

ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Engaging the “Animal Question” in International Relations

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By raising the “animal question” in International Relations (IR), this essay seeks to contribute not only to put animals and human–animal relations on the IR agenda, but also to move the field in a less anthropocentric and non-speciesist direction. More specifically, the essay does three things: First, it makes animals visible within some of the main empirical realms conventionally treated as the subject matter of IR. Second, it reflects on IR’s neglect of animals and human–animal relations in relation to both how IR has been constituted as a field and the broader socio-cultural context in which it is embedded. Third, it explores various ways in which IR scholars can start incorporating and take animals and human–animal relations seriously in studies on international relations.

Mediante el planteamiento de la “cuestión animal” en el ámbito de las Relaciones Internacionales (RR. II.), este ensayo pretende contribuir no solo a poner a los animales y la relación hombre-animal en la agenda de las RR. II., sino también a mover el campo hacia una dirección menos antropocéntrica y no especista. En concreto, el presente ensayo se centra en tres aspectos: Primero, visibiliza a los animales dentro de algunos de los principales espacios experimentales considerados tradicionalmente objeto de las RR. II. Segundo, reflexiona sobre el descuido de los animales y la relación hombre-animal por parte de las RR. II en lo que respecta a la forma en que las RR. II se han constituido como campo y el contexto sociocultural más amplio en el que se insertan. Tercero, explora varias formas en las que los académicos del ámbito de las RR. II pueden empezar a incorporar de manera seria la problemática de los animales y la relación hombre-animal en los estudios sobre relaciones internacionales.

En soulevant la « question animale » dans les relations internationales, cet essai cherche non seulement à contribuer à l’inscription des animaux et des relations entre humains et animaux au programme des relations internationales, mais aussi à orienter le domaine dans une direction non-spéciste moins anthropocentrique. Plus précisément, cet essai se livre à trois activités : Il commence par conférer une plus grande visibilité aux animaux dans certains des principaux domaines empiriques conventionnellement traités comme sujets des relations internationales. Il se livre ensuite à une réflexion sur la façon dont les relations internationales négligent les animaux et les relations entre humains et animaux, que ce soit dans la manière dont elles ont été constituées en tant que discipline, ou dans le contexte socioculturel plus large auquel elles sont intégrées. Enfin, il explore les diverses manières dont les chercheurs en relations internationales peuvent commencer à prendre au sérieux et à intégrer les

animaux et les relations entre humains et animaux aux études portant sur les relations internationales.

Keywords: human–animal relations, animals in international relations, new research agenda

Palabras clave, relaciones humano-animal, nueva agenda de investigación

Mots clés, relations entre humains et animaux, nouveau programme de recherche

When I began thinking about and exploring the topic of animals in world politics several years ago, I came across the following statement by Kurtz in a discussion on human–animal communication: “Animals are very simplistic creatures. They are not concerned with world politics.”¹ This comment stuck in my mind for several reasons. First, it neglected not only that human beings are animals, but also that very many human animals could not care less about whatever passes as world politics. Second, despite Kurtz’s emphasis on nonhuman animals being social and engaging extensively in communication both within and across species, the statement reproduced the rather problematic dichotomy between “simplistic” animals on the one hand and seemingly complex or sophisticated human beings on the other. Finally, my experience with scholars concerned with world politics has left me with little basis for understanding what supposedly makes them less simple than human and nonhuman animals without such a concern.²

Irrespective of this, scholars of world politics have thus far given next to no attention to animals and human–animal relations in their work, and it is no understatement to argue both that the academic discipline of International Relations (IR) operates as if animals hardly exist, and that most of its practitioners seem completely ignorant of the anthropocentric and speciesist underpinnings of the discipline and their own work. This situation contrasts to some extent with how “the whole sticky mess of human views toward, relations with, and uses of animals” (Mason 2005, 277) has increasingly been addressed by scholars within other social science disciplines and across the humanities. By the turn of the millennium, disparate engagements with the “animal question” had given rise to the field of study variously called Anthrozoology, Animal Studies and Human–Animal Studies, which DeMello (2012, 4) has described as “an interdisciplinary field that explores the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them.”³

This essay raises the “animal question” in the study of international relations, and seeks to contribute not only to put animals and human–animal relations on the IR agenda, but also to move the field in a less anthropocentric and non-speciesist direction. As an initial step toward this end, the first section goes some way to make animals visible within some of the empirical realms conventionally treated as the subject matter of IR. Given the actual presence of animals in more or less everything having to do with international relations, the question of why they and human–animal relations have been systematically neglected by IR scholars becomes all the more significant, and the second section throws some light on this by looking at both how the subject matter of IR has been constituted, and how IR is embedded in a broader academic and socio-cultural context. In part by drawing inspiration from non-IR scholarship, section three explores how the

¹ SoulJourney, accessed December 2, 2009. <http://www.souljourney.com/sharon.htm>.

² Although the term “nonhuman animals” usefully draws attention to humans being animals, this essay uses primarily “animals” when referring to sentient beings other than humans.

