentation in a face-to-face encounter is clearly sequenced. However, within a medium such as the Internet, there are no sequential constraints, and one has the ability to revise or update contributions. In a face-to-face interaction, any repair must be done publicly. Van

Eemeren et al.'s (1997; Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999) normative model is not only limited, then, in terms of its applicability in interpreting everyday conversational argument but also and more significantly with regard to other media such as the Internet. With regard to this medium, it would be difficult to analyze texts in terms of their stage model and to locate deviations and fallacies when there are no sequential constraints and the context is potentially so broad that it is difficult to be sure of precisely to whom and what the text is orienting. Furthermore, the audience in such cases are surfing the Internet. As such, they have considerable organizational control over texts and so structure their own debate. Therefore, an analysis of texts in terms of their four stages of reasonable discussion may not be greatly relevant.

Given the limitations of such modeling of argumentation, following Antaki (1994), we would argue for a more situated, practice-based approach to analyzing argumentation, which is concerned with how people manage disagreement. Methodologically, this requires from the analyst a turn to "the regulation of real talk" (Antaki, 1994, p. 169), a turn towards the participants' own practices as they engage in argument. Margaret Wetherell (1998) has argued for a relatively broad interpretation of participant orientation, at least one that goes beyond the conversation analyst's concern with managing the conversational moment. She has argued that close analysis of small pieces of argument should be complemented by a concern for how that piece can be seen as part of what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) referred to as the "argumentative texture" of the social. Although accepting the always partial nature of any discourse analysis, Wetherell was keen to emphasize the need for an analysis that would ask "how participants' utterances contribute to and are occasioned by [conversational] activities," and that would "trace through the argumentative threads displayed in participants' orientations and would interrogate the content or the nature of members' methods for sense-making in more depth" (p. 404).

In this article, we analyze a modern controversy as conducted within a modern medium—that is, the animal rights (AR) debate as conducted on the Internet. The AR debate is a clear example that argument is both more than rational and oriented to other business besides resolving a difference of opinion. The emotiveness of the debate and its orientation towards political change tend to be quite prominent. The remainder of this article contains an analysis of contributions to Internet sites concerned with AR that take an explicit stance for or against AR. Our reading of these texts highlights the strategies used by the pro-and anti-AR contributors and the interactional business that the arguments are embedded in. Given the ideological texture of public debate about AR, and the fact that here it is conducted over the Internet, an analysis would be likely to especially profit from a sensitivity to the relations between particular argumentative moments and the argumentative texture of the social.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The data in this study were collected from sites on the Internet where contributors took explicit stances for or against the idea of AR. The Internet is becoming a prominent medium for communication and thus a new mode, besides talk-in-interaction and the print media, for the social construction of reality through argumentative discourse. Increasingly, social phenomena are created and contested on the Internet. It is a site for public debate of contemporary issues and, at the same time, is seen as a communication medium that may influence the way in which public debate and even political debate take place in the future.

The approach to obtaining materials involved using a widely available search engine, Excite, to look for materials about AR. The first site entered from the results of the search was an introduction to the AR controversy that included links to pro- and anti-AR sites.¹ Materials constituting the pro- and anti-AR arguments discussed in this article were obtained from the sites listed on this introductory site. Most were from the largest and main site, the Animal Rights Resource Site (<http://www.envirolink.org/arrs/>), which had articles, frequently asked questions, and references on AR issues, including material from both sides of the argument. When choosing material for analysis here, an attempt was made to obtain a range of perspectives and tones, for example, scientific, philosophical, satirical, and materials on issues such as farming, hunting, and research.

ANALYSIS

The analysis was guided in the main by procedures for analyzing textual material outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1995), Coyle (1995), and Gill (1996). The articles were analyzed, one by one, in detail. Attention was focused on vocabulary used; claims and arguments made; and rhetorical strategies for making these claims appear factual or persuasive, such as appeals to personal experience and use of technical or specialist terms. When analyzing the material, a continual concern was how the discursive strategies worked ideologically, for example, how they constructed animals, humans, and humans' use of animals and how the constructions of one side of the debate related to those of the other. In other words, in our analysis, we attempted to combine a "top-down" focus on ideological practice and "bottom-up" focus on the "designed features," or action orientation, of the discourse (Edley & Wetherell, 1997) to allow attention both to the detail of particular, argumentative moments and to the wider, "argumentative texture" of the social (Wetherell, 1998). The analytic process involved constant movement back and forth between pro- and anti-AR material. This was

done to enable us to identify the “dialogic” (Bakhtin, 1988) in the argument.

The argumentative strategies identified in the pro-AR material were

- depictions of animal suffering when talking of humans’ use of animals,
- constructing humans and researchers as cruel or greedy,
- presenting animal use as oppression/discrimination,
- constructing humans’ use of animals as unnecessary and dangerous to human health,
- constructing an equivalence and interconnectedness between humans and animals, and
- presenting animal rights as peaceful and humanitarian.

The argumentative strategies identified in the anti-AR material were

- constructing humans’ use of animals as useful and necessary for human welfare;
- constructing animal rights as incompatible with human welfare;
- constructing use of animals as a norm of nature and incompatible with animal rights;
- constructing the AR movement and AR ideas as extremist, emotional, or oppressive; and
- constructing researchers as humanitarian.