³ See also Waldau (2013), Marvin and McHugh (2014), and Kalof (2017).

“animal question” can be raised and engaged in studies on world politics. The essay concludes with an encouragement for IR scholars to begin taking animals and human–animal relations seriously in their research.

Animals in international relations

If existing IR scholarship is taken as the point of departure, then one can to a large extent be excused for thinking that animals hardly exist and/or are largely irrelevant to international relations. In introductory textbooks, animals appear almost exclusively in rather marginal chapters dealing with environmental politics (systematically located near the end), and the tendency is to engage with them primarily in connection with the two environmental problems of natural resource depletion and biological diversity loss.⁴ Beyond a concern with causes and possible consequences, the focus tends to be on intergovernmental efforts to solve these problems through the establishment of agreements and regimes. Discussions often include something on the role played by nongovernmental organizations, and attention is occasionally given also to the relationship between the management of the environmental problems in question and issues such as world trade. Not surprisingly, introductory textbooks reflect the attention that animals have received in IR scholarship more generally, where they primarily figure in much the same way in textbooks and monographs related to the subfield of International Environmental Politics (IEP). With regard to journal articles, there is somewhat greater diversity in terms of the context within which animals appear, but the vast majority of the relevant ones nonetheless concern resource depletion or species extinction.⁵

The rather narrow focus of IR scholarship aside, animals clearly figure as objects of diplomacy beyond intergovernmental activities related to particular environmental problems. First, as briefly mentioned in some introductory IR textbooks, they appear also in connection with efforts to deal with zoonoses or diseases that are transmissible from vertebrate animals to humans. Recent cases include mad cow disease, influenzas such as “bird flu” and “swine flu,” Ebola virus disease, and respiratory illnesses caused by coronaviruses (SARS, MERS, and COVID-19), and the World Health Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization are at the center of international efforts to deal with such diseases (Couvillion 2017).⁶ Second, although there is “no global legal agreement specifically concerned with the welfare and treatment of individual animals” (White 2013, 391), some states have negotiated and introduced legal instruments meant to serve the welfare of animals (Kelch 2017). Europe has been at the forefront of this, with the Council of Europe creating conventions for the protection of animals for farming, slaughter, experimental and other scientific purposes, companionship as well as during international transport, and the European Union (EU) passing several directives dealing with much the same issues (Driessen 2017). In addition, the OIE has increasingly moved beyond its primary focus on “animal health” to establish voluntary standards for “animal welfare,” which have been recognized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a legitimate basis for sanitary measures on the part of member states.⁷ In the light especially of the WTO’s 2014 decision regarding the EU’s ban on the import of seal products, international trade law has also come to be seen as “an important, although under-acknowledged, locus for the

⁴ More or less any introductory textbook can confirm this.

⁵ Exceptions include sections on “animals in international politics” and “international animal protection” in *Internasjonal Politikk* (IP 2013) *Global Policy* (GP 2013) respectively, and other exceptions will be cited later.

⁶ This comes on top of the attention that animals have since long received in connection with vector-borne diseases, and the attention given to infectious diseases after the SARS outbreak in 2003 contributed to bring “global health” onto the IR agenda (McInnes and Lee 2012).

⁷ The standards in question are incorporated in the OIE’s Terrestrial Animal Health Code and Aquatic Animal Health Code (see <http://www.oie.int/standard-setting>).

development of global norms concerning the protection of animals” (Sykes 2016, 55; 2019). Combined with various private sector initiatives, it has overall become common to talk about animal welfare having become globalized (Park and Singer 2012).

Third, there is a tradition stretching at least back to Ancient Egypt of animals being given as gifts in a diplomatic context. As noted by Leira and Neumann, early examples of this practice exhibited a pattern whereby “some animals (typically those used for food or transport) were offered in large quantities and also given away in border provinces, while more exotic animals, such as giraffes and elephants, which came in smaller quantities, were always presented to the ruler” (2016, 348). While less common today, animal gifting remains part of contemporary diplomacy, with China’s “panda diplomacy” being the best-known example (Hartig 2013). However, pandas are not the only animals currently being gifted, with koalas regularly subjected to the same on the part of Australia’s government, and Putin known to be central on both ends of “puppy diplomacy.” Other recent examples include the president of Turkey receiving four lion cubs from Sudan’s president in December 2017, the president of France giving a horse to the president of China in January 2018, and the president of South Korea receiving two “peace puppies” from the North Korean leader in October 2018.

The historical use of animals as diplomatic gifts has been closely linked to the practice of exhibiting animals in menageries and zoos. In parallel with animal gifting, this has a history stretching back in time to at least Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China (Kisling 2001), and even if Jacques-Henri Bernandin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814) might have been correct in arguing that “foreign relations require the existence of a menagerie” (quoted in Robbins 2002, 216), the practice of exhibiting “exotic” animals has been about more than the mere storage of diplomatic gifts. Not only have zoos themselves been used for diplomatic purposes (Kinder 2013a), but rulers in both ancient and more recent times have actively organized expeditions to capture and bring “exotic” animals back to the imperial center, where they symbolized power in relation to not only distant lands, but also the animal world and local people (Belozerskay 2006; Miller 2013). At least since the Roman period, such animals have also been used for entertainment purposes, and more recent expressions of this include traveling menageries and the use of them in circuses (Wilson 2015, 5–22).

In a diplomatic context, animals appear also in many other ways, and this can be illustrated with the G20 summit in Australia in November 2014. While the encounters between participating state leaders received much media attention, so did those between them and their spouses on the one hand and koalas residing in the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary on the other. While some koalas were brought as cuddling objects to the state leaders’ meeting in Brisbane’s Gallery of Modern Art, their spouses paid a two-hour visit to the sanctuary in order to cuddle koalas in more natural surroundings. These human–animal encounters were quickly dubbed “koala diplomacy,” and thereby came to supplement Australia’s practice of giving koalas as “goodwill ambassadors” to other countries (Arup 2014). The establishment of the Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in 1927 was internal to growing concerns about the fate of native animal species at the time, and while it is said to have been more than 10 million koalas in “Australia” when British colonialists arrived in 1788, the Australian Koala Foundation recently estimated that there are “no more than 80,000 koalas” left in the wild (AKF 2019).

In contrast, while there were no cattle, sheep, or goat in “Australia” before the arrival of British colonialists, the headcount was 26.2, 72.1, and 6 million for the three species, respectively, as of July 2017.⁸ This serves as a reminder that animals

⁸ Meat & Livestock Australia, accessed July 25, 2019. <https://www.mla.com.au/prices-markets/Trends-analysis/fast-facts/#>.

also crossed oceans when Europeans colonized and settled in far-away places, that the animals the colonialists brought along were central to their success as settlers, and that the combined migration of humans and animals contributed to fundamentally alter local ecological systems (Anderson 2004; Crosby 2004).⁹ Such animal movements across continents concerned not only “livestock” within the context of the European tradition of animal husbandry, but also “game species” and other animals thought to improve on the local fauna, as well as more accidental species introductions. Acclimatization societies established in the 1850s onward played a central role in this process (Osborne 2001), and the overall mobility of animals across natural barriers was not only part of the background to the emergence of the conservation movement in the early-twentieth century,¹⁰ but also informs current efforts to prevent and manage “invasive species” or so-called bioinvasions (Keller, Cadotte, and Sandiford 2015).

Returning to the G20 Summit, it should also be noted that several animals literally appeared on the table when the participants dined. While the menu for the buffet-style lunch barbecue at Queensland Parliament House included buffalo mozzarella, goat’s curd, Moreton Bay rock oysters, Mooloolaba king prawns, Moreton Bay bugs, pancetta, bay kebabs, Flinders Island lamb, and Tasmanian ocean trout, the one prepared for the working dinner organized at the Brisbane Gallery of Modern Art included Hervey Bay scallops, Mooloolaba squid broth, Kenilworth Wagyu beef and Murray cod, and the one prepared for the main summit lunch included Darling Downs lamb, Queensland king snapper, and bugs/shellfishes (SMH 2014). If it is taken into consideration that all 4,000 or so summit delegates were fed, then the overall amount of animal flesh served should be quite high, with the only available figure being 1.5 tons of lamb (Agius 2014). Everything served was not “meat,” however, as one state leader (Modi) and possibly some other delegates from India and elsewhere were vegetarians.

As is the case with humans more generally, most state leaders have relations with animals beyond eating some of them and probably wearing parts of them as clothes. This includes keeping animals as “pets,” and it is well known both that the Obama family included two Portuguese water dogs and that Putin has several dogs. However, four other leaders participating in the G20 meeting also kept dogs (Abbott, Hollande, Renzi, and van Rompuy) while two kept cats (Cameron and Harper).¹¹ Beyond animal companionship, Putin has developed an image of himself as an “animal lover,” and stories with photos of him on horseback and together with various other animals have been widely circulated (Noack 2014). Although information about the pastimes of state leaders is not always readily available, at least two other G20 participants (Abbott and Salmon) were also known to do horseback-riding. And, while two participating state leaders had defended hunting of various animals—namely, Abe with regard to dolphins and whales, and Cameron regarding foxes—it is not clear if they hunt themselves.

Diplomacy is not the only context within which animals are present in international relations, and this becomes obvious when considering another conventional IR topic—namely, war or violent conflict. While this is interestingly a context in which humans at times are considered to behave “like animals,” it is clear that animals have always been involved in and affected by the preparation and execution of

⁹ On how such ecological changes and animals (mosquitoes) influenced imperial rivalries, see McNeil (2010).

¹⁰ This was the case at least in Australia, where conservation went hand-in-hand with the assertion of a national identity attached to native nature in the early-twentieth century (Smith 2011). Elsewhere, an imperial or elite “hunting cult” played the central role in the movement to preserve fauna (Adams 2004, 19–41).