Now that recurrent themes and argumentative strategies were identified, our own dialogue with the texts became explicit as the themes were used to interrogate the data. The materials for each side were read and reread to identify instances of these themes. Notes were made that were relevant to the strategy on the significance of the language or rhetorical strategies used. When using these patterns to reexplore the text, strategies that went against the pattern were noted and examined for how they functioned ideologically.

PRO-AR ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES

Situating Humans’ Use of Animals as a Moral Problem

In attempting to problematize humans’ use of animals, the pro-AR side of the debate makes an appeal to the reader’s emotions by using a discourse of animal suffering when talking of humans’ use of animals, particularly in research and in farming. Within this discourse, the meaning of humans’ use of animals is reconstructed as pain and death for animals, and animals are given a victim status that may potentially

arouse sympathy or guilt in the reader. Consider the following two extracts as examples:

Extract 1

I have seen a fully conscious dog, with an open incision into the thoracic and abdominal cavity, lying on the concrete floor of a corridor in that same laboratory, writhing desperately but unable to rise, while men and women passed by without so much as even a glance.

Extract 2

The production of eggs and dairy products involves enormous killing as does the production of meat. Surplus cockerels, unwanted calves, “spent” dairy cows and laying fowl have been slaughtered, bludgeoned, trashed, drowned and ditched throughout the ages. Disposing of the “surplus” males by the dairy industry is the basis of the veal calf industry. The egg industry trashes half the population of birds born—more than 250 million male chicks—every year.

The above depictions of humans’ use of animals is given solely in terms of the painful procedures and suffering for the animals to reconstruct the meaning of this use as animal suffering and neglect. In the first extract, animal-based research is described in terms of the profound, physical pain of the animal. This depiction is made vivid, and the use of animals is abnormalized through terms of emphasis and extreme case formulations (“fully conscious . . . writhing desperately”) that function to take the depictions of pain to the extreme and thus maximize the animals’ suffering, which is more potent to evoke the reader’s shock and sympathy. The procedures carried out on the animal are described in graphic detail both to build the account as factual and to give horror to the portrayal of animal mistreatment. This reconstruction of animal research is made to appear a factual representation through the use of technical terms from a medical discourse (“incision,” “thoracic,” “abdominal cavity”). The use of such terms warrants the claims made about research through constructing the speaker as someone knowledgeable about science. In the second extract, the meaning of farming is constituted as mass animal slaughter through the depictions of the killing and violence involved. The methods of farming are described with verbs that maximize the violence entailed—“slaughtered, bludgeoned, trashed, drowned and ditched”—to evoke horror and compassion for animals in the reader. This depiction of animal suffering is made to appear factual through the use of terms from agriculture and the calling of attention to this usage by quotation marks (“spent,” “surplus”), constructing the speaker as someone knowledgeable about farming.

Davies and Harré (1990) contended that the power of a discourse is in its provision of subject positions. The self and others are constituted and reconstituted as we move between discourses. This transformation of the self and other is known as positioning. The power of the use

of a discourse of suffering is that it functions not only to problematize humans' use of animals but also creates a subject position for animals as suffering victims that is likely to evoke sympathy for their plight. Further, within this discourse, a subject position is made available for those who use animals as cruel or hurtful toward these animal victims. We can see these possibilities being drawn on explicitly in Extract 1. The casual, nonchalant reaction of the researchers ("passed by without so much as even a glance") is juxtaposed with the vivid description of the dog's pain ("writhing desperately") to position the dog and researchers in relation to one another—the dog as victim and the researchers as uncaring of animal welfare. In Extract 2, the entire dairy industry is positioned as mass killers of animals ("The egg industry trashes half the population of birds born . . . every year"). This discourse and these subject positions work to reconstruct the meaning of using animals in a way that makes it problematic by evoking both sympathy for animals and also possibly anger at those positioned as hurting animals. Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997; Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999) might well have noted the use of an emotional appeal here, but this facet would be backgrounded because of the model's primary focus on rational procedure and resolution of difference of opinion rather than on other rhetorical goals and argumentative practices.

However, constructing use of animals as causing suffering does not necessarily ground it as a "morally" problematic or a "rights" issue. This suffering could be reframed as necessary and pragmatic; it need not be treated as a moral problem. The suffering-victim status of animals does not carry with it a structure of "rights." The pro-AR side of the debate uses comparisons of use of animals to human oppression to construct animal use as discrimination and to create more politically powerful subject positions for animals. Davies and Harré (1990) posit that a subject position incorporates a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. The use of a discourse of oppression and the creation of a subject position for animals as victims of oppression locate animals in a structure of rights that includes entitlements to fairness that the previously discussed subject position did not. Consider the following extracts.

Extract 3

Farm animals can be profoundly mistreated and still "produce," in the same way that profoundly mistreated humans can be overweight, sexually active and able to produce offspring. Like humans, farm animals can "adapt" up to a point, to living in slums and concentration camp conditions. Is this an argument for slums and concentration camps?

Extract 4

12. What about human problems? Why concentrate on animals when so many suffering people need help?

Are Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) badgered with why they are not working instead for battered women or abused children or some other cause? Were the Americans who fought against slavery attacked for ignoring the plight of white people? Choosing a particular issue does not mean that one is indifferent to other concerns. Animal abuse, like child abuse and spouse abuse, is a human problem. The world that we have made for farm animals to live in hurts people as well as the animals and offers good evidence that hardening of the sensibilities is an even worse disease than hardening of the arteries. As human beings, we have a responsibility to the victims of our society and our species, whoever and wherever those victims may be. Every social justice movement in history has been scorned by the mainstream, which is made up ironically of people whose own freedoms and rights were won by revolutionaries at an earlier time.

These comparisons of animal use to “slums and concentration camp conditions” and “slavery” have connotations of human rights violations, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. Using this discourse brings the construction of animal suffering into a moral domain. For by defining animal use in terms of human oppression, animal use is reconstructed as discrimination and oppression. In Extract 3, for example, the comparison of farm animals’ ability to live on farms with humans’ ability to adapt to concentration camps constructs farming as an enterprise of mass oppression. Similarly, in Extract 4, in which the AR movement is compared to the Black civil rights movement, animal use becomes constructed as a violation of rights. Here also, the AR issue is further constructed as interlinked with, and at the vanguard of, wider social efforts to end injustice. The speaker portrays the scorn directed at the AR movement as symptomatic of attitudes toward new revolutionary social justice movements, thus positioning the AR issue as part of the wider impulse to end oppression and at the forefront of such efforts. This further constructs AR and human rights as related. The use of the discourse of oppression and rights violations provides a more powerful subject position for animals—now not just suffering victims but oppressed and discriminated-against victims whose rights are being violated. This conceptual repertoire brings a structure of entitlements to fairness and to consideration of their interests, to the subject position of victim. Within this discourse, subject positions are provided for humans and opponents of AR as prejudiced and oppressive. In Extract 3, for example, by the challenge “Is this an argument for slums and concentration camps?” the argument for farming is constructed as equivalent to arguing for genocide, so those who argue in support of farming are implicitly positioned as similar to Nazis. In Extract 4, by constructing the lack of support for animal rights as symptomatic of attitudes to all new social justice movements, opponents of AR are subtly positioned as prejudiced.

The approach of Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997; Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999) suggests a somewhat different tack with these

extracts. With their interest in rational resolution and maintenance of critical standards of reasonableness, Van Eemeren et al. would have noted that in Extract 4, the question or challenge ("What about human problems? Why concentrate on animals when so many suffering people need help?") requires the arguer to justify the legitimacy of a concern for animal rather than human problems. However, instead the response justifies a general selectivity in the championing of issues. The extract then claims that animal problems are also human problems and that we have a responsibility for animal victims, but it provides no substantive support for either of these latter claims. The claims in this extract would thus have been designated fallacies because of their failure to justify why animal problems should be on a par with human problems. This failure would be seen as an obstacle to a rational resolution and a violation of critical standards of reasonableness. Consequently, such a model is restrictive in its view of both the aims of argument and the legitimacy of argumentative moves, and it points to interesting omissions in the argumentation, but it misses how the comparison of animal issues to human oppression constructs a more politically powerful status for animals and brings the issue into a new domain.

A related strategy used to tie humans' use of animals explicitly to the moral domain is constructing animal use as symptomatic of a human depravity or moral deficiency. Consider the following extract, for example:

Extract 5

I have just browsed the horrific graphics posted [on ARRS].

Let me begin by saying that I am not proud to be a human after seeing what people are capable of doing to animals. . . .

Look what humans do to one another. . . . Would anyone think they would treat the animal world with dignity and respect. . . . I think not.

The above extract constructs animal mistreatment as symptomatic of human deficiencies. In Extract 5, humans' treatment of animals is constructed as an extension of their general lack of respect for others. This is constructed as morally deficient through the speaker positioning him/herself as ashamed of his/her humanity because of it. This reflexive positioning in which the cognitive world, here shame at the human condition, is constructed as the result of what "people are capable of doing to animals" constitutes animal use and humans who use animals as inhumane. Although such a reflexive construction of an emotional state gives a moving element to the portrayal, through its emotiveness it also makes space for the anti-AR strategy of positioning the AR movement and its views as based on a peculiar emotionality. The speaker eclipses somewhat these possible negative subject positions through another self-construction. The opening statement functions to achieve this—"I have just browsed the horrific graphics posted [on

ARRS].” The casual air of “browsed” positions the speaker as moderate—they were just engaging in a casual, normal activity when they came across the “horrific.” Wooffitt (1992, cited in Potter, 1996, p. 140) has discussed how descriptions of mundane activities are often given before a description of a paranormal event because the former description functions to construct the speaker as normal and rational, and thus, their descriptions of the extreme event are made more believable through their heading off of others undermining the story because of fantasy or madness. Similar is the use of “browsed”; it positions the speaker as moderate, and thus his/her emotive depiction of the shaming of the human condition because of the treatment of animals resisted possible undermining as due to a tendency to overemotionality or extremism. Although Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997, 1999) might well note the rhetorical work achieved here by the emotional, such an argumentative practice would be backgrounded because of the model’s primary focus on rational procedure. In another posting to this Web site, humans’ use of animals in experiments is constructed as sadism, and researchers are positioned as imaginative sadists, through an explicit claim connecting animal research to sadism—“everything that can be thought out by a sadistic and criminal imagination with regard to cruelty and mistreatment has in fact been carried out and exceeded.”