¹¹ In contrast, another participant (Zuma) once argued that keeping a dog is “not African” (Conway-Smith 2012). While pet keeping is commonly considered something “western,” and though there clearly have been connections to colonialism (Skabelund 2011), the practice was initiated in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia (Mark 2019), it has not always been tolerated in the West (Serpell 1996, 48ff., 157ff.), and equivalent practices have been common in tribal societies (Serpell 1996, 60–72).

war. In this connection, Showalter has argued that “[w]ithout animals, historically, war as we know it would have been flat-out impossible,”¹² and there has been a limit neither to the type of animal forcefully conscripted into war nor the uses to which they have been put (Kistler 2011; Hediger 2013; Salter, Nocella, and Bentley 2014). Leaving aside the long history of animals being used as “beasts of burden,” warriors, weapons, couriers, mascots, and more, World War I (WWI) supposedly “saw the largest mobilization of animals in history” (Thurston 2010, 586), and the difficulty of replacing them (especially horses) is seen to have influenced the outcome of the war (Cooper 2000, 65; Shaw 2014).

The replacement need in question was a product of the enormous animal fatalities during WWI, and while Shaw (2014) has emphasized “[l]osses through exhaustion, disease [...], starvation and enemy action,” animals died also for reasons such as the tendency for retreating armies to kill rather than leave animals to enemy forces. In other cases of retreat or war ending, animals have simply been left behind, as was the case with not only many animals used in WWI, but also the dogs used by the United States in the Vietnam War (Alger and Alger 2013, 86–87). In connection with US warfare in Vietnam, many animals were also used to test the chemical agents that subsequently did such damage to humans and animals alike (Wilcox 2011).¹³ Domesticated animals belonging to the “enemy” have been common targets in war, as have zoos containing wild animals in captivity. In preparation for war, not only have “dangerous” zoo animals often been killed (Itoh 2011), but so have many companion animals (Keen 2017).¹⁴ In other cases, pets and farm animals alike have simply been left behind when people abandoned their homes to escape war (Alexander 2014). With regard to animals in the wild, their habitats are often negatively affected by warfare and many species tend also to suffer heavily from hunting and poaching on the part of both warring parties and displaced people. From a conservation perspective, the significance of this is all the greater today due to not only the geographical overlap between many contemporary armed conflicts and biodiversity hotspots, but also the specific characteristics of protracted “new wars” occurring within states (Hanson et al. 2009, Benz and Benz-Schwarzburg 2010, Gaynor et al. 2016).

Although animals are no longer as central in human warfare as they once were, they are still very much present in forced military service as “beasts of burden” in rugged terrains, soldiers, spies, weapons of various kinds, “gas detectors” in connection with chemical warfare, messengers, bomb sniffers, minesweepers, guards at military bases and other installations, search and rescue team workers, mascots, objects in weapons testing and medical training exercises, food, etc. Beyond their material presence, there has always been and remains also a lot of symbolism connected to animals in a war context. As for instance noted by Shaw (2014) with reference to WWI:

The military had long had a close association with animals, either as symbols of courage (such as lions), or through the image of the warrior and his horse. Similarly, the enemy could be depicted as an enraged beast, as Allied propaganda presented the German war machine. The Central Powers reveled in depicting the British Empire as a duplicitous, colonising “octopus”, an image that was in turn used against them by the French.

While the dehumanizing use of little-esteemed animals in enemy images (Keen 1986, 60–64) has a parallel in how groups of people have been animalized and treated as “less than human” in many other contexts (Roberts 2008), the positive

¹² Quoted by *The Associated Press* in connection with the Iraq War in 2003 (RE 2003).

¹³ On animals in the context of the Cold War in Asia, see Bankoff (2010). With regard to the Cold War, note also the extensive use of animals in space programs (Burgess and Dubbs 2007).

¹⁴ While Kinder (2013b) has drawn attention to three roles thrust upon “zoo animals” in the context of warfare (captives, patriotic citizens, and good soldiers), they have also served as sources of food (Fogh Hansen and Eriksen 2014).

identification of a military “self” with more esteemed and powerful animals has a parallel in how many of the same animals (e.g., lions and eagles) figure in the coats of arms and emblems of many nation-states. However, this is not the only way in which nation-states are symbolized or made meaningful in animal terms, and additional cases include declarations of particular animals as “national” and the identification of nation-states with particular animal-related activities. Examples of the former include the inventions of the “German Shepherd” (Skabelund 2008) and the “Finnhorse” (Schuurman and Nyman 2014), while examples of the latter can be how Norway is commonly depicted as a “fishing nation” and the identification of Spain with bullfighting. Furthermore, the relationship to animals has in some cases been considered central to the construction of whole national communities, with Australia (Franklin 2006) and Japan (Pflugfelder and Walker 2005) being two studied cases in point.