Situating Human Welfare and Animal Welfare as Compatible and Reinforcing

Whereas the pro-AR side concentrates on morally problematizing humans’ use of animals and on constructing animals as victims and humans as cruel and oppressive, the anti-AR side constructs animal use as beneficial for humans and human welfare as an imperative (this will be discussed in detail later). The pro-AR side does orient to this strategy by arguing that animal use, specifically as meat and research, brings no benefits to humans and actually endangers human health, thus neatly eclipsing the imperative of human progress and welfare.

Extract 6

Of course, it is only out of ignorance that John and his cohorts continue to think that killing is necessary for medical progress. All that is known about congenital heart disease and other medical conditions could have been learned without the slaughter; human cadavers and increasingly sophisticated in vitro and computer systems are being developed and would have been much further along if so much time and money had not been wasted on vivisection. Animal research has led to more erroneous conclusions and detrimental outcomes than will ever be publicized. As a former medical researcher, I can assure John that there is nothing remotely useful coming out of 95% of the labs conducting animal research, and the 5% that is useful could be obtained by other means. Recent misguided attempts at xenotransplantation (transplanting

organs from one species into another) are particularly fraught with danger, as unknown communicable diseases are almost certain to cross the species barrier with unknown results.

In Extract 6, research on animals is constructed as needless and useless—"all that is known about congenital heart disease and other medical conditions could have been learned without the slaughter." There are other alternatives ("human cadavers and increasingly sophisticated in vitro and computer systems"), and far from animal research being necessary because there are no such alternatives, animal research is constructed as hindering the progress of such alternatives; these "would have been much further along if so much time and money had not been wasted on vivisection." There were also postings on meat consumption in which it was argued that "an animal based diet causes degenerative diseases." "Endangerment" claims (Kunkel, 1995) such as this are also used when referring to research; in Extract 6 it is claimed that "animal based research has led to more erroneous conclusions and detrimental outcomes" and that "attempts at xenotransplantation . . . are particularly fraught with danger." These claims that animal research is needless and dangerous construct AR and human welfare as not only compatible but linked: Animal liberation will increase human welfare. Interestingly, Van Eemeren et al. (1997; Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999) would note here how the claim that animal research has led to detrimental outcomes is unsupported in the text. Consequently, it would be deemed a fallacy and an obstacle to reasonable resolution. However, although this is interesting, it somewhat misses the point. The rhetorical aim is to promote animal liberation by claiming that animal use has negative effects for humans as well as for animals. Such a claim hardly needs backing because it is designed to appeal to our emotions by evoking doubt or fear. Moreover, although this claim may deviate from Van Eemeren's procedure, its factuality is oriented to through the use of technical terms ("xenotransplantation," "human cadavers") and through the speaker's positioning himself as "a former medical researcher" and thus, someone entitled to know about the value of medical research techniques. His appeal to statistics also functions to build facticity. By its claim that 95% of the animal research yields no benefits, whereas the 5% that does could be obtained through other means, the concession that 5% is useful constructs the argument of the uselessness of animal research as rigorous and unbiased. However, its inclusion of the statement "could have been obtained through other means" gives no ground to the other side because it simultaneously maintains the needlessness of animal research. This argumentative strategy that animal use (meat, research) is needless and dangerous constitutes AR and human concerns as compatible and positively connected and negates anti-AR portrayals of AR as detrimental to human welfare.

Variability in the Construction of Human and Animal Interests

These two main argumentative strategies of the pro-AR side—constructing animal use as suffering and discrimination and constructing animal welfare and human welfare as compatible and positively connected—can lead to contradiction. In constructing animal use as discrimination, humans are positioned as oppressors, a subject position with connotations attached to gain from exploitation. On the other hand, by constructing human health as endangered by animal use, human interests are constituted as hindered by animal use. Thus, not surprisingly, the attempt to promote these two strategies leads to variability in the discourse—mainly in how human and animal interests are portrayed. At times, human and animal interests are constructed as intimately interdependent. Take the following extracts as examples.

Extract 7

I also believe that all life is connected and whatever we do to the animal world and the earth itself . . . we ultimately do to ourselves.

Extract 8

I hope John and those like him will see that the first step in preserving our world and its life is recognition that we, as humans, are a part of nature, not the end product existing only to conquer our environment. Respect for life, all life, is the key to survival.

In each of these extracts, human existence and animal existence are constructed as interconnected, and harming animals is constructed as causing harm to humans. In Extracts 7 and 8, this is constructed as a global interdependency between animals, humans, and the entire planet. In both of these extracts, this connection is also constituted through categorization. A broad category of “life” is used to create inclusivity between humans and animals. Such depictions function to construct animal interests and human interests as interconnected and mutually reinforcing and, thus, negate concerns that AR are detrimental to human welfare.

However, at other times, human and animal interests are depicted as conflicting and incompatible.

Extract 9

Any attempt to balance human and animal interests through the use of laws that prohibit “inhumane” treatment or “unnecessary” suffering will be futile even if more weight is attached to the animal interests.

In our society, property rights are among the most highly valued of all human rights. Most human/animal conflicts occur precisely because a human property owner seeks to exploit his or her animal property. Even if we increase the weight attached to the animal interests, the human property rights cannot be abrogated without a compelling justification. No animal interest is likely to be regarded as supplying that compelling

justification as long as animals are regarded as the property of their owners. No form of animal welfare is likely to be successful as long as animal interests may be sacrificed for consequential reasons alone and there are no absolute prohibitions on at least some forms of animal exploitation.

In Extract 9, animal interests are constructed as at odds with human interests: They are something weighed against human interests that can bring both into conflict ("human/animal conflicts occur . . . because a human property owner seeks to exploit his or her animal property"). Here this separation of human and animal interests is being used to problematize the use of animals and humans' ownership of them as detrimental to and oppressive of animals' interests ("No form of animal welfare is likely to be successful as long as . . . there are no absolute prohibitions on at least some forms of animal exploitation"). Further, this separation of interests is framed within a rights context; the article is arguing for the superiority of AR over animal welfare for protecting animals' interests.

Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997, 1999) would designate such inconsistent portrayals both as fallacies and as obstacles to rational resolution of disagreement. But this would be to underplay the political and social goals—for example, a gain for an interest group—that are being oriented to here and the way in which variable portrayals bolster these aims. Thus, these contradictory portrayals of human and animal interests promote the two main argumentative strategies used by the pro-AR side—the construction of animal use as oppression and the construction of animal use as unnecessary and endangering humans and thus AR as compatible with human interests. The constitution of an interdependency between animals and humans is functioning to construct animal and human welfare as mutually reinforcing and thus negates constructions of AR as a threat to human welfare. The depiction of animal and human interests as separate is functioning to construct animal use as oppression and the need for AR.

ANTI-AR ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES

The anti-AR side of the debate dialogues with the two main pro-AR argumentative strategies in a number of ways. They construct animal use as benefiting humans and so situate animal use as necessary and human and animal interests as incompatible. They subvert the pro-AR oppression/rights strategy by constructing use of animals as a natural norm incompatible with AR, thus removing animal use from the realm of the moral. Third, they turn the oppression issue on its head by constructing AR as discrimination.

Situating Human Welfare and Animal Welfare as Incompatible

The anti-AR side dialogues with the pro-AR arguments of animal use as needless and dangerous by reconstructing the meaning of humans' use of animals as beneficial and necessary for human welfare. Consider the following extracts, for example:

Extract 10

On March 22, 1990, my son John was born missing the major pumping chamber in his heart, a malady called hypoplastic left heart. Thirteen years ago, the same affliction took the life of my best friend's firstborn. No one, to my knowledge, truly understands how the problem occurs, but it does. Medical advances, including transplantation techniques developed thanks to the sacrifice (in the best sense of the term) of a variety of animals now give these children a real chance of enjoying a full and normal life. Had he been born a few years earlier, John would have been made as comfortable as possible and allowed to die. . . .

What enlightened animal-rights activist can honestly compare the life of one or a thousand rats to that of my son? Look him or me in the eye and say it.

Extract 11

PCRM (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine) advocates the "New Four Food Groups" which totally excludes animal products. Although the vegan regimen can be adequate if properly planned, it has been shown to increase the risk of nutrient deficiencies. Children are particularly vulnerable. Sanders and Reddy (Am. J. Clin. Nutr., 1994 May; 59(5 Suppl): 1176S-1181S) indicated: "Excessive bulk combined with low energy density can be a problem for children aged < or = 5y and can lead to impaired growth."

In Extract 10, animal research is constructed as a life-saving enterprise. It is portrayed as leading to advances that give sick children a chance to live normal lives and as having the potential to cure fatal diseases. The importance and the enormity of the benefits is constructed through the juxtaposition of the happy outcome of "giving these children a real chance of enjoying a full and normal life" with the fatal alternative that "John would have been made as comfortable as possible and allowed to die." Animal research is thus made a matter of life or death for humans. This implicitly constructs human welfare as dependent on animal use and thus incompatible with AR. Pro-AR arguments of animal research as endangering human health are negated implicitly by constructing the lack of such research as a danger. In Extract 11, animal agriculture is constructed as necessary for human health by portraying veganism as detrimental to human health and development ("Although the vegan regimen can be adequate if properly planned, it has been shown to increase the risk of nutrient deficiencies."), the concession in the first clause constructing the argument as balanced and disinterested and, thus, building the facticity of the

second claim of risk. Veganism is constructed as an extreme alternative; it “totally excludes animal products,” the extreme case formulation constructing this as something extreme or abnormal. Also, the use of the word “regimen” with its connotations of self-discipline and strictness further helps to construct veganism as extreme. Veganism is constructed as detrimental to children’s health (“Children are particularly vulnerable.”). The technical terms and the impersonal descriptive style of the extract help build the facticity of the account. Here, the pro-AR arguments of meat as endangering health and plant-based diets as superior are undermined by constructing plant-based diets as dangerous to human health. Thus, animal use is constituted as necessary and animal liberation and human welfare are constructed as incompatible.