Animal symbolism is quite common also within the referent domain of what is often treated as the second most important IR subfield—namely, International Political Economy. As key actors in the production and distribution of goods and services in the contemporary world political economy, transnational corporations make extensive use of animals in both their identity construction and external communication. As noted by Brown (2014, 88) in the context of marketing, “the merest glance across marketing’s landscape reveals that animals are all around.” He goes on to state that “[t]hey are found in every imaginable product category—cars, clothing, cosmetics, computers, cell phones, credit cards, etc.—and hail from every quarter of the marcomms compass from logos, slogans and posters to home pages, package designs and brand names” (Brown 2014, 88). While animals are indeed symbolically “all around” in the increasingly globalized corporate world, they have also a significant material presence in the world political economy.

In a historical perspective, there is no doubt that animals have played a very significant role in sustaining human societies. While wild animals did so as prey for hunting and gathering societies, domesticated animals came to do so to a much greater extent with the Neolithic transformation of societies toward a lifestyle based on crop cultivation and animal herding that began approximately 12,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent of the Near East (Colledge et al. 2013). What became the main “food animals” (sheep, goats, Taurine cattle, and pigs) were domesticated 10,500–12,000 years ago, and cattle was put to use also as “draught animals” and sources of transport some thousands years later.¹⁵ In time, many other animals were domesticated for the same and other purposes in different parts of the world (Clutton-Brock 2012).¹⁶ While the use of some of these so-called domesticates in warfare was discussed earlier, they have undoubtedly also played significant economic roles not only in agricultural subsistence economies, but also in later commodity-based commercial economies, as well as industrializing economies (Greene 2008).

Although animals are no longer used as extensively as they once were for traction, they remain active as “workers” in many respects (Coulter 2016), and are also very much present as sources of food and other commodities with a not-insignificant trade value in today’s integrated world economy (Phillips 2015). In live condition, they are traded across borders as livestock animals, breeding animals, companion animals, entertainment animals, exhibition animals, laboratory animals, sport animals, etc. Furthermore, live animals are used in the production of many products that are traded across borders—most notably, dairy and other food products as well as wool, but also biopharmed medicinal drugs and genetic breeding resources. In killed or slaughtered condition, their body parts are traded across borders

¹⁵The use of animals for traction was part of the “secondary products revolution,” which included the use of animals also for milk and wool (Greenfield 2010).

¹⁶Note that domestication is an ongoing process, and that “the majority of domestic animals [...] have been domesticated in the past few centuries.” (Larson and Fuller 2014, 127)

as “meat” and other food products, ornamental products, traditional medicine, aphrodisiacs, etc., at the same time as parts of their dead bodies are used as inputs in the production of a vast number of other products traded across borders.

In the global cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries, there is not only extensive use of animal ingredients in a lot of products, but many of the latter and/or non-animal ingredients used to produce them are tested on animals before being made accessible for human consumption around the world. Beyond trade in goods, animals are present also in international services trade, where they play multiple roles in the rapidly growing industries of “ecotourism,” “wildlife tourism,” and nature-based tourism more generally (Duffy 2013; Markwell 2015). More specifically, animals serve as objects of the human gaze in non-consumptive wildlife watching as well as in zoos and aquaria, as prey in consumptive activities such as hunting and fishing, as workers carrying or pulling people and their belongings in different terrains, and as sources of local and “exotic” food. In addition, certain “sporting” activities involving animals are also significant tourist attractions, with significant cases in point being bullfighting, horseracing, greyhound racing, and camel wrestling.

While a focus on international trade is important, it is equally important to consider how traded animals and products thereof are produced within the contemporary world political economy. With regard to trade in animals originating in the wild, it is a matter of neither “production” nor the mere “harvesting” of animal resources. Rather, some animals are hunted and killed, with particular body parts removed on-site, or their dead bodies moved and dismembered elsewhere before being traded. Alternatively, animals are captured alive, and either traded in live condition for companionship, exhibition, experiments or food, or killed and dismembered elsewhere before being traded. In either case, the killing or capturing of wildlife for trade is a diverse form of activity that ranges from individual members of particular and often rare animal species to a huge number of individual members of more common animal species (e.g., commercial fishing). The actors involved are also very diverse, and this is the case even with regard to illegal wildlife trade, which involves everything from small-scale poachers to legally registered enterprises and transnational criminal groups (van Uhm 2016, 108ff.).

While trade in wildlife is extensive, the vast majority of animals and products thereof traded internationally are produced in human captivity. Such “animal farming” operates at very different scales for various animal species, and the extent of human control and intervention also varies a great deal. Although animals are farmed and traded for a whole range of different purposes, the most comprehensive activity is undoubtedly the mass production of animals for food. While the selective breeding and farming of certain land animal species for food has a long history, aquatic animal species have been subjected to this only more recently (Teletchea and Fontaine 2014). As of today, the farming of several land and aquatic animal species alike is characterized by intensive, industrialized, and biotech-based production systems, with purpose-bred, concentrate-fed, and heavily medicated “food animals” spending their much-shortened lives in strict confinement (Fitzgerald 2015; Neo and Emel 2017). This production is increasingly operating at a transnational level, with large corporations playing significant roles not only in the breeding, farming, and trading of the animal products in question, but also in spreading a certain “meat culture” around the world (Potts 2017). Despite growing worries related to the environment, food security, and human health (D’Silva and Webster 2017; Willet et al. 2019), there is little to indicate that global “livestock” production and trade will decline any time soon.