These extracts, although seemingly orientating to and interacting with the pro-AR strategy of animal use as needless and dangerous, are also dialoguing with the other main pro-AR strategy of animal use as suffering/oppression. This is done through the creation of alternative subject positions for the stakeholders involved. In Extract 10, animals are positioned as altruistic martyrs, as saviors of sick children rather than the victims of human exploitation—“transplantation techniques developed thanks to the sacrifice (in the best sense of the term) of a variety of animals now give these children a real chance of enjoying a full and normal life.” The grateful tone (“thanks,” “in the best sense of the term”) positions the speaker as appreciative of the animals’ deaths. These new subject positions help reconstruct the meaning of animal use not as oppression but as a humanitarian enterprise and provide less problematic subject positions for humans and animals. In Extract 11, the animals, in a sense, disappear, and become reconstructed as “animal products” and essential nutrients missing from vegan diets—not the individual beings constituted by the pro-AR side. Further, here it is humans rather than animals who become positioned as victims—“John was born missing the major pumping chamber of his heart,” “Children are particularly vulnerable”—and so by evoking sympathy for the plight of humans, human rather than animal suffering becomes the imperative, with animal use as the antidote.

Noteworthy here is a point that the Van Eemeren approach would reveal—the failure in the extracts above to justify why human welfare is more important than animal welfare. The extracts construct animal use as necessary for human welfare but provide no substantive support for the presumption, disputed by the pro-AR side, that human welfare should be prioritized. Van Eemeren would point in Extract 10 to the rhetorical question (“What animal-rights activist can honestly compare the life of one or a thousand rats to that of my son?”) and designate it as a fallacy because of its lack of substantive support for the privileging of human interests. However, this would miss the point that the argument achieves its aims through its morally indignant

tone and emotional appeal that both evokes sympathy and shames or embarrasses the reader into agreeing.

Removing Humans' Use of Animals from the Realm of the Moral

The pro-AR argumentative strategy of animal use as discrimination and oppression is dialogued with, and undermined by, the anti-AR discursive strategy of constructing humans' use of animals as a natural, evolutionary norm, intrinsic to every species. This undermines the pro-AR strategy by denying exploitation its moral force and thus eclipsing the rights attendant in the discourse of oppression:

Extract 12

"These everyday animal transgressions against common decency did not come to mind with the idea that they might somehow justify human depredations. What I was getting at was an apparent contradiction in the animal rights philosophy. How could animal liberationists argue on the one hand that humans were a part of nature, no better or worse than other animals and on the other hand that our species alone was obliged to give up practices with which it has naturally evolved, like killing and eating animals and wearing their skins? How could they argue that humans have no inherent moral superiority, and at the same time argue that we have a high moral obligation to treat animals more humanely than they would treat us or each other?"

Conniff also noted:

"The trouble with speciesism as a cause for indignation was it seemed to be just about universal in the animal kingdom. By definition, a species is a group of physically and genetically similar individuals which interbreed and also often cooperate the better to eat other species and forestall the time of being eaten."

In this extract, exploitation of animals is constructed as a norm of nature, something that all species do ("By definition a species . . . eat[s] other species and forestall[s] the time of being eaten"). The universality and commonality of humans' behavior and animals' behavior is achieved through the use of global phrases such as "killing and eating animals and wearing their skins." Such global phrases obscure uses of other species and procedures entailed in such uses that are specific to humans (for example, research on animals and intensive farming) and thus help create an equivalence between humans' treatment of animals and the latter's treatment of each other. Discrimination ("speciesism") is thus constituted as a natural norm, something practical rather than moral. This construction of species behavior is used to deny AR as an imperative. The pro-AR position is framed as advocating equivalence between humans and animals and as advocating a moral obligation on humans not to use other animals. These are made incompatible by constructing species use as a norm of nature and expecting

the reader to supply the conclusion in Extract 12 that if we are equivalent to animals, we are entitled to behave as they do and have no extra moral obligations.

The deconstruction of the pro-AR oppression strategy also operates at a very micro level. When referring to animal rights, the anti-AR articles generally refer to them in the following ways: "animal rights," animal "rights," or animal activists. These all function to ironise (Potter, 1996) AR in subtle ways. The use of quotation marks functions to call attention to the status of the words *as* words, as concepts and ideas rather than facts. This negates AR as factual and something belonging to animals; rather, it becomes something that is constructed. The second and third ways of referring to AR further work to separate animals from the realm of rights—through the enclosure of *rights* only in the quotation marks in the second and through the simple absence of the term in the third. By constructing AR as a concept rather than something real, and separating the word from animals, AR loses force as a moral obligation to which animals are entitled.

Situating AR as the Moral Problem

The anti-AR side of the debate constructs AR as discrimination and oppression, thus undermining the pro-AR strategy of constituting animal use as discrimination. AR becomes the moral problem.

Extract 13

Perhaps the most chilling to anyone even vaguely aware of the rhetoric and history of hate was "I am also disturbed if an effort is made to save genetically defective/reproducing adults who could then pass on their defects." Excuse me, but who among us qualifies as genetically pure?

Should we stamp out those bearing the genetic makeup contributing to male-pattern baldness? Left hand/left eye dominance? A bit of heft to the hindquarters? Must only those who qualify for the annual swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated* be allowed to live?

Extract 14

AR Activists Only Interested in Cute Animals.

This has been my impression—that the AR movement isn't so much motivated by a desire to help animals as by a desire to help CUTE animals. There's about a dozen or so species that're commonly used in lab work, God's creatures every one—but you notice they don't kick up much of a fuss about, say, the nematodes or fruitflies, or actually any species that hasn't been in a cartoon.