Overall, it is clear that animals are not only omnipresent within the empirical realms studied by IR scholars, but also that they occupy positions there that are not particularly privileged and enviable. In contrast to how power relations often operate in the hidden, many of the ones between humans and animals are in

the open for everybody to see. Domesticated animals are constituted as property, objects, commodities, and/or resources that humans use for their own perceived benefit in diplomacy, warfare, research, food production, and trade. The situation is not much different for many wild animals: In addition to being hunted, captured, traded, exhibited, eaten, and/or subjected to experiments, their lives are negatively affected by overexploitation, habitat destruction, invasive species, and climate change (Gould 2018, 75ff.). Overall, it has been argued that “[w]e have created and now live in an era of animal abuse that is unprecedented in its scale and severity” (Maher, Pierpoint, and Beirne 2017, 4), while “anthropocene defaunation” as a “pervasive component of the planet’s sixth mass extinction” seems set to continue (Dirzo et al. 2014, 401).

Making Sense of the Animal Neglect in IR

Against the background of the actual presence of animals within all spheres of international relations, the question can be raised as to why they have received next to no attention within IR. One possible explanation concerns how IR is defined as a discipline, which in turn is related to the theoretical perspectives that have informed much of the work done within it. Inspired by various versions of realist theory, world politics has often been treated as equivalent to inter-state political relations. Irrespective of how this has at times made also humans invisible within IR, it should be fairly obvious that a focus on nation-states and their formal representatives limits our ability to see animals in world politics. While not impossible, we will at best register animals when they are directly linked to state representatives or constituted as objects of something in inter-state relations. In connection with the latter, the matter will in either case be considered as belonging to the less significant sphere of “low politics”—this, with the possible exception of inter-state confrontations related to animals conceived as “natural resources”.¹⁷

Needless to say, it is not given how an academic field is defined, and many IR scholars have since the 1970s operated with an understanding of world politics as consisting of a more inclusive set of political, economic, social, and cultural relations among states, or within the framework of a world society existing above and beyond the inter-state system and including many non-state actors. While such an understanding has contributed significantly to expand the field of IR, it has not contributed to more attention being given to animals. One reason to this can be that the transnational relations in question have for the main part been conceived in inter-human terms, while the world society in question has been conceived as consisting of humans only. This human-centeredness must be understood within the context of the social sciences and humanities more generally, as well as the traditional division of labor between these broad fields of study on the one hand, and the natural sciences on the other. As noted by Noske, it has been commonly argued within the social sciences that

animals in themselves have nothing to offer a science which is concerned with the social and the cultural. Anthropologists and sociologists as well as scholars in the humanities generally assume that sociability and culture do not exist outside of the human realm. [...] On the whole, animals figure [...] not only as objects for human subjects to act upon but also as antithesis of all that according to the social sciences makes humans human. The social sciences present themselves pre-eminently as the sciences of discontinuity between humans and animals. (1993, 186–87)

Not surprisingly, the situation has been much the same within the field of study that many consider IR to be an integral part of—namely, political science. With reference to “boundaries delineated within the deepest roots of political thought,”

¹⁷ A case in point is the “cod wars” between the UK and Iceland from the 1950s to the 1970s (Steinsson 2016).

Boyer et al. (2015, 1) have argued that “when Aristotle laid the groundwork for the empirical study of politics and staked out its subject matter, he did so by explicitly excluding animals from the polis.” And, “[t]aking Aristotle’s cut as a pre-political fact, Western political philosophy and the various subfields of political science have committed themselves to a view of politics as an exclusively human affair” (Boyer et al. 2015). In a similar fashion, Wissenburg and Schlosberg (2014, 2) have argued that “it all started with Aristotle, who, in his *Politics* [...], characterised humans as animals of a special kind: like other animals, they produce, reproduce, and lead social lives, but unlike others they create and shape their environment, making them the unique *zōon politikón*, the political animal.”

The references to Aristotle contribute both to locate IR, the social sciences, and academia more generally within the broader socio-cultural context of “Western civilization” and to locate the social sciences’ conventional neglect of animals within what many have argued to be a long “Western tradition” of not only establishing a categorical distinction between humanity and animality as well as nature more generally, but also elevating humanity above nature and the nonhuman world. According to Ingold, “the entire edifice of Western thought and science” is built upon the treatment of humanity and nature as “two mutually exclusive domains of being” (2000, 1), and Birke (2011, xviii) has argued that “within Western cultural traditions, there is a long tradition of domination, and of perceiving other animals as there solely for our use.” With regard to such human-supremacist or dominationist thinking, Mason has stated that “Aristotle, the biblical scribes, the Romans, and St. Thomas Aquinas all thought that human domination over the earth was perfectly well and good,” and “Bacon, Descartes, and others strengthened the view; indeed, they turned it up a few notches by stressing its material rewards and moral imperatives” (2005, 48).¹⁸