In each of these extracts, AR is constructed as entailing discrimination. Extract 13 occurred in the context of a description of PETA's (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals') views. Here, PETA is constructed as having reservations about helping "genetically defective" people, and this is constructed as a factual portrayal of PETA's views by placing it in quotation marks so that it is constituted as a repetition rather

than a reconstruction of their standpoint. The PETA view is constituted as frightening (“chilling”) and widely discriminatory by applying it to what are considered to be minor imperfections (baldness, left-eye dominance) and implying that everyone is imperfect (“Excuse me, but who among us qualifies as genetically pure?”) to position the AR movement as prejudiced against physical flaws and seeking a master race (“Must only those who qualify for the annual swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated* be allowed to live?”). Further, the application to minor imperfections constructs the view as extreme, unrealistic, and detrimental to human welfare. Also, the indignant tone (“Excuse me.”) constructs such a view as outrageous. In Extract 14, the AR movement is positioned as discriminating against unattractive animals (“AR Activists Only Interested in Cute Animals”). This eclipses pro-AR self-constructions as liberators of the oppressed by constructing them as motivated not by a principled, rational altruism but by a sentimental, infantile interest in cuteness (“they don’t kick up much of a fuss about . . . any species that hasn’t been in a cartoon”). Interestingly, Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997, 1999) would note for Extract 14 the provocative insulting tone that would be considered an obstacle to rational resolution by its failure to be cooperative. However, because such an argument is aimed not at reaching rational resolution but at subverting the presentation of animal use as morally problematic, satire and sarcasm are used quite effectively to trivialize AR arguments. Further, in Extract 14 the concept of AR is presented as being inconsistent or as contradicting itself in its interest in animal protection. In both of these extracts, a certain turning of tables against pro-AR arguments is taking place, for now AR itself becomes constructed as oppression and thus the moral problem. Subject positions for animal rightists as oppressors are now made available. This reconstruction of AR as discrimination functions to undermine pro-AR constructions of humans’ use of animals as oppression, for the AR view now becomes contradictory. It also works to neatly sweep the moral high ground away from the pro-AR side of the debate.

Perhaps the most powerful argumentative strategy used by the anti-AR side, which simultaneously works to undermine both of the main pro-AR strategies, is the construction of AR as an attempt to deny human rights. This undermines the pro-AR argument of animal use as discrimination of animals by resituating the meaning of AR as discrimination of humans. It also negates pro-AR constructions of AR as compatible and positively linked with human welfare by its implications of AR as detrimental to human welfare.

Extract 15

“What the pejorative emphasis on speciesism suggests to me is a sense of human worthlessness or more specifically, the worthlessness of other people. . . .”

So, in Conniff's view, the suggestion that we should consider the interests of other species equally is degrading to humans. Additional evidence for this interpretation is provided by the following:

"One can hear it much more clearly in the remarks of Ingrid Newkirk, who must not realise that in likening chicken slaughter houses to death camps she echoes something Heinrich Himmler once said: 'We Germans, who are the only people in the world who have a decent attitude towards animals, will also assume a decent attitude towards these human animals.' It should not need saying this late in the game but devaluing human life and deifying animals is a dangerous solution."

Extract 16

Those people among us who would give lower animals human rights do not do it because they love other animals. They do it because they hate human kind. They hate the fact that their own superior nature as intellectual beings gives them superior challenges which they shrink from by attempting to deny the superiority of their human nature.

"Animal rights" is just one more diabolic scheme for promoting government control over human lives by destroying our right to private property.

In both these extracts, AR is constructed as human hatred ("the pejorative emphasis on speciesism suggests to me . . . the worthlessness of other people," "Those people among us who would give lower animals human rights . . . do it because they hate human kind."). In Extract 15, the pro-AR strategy of comparing animal use to human oppression ("Ingrid Newkirk . . . in likening chicken slaughterhouses to death camps") is compared to Heinrich Himmler's declaration of a German concern for humans arising out of a concern for animals. The obvious failure of the concern for humans functions to connect AR with mass slaughter. This connection is made explicit in the remark "devaluing human life and deifying animals is a dangerous solution." This association constitutes AR as a danger to human rights. In Extract 16, AR is depicted as a sinister plot to destroy human property rights ('Animal rights' is just one more diabolic scheme for . . . destroying our right to private property"). AR is further constructed as self-delusional through constituting it as a denial of the reality of human superiority and the challenges this entails—"they hate the fact that their own superior nature gives them superior challenges which they shrink from by attempting to deny the superiority of their human nature." By reconstructing the meaning of AR as destruction of human rights, animal rightists become the oppressors and humans who use animals become the victims: AR is thus oppression of humans. This subverts the pro-AR argument of humans' use of animals as discrimination and, through its implications of danger to human rights, simultaneously undermines the other pro-AR argument of AR as compatible with and beneficial to human welfare.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This analysis has considered pro- and anti-AR arguments on the Internet. The pro-AR side of the debate used two main argumentative strategies. The first involved reconstructing the meaning of humans' use of animals as animal suffering to create a subject position for animals as victims that would evoke sympathy, shock, or guilt. Comparisons to human oppression functioned to bring animal use into the realm of discrimination and rights. This discourse also functioned to provide a more politically powerful positioning for animals as oppressed victims entitled to justice and liberation. Further, human beings who use animals, particularly researchers, were positioned as morally deficient because of this use. This linking of animal use to human depravity implies that the only way to retrieve human moral goodness is to stop using animals. These patterns functioned to problematize animal use morally. The second main argumentative strategy involved portraying animal use as unnecessary for, and dangerous to, human health. This strategy functioned to present AR as not only compatible with human interests but as positively linked to bettering human welfare. The attempt to promote these two discursive functions led to variability in the portrayals of human and animal interests. In an attempt to bolster the strategy of constructing human and animal welfare as compatible and connected, animal and human interests were at times portrayed as interdependent. In an attempt to bolster the other main strategy of problematizing animal use as discrimination, human interests were sometimes portrayed as in conflict with and violating animal interests. The anti-AR side used a number of strategies to resituate the meaning of humans' use of animals. These strategies dialogued with the pro-AR constructions in a number of ways. The anti-AR side negates the pro-AR construction of animal use as useless and dangerous by reconstructing animal use as beneficial and necessary for human welfare, thus separating human and animal interests as incompatible. They also do this by constructing AR as destroying human rights. This latter construction is part of a general strategy of constructing AR as discriminatory, a strategy that functions to undermine the pro-AR strategy of presenting animal use as discrimination, for now AR rather than animal use becomes constituted as oppression and thus the moral problem. The anti-AR side also used another strategy to subvert the pro-AR oppression strategy, that is by constructing animal use as a norm of nature, incompatible with AR; it situates animal use as something practical rather than moral.