While having a solid foundation in the history of a “Western civilization” rooted in Ancient Greece and Judeo-Christian religion, the idea of humans being separate from and superior to other animals can be argued to go further back to the transition from hunting-gathering to a settled agrarian society. For instance, archaeologists like Cauvin (2000) and Vigne (2011, 178) have emphasized “the importance of spiritual and symbolic thought within the origins of animal domestication” in the Near East about 12,000 years ago and argued that for this domestication to start the “horizontal, cosmogonic conception of the world” characteristic of animist or totemic societies would have to be replaced with a vertical one. With reference to excavated “representations showing [divinities] standing above human figures or with humans praying toward the sky,” the argument being made is that

humans were beginning to see themselves within a hierarchical order dominated by divinities, placing themselves above animals and plants, which in turn allowed them to dominate or even kill them, while being pardoned of this unbearable act of murdering familiars “turning towards a higher entity, to whom [they] will [...] offer the victim”. (Vigne 2011, 178; Cauvin 2000)

An alternative view of the relationship between the emergence of religion and animal domestication is that the latter was a response to ecological and/or demographic pressures and that religion simply reinforced that response and enabled people to exploit and kill animals with a clear conscience (Serpell 1996, 212ff.). In line with this, Mason has argued that the shift from hunting-gathering to agriculture created a need to move away from a worldview within which humans “regarded animals as totems, tribal ancestors, Animal Masters, and souls,” and that the emergent agrarian societies “invented new ideologies” that worked “to reduce

¹⁸ Ingold (2000, 6) has stressed that “the Western tradition of thought [...] is as richly various, multivocal, historically changeable and contest-riven as any other,” and see Steiner (2005), Phelps (2007), and Preece (2008) for heterodox voices or a subordinate counter-tradition in the history of philosophy, animal advocacy, and vegetarianism, respectively.

and debase animals and nature and to elevate human being over them” (2017, 137–38). Personally, I have no basis for saying much about the “birth of divinities” preceding or following animal domestication and concur with Dunayer’s (2004, 5) view that “it is impossible to determine which came first: oppression [of animals] or its psychological justification,” and that the practices and attitudes in question are in either case “inextricably linked [and] continually feed each other.”

With regard to international relations, there is no doubt that a vast number of animals are used in various ways to serve human interests across multiple domains and that the animals in question are systematically treated in ways that most humans would consider completely unacceptable for humans. This raises the question of how such treatments of animals are justified, and though this can be expected to vary across socio-cultural contexts as well as with the particular animal use in question, all justifying arguments are likely to boil down to one or another conception of humans being different from and somehow superior to other animals. For most humans most of the time, however, it seems like there really is no need for an explicit justification of anything. While many humans seem disturbed when confronted with instances of other humans being “treated as animals,” the inhuman(e) treatment of animals is seemingly just part of the natural order of things.

Where does this leave IR and its neglect of the roles played by and positions occupied by animals within the subject domain that it claims for itself? Should the neglect be taken to indicate the presence of a relatively benign form of anthropocentrism, whereby IR scholars have more or less unconsciously put humans at the center of attention and somewhat innocently failed to recognize the presence and treatment of animals in international relations? Alternatively, should the neglect be taken to indicate the presence of a more malign form of anthropocentrism, whereby IR scholars positively see *homo sapiens* as the only species that really matter and consciously give their consent to how other animal species are treated in international relations? More generally, does it make sense to argue that IR’s neglect of animals in international relations implies or is a product of it being anthropocentric in general and speciesist in particular?

Anthropocentrism is no easy concept, and it is possible to distinguish between at least three senses of it. The first is *ethical* anthropocentrism understood as the view that “human beings are morally superior to everything else in the natural order,” with a strong version arguing that “human beings alone possess intrinsic worth” and a weaker one recognizing that “some nonhumans have at least some intrinsic moral worth but never as much as a human being” (Thompson 2017, 78–79). Second, there is *ontological* anthropocentrism understood as “a view about the ultimate nature of reality that prioritizes the existence of human beings” by locating them “at the center of creation, as the end or reason for which everything else in the material world exists” (Thompson 2017, 78). While such anthropocentrism is often seen to inform ethical anthropocentrism, Thompson argues that the latter has “a long history of philosophical defense without direct appeal to metaphysics. To many,” he continues, “it has seemed that human beings possess special properties—for example, consciousness, complex rationality, propositional language, intentionality, or moral agency—which have been offered in defense of human moral exceptionalism” (Thompson 2017, 79).

The third sense of anthropocentrism discussed by Thompson is *conceptual* anthropocentrism, which he defines as “the idea that human beings can only comprehend the world from a characteristically human perspective—from within a human conceptual framework” (2017, 79). This links up with the more common notion of *perspectival* anthropocentrism, the “trivial truth” of which is that “the world can only be seen from some perspective or other, and since the only perspective available to us humans is a human perspective, we can only see the world from that perspective” (Samuelsson 2013, 639). While often presented as an inescapable and seemingly benign form of anthropocentrism, Woodhall convincingly argues that “even if we

are necessarily human this does not warrant the label anthropocentrism,” and perspectival anthropocentrism should rather be understood as “interpreting or regarding the world in terms of human values, experiences, or thoughts” (2016, 74, 76). According to Woodhall, anthropocentrism is best understood as a combination of the interconnected ethical and perspectival senses of it, and there is nothing “inescapable or inevitable” about it (2016).