It seems apparent from the analysis that the two sides of the debate use similar patterns to serve similar functions. Both sides use endangerment arguments (meat causes fatal diseases, veganism endangers children's health) to construct the position advocated by the other side as a danger to human welfare. Both construct the opposing position as

discrimination (animal use as discrimination, AR as speciesist) to problematize the other morally. Both use emotional appeals to achieve their rhetorical aims.

From our analysis of the AR debate, a number of important features of argumentation emerge that are pertinent for how we theorize argument. We have seen how argumentation occurs within and serves various kinds of interactional business and rhetorical aims besides that of resolving a difference of opinion. Our reading of the AR debate explicated how argumentative strategies were oriented toward morally problematizing animal use and creating a politically powerful status for animals or making animal use a pragmatic rather than a moral issue. Moreover, such rhetorical aims were served as much by emotional appeals that evoke shock, sympathy, and guilt as by rational appeals. Van Eemeren and colleagues (1997, 1999) certainly recognize such facets of argumentation. However, because the model is an ideal description of reasonable discussion aimed at resolution of a difference of opinion, other argumentative practices and rhetorical aims are backgrounded or deemed fallacies or obstacles to rational resolution. However, as we saw in the analysis, such a restrictive view of argument can be misleading. Designating deviations from Van Eemeren and colleagues' rational procedure as fallacies and obstacles is beside the point and misguided when the rhetorical aims are other than reasonable resolution and effectively served by other argumentative practices such as emotional appeals and sarcasm. Such a model therefore needs to take more seriously these other argumentative practices.

Moreover, such a model may be considered narrowly prescriptive. Given the variety of rhetorical aims of argument, prescribing adherence to their stage model of rational discussion is too limited. When the goal is to provoke attention, uncooperative argumentative moves may be more effective. Similarly, when one is flirting, strategies designed to sustain disagreement may be the most appropriate.

We have looked at the AR debate within the medium of the Internet. Although not our main interest, we have pointed out how such a medium is problematic for the Van Eemeren and colleagues' stage model. Because there are no sequential constraints and the context is so broad, their stage model may not be so relevant and deviations and fallacies not so readily identifiable. A similar point could apply also to other media such as mobile phone texting. Here, textual contributions to an argument can easily get out of sequence because of delays in delivery. Such a context would very likely change the structure of argumentation. The relevance of the Van Eemeren model to different media with differing contextual constraints on the interaction is open to question.

In conclusion, the present study was an examination of the social construction of argument in the AR debate. It found that the pro-AR side attempted to construct animal use as a problem through using a

discourse of suffering and further defined animal use in relation to oppression of humans to construct this use as morally problematic and create a subject position for animals that entailed rights. It attempted to present animal welfare and human welfare as mutually reinforcing by presenting animal use as a danger to humans. The attempt to promote these two strategies led to variable portrayals of human and animal interests. The anti-AR side undermined pro-AR constructions of oppression by presenting species use as a norm of nature and incompatible with AR and by presenting AR as itself discriminatory. It situated animal use as necessary for human welfare and thus separated animal interests and human interests as incompatible. The implications of these strategies for theorizing argumentation were discussed.

NOTE

1. Sample sites from which we obtained material include <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Animal-Rights-Debate>; <http://animalconcerns.netforchange.com>; <http://www.waste.org/~oak/>; <http://www.waste.org/~oak/ar-faq/>; <http://www.ampef.org/>; and <http://www.animalrights.net/articles>.

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Davina Swan is a postgraduate psychology student in University College Cork, Ireland. She is currently doing her doctorate, which involves a sociocultural analysis of the experience of creative writing.

John C. McCarthy is a lecturer in the Department of Applied Psychology, University College Cork, Ireland. His research interests include the social context of information technology, artistic activity, experience, and practice.