With regard to speciesism, Cavalieri (2001, 70) has argued that it can “be used to describe any form of discrimination based on species,” and several scholars have used it in such a general way. Singer did so when influentially defining it as “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (1975, 6), and a more recent case is Horta’s (2010, 243) definition of it as “the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to a certain species.” Understood in such species-neutral terms, anthropocentrism can be considered to be equal to speciesism on the part of and/or in favor of the human species. However, the term speciesism is most often used with specific reference to a “species bias” on the part of humans vis-à-vis animals, with the *Oxford English Dictionary* defining it as “discrimination against or exploitation of certain animal species by human beings, based on an assumption of mankind’s superiority,”¹⁹ and Dunayer (2004, 5) defining it as “a failure, in attitude or practice, to accord any nonhuman being equal consideration and respect.” Understood in this more specific way, speciesism can be considered to be a form of anthropocentrism “prejudicially favouring humans over other creaturely species” rather than “over anything whatsoever (creatures, trees, mountains, flora, and so on)” (Milligan 2011, 225).

While it has been argued that IR is “fully human-centred in its approach” or dominated by a “human-centred paradigm” (Cudworth and Hobden 2011, 1, 21; Youatt 2014), it has long since been much more common to criticize IR for not being sufficiently concerned with humans. Such criticism has been internal to several attempts to change the IR agenda since the 1960s, and most of it has been directed at realism as the dominant theory after World War II. A case in point is Preiswerk, who complained about the social sciences being “dehumanized,” took particular aim at “the state-centric approach” in IR, criticized “the inhuman aspects of a state-based international system,” and stressed the need to “put the human being and his [*sic*] essential needs back into the centre of attention” (1977, 53, 58). Another case is Gurtov (1988), who criticized existing IR theories and proposed an alternative “global-humanist perspective” that would explicitly approach issues in world politics “from the perspective of the human interest.” However, although realism tends to imply subordination of humans to the state and its perceived interests, one cannot in a simple way conclude that it is a non-anthropocentric theoretical framework. While much can be said about this, it can suffice here to stress two points: First, despite the tendency to treat the state as a human writ large, it is recognized that states are political communities with membership ascribed and limited to humans through citizenship. Second, despite how state survival is often treated as the normative core of realism, there is an underlying conservative political philosophy stressing the instrumental significance of the state in relation to its citizens. In short, the state is seen to elevate humans above nature and enable them to enjoy lives that are different from and better than those of “beasts.”

Realism aside, it is clear that the IR agenda has expanded significantly since the 1970s, and one element of this has been a shift in focus away from the state and things national to humans and things human. With regard to issues receiving attention, this can be seen not only in how the notions of “human security” and “human development” have challenged more state-centric conceptions of security and development, but also in the greater salience of human rights, human costs of

¹⁹ Accessed December 5, 2017. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185996?redirectedFrom=speciesism&>.

war, human mobility, human health, etc. With regard to actors or agents, the shift in question can be seen in “the inclusion of an ever larger group of nonstate actors, to use the mainstream IR vocabulary” (Hellmann 2011, 1311), with “nonstate actors” referring to both individual humans and various groups thereof. Alternatively, Hellmann states, “critical, postmodern, feminist, and/or postcolonial theories identified a huge, highly diverse, and often indiscernible group that they called the marginalized: victims of war, poverty, or colonialism; women; or, more generally, all human beings who had become mere objects of structures and practices of power rather than being political subjects” (Hellmann 2011, 1311).

Returning to the question of IR being anthropocentric and/or speciesist or not, several points can be made. First, IR scholars conceive of international relations as an arena populated solely by individual or collective human actors, and animals are recognized neither as subjects nor as “objects of structures and practices of power.” Second, by giving next to no consideration to animals in their work, IR scholars implicitly ascribe greater value to humans and whatever needs, interests, preferences, or rights they are seen to have. Third, by giving attention to animals more or less only in human-centered contexts, IR scholars implicitly subscribe to a view of animals as means to human ends and without any value beyond the utility that humans derive from them. For instance, concerns with the depletion or extinction of animal species tend to be internal to more foundational concerns with either the future of the human species within an ecological context or the future supply of “natural resources” to feed a growing human population. In a similar fashion, concerns with the health and welfare of animals tend to be internal to more foundational concerns with the health and well-being of humans and/or the trade in live animals and food products derived from animals.

Overall, while I have yet to come across an IR scholar making statements that are explicitly anthropocentric or speciesist, there is a good basis for arguing that IR is indeed founded on largely unrecognized assumptions that are anthropocentric and speciesist, and this can itself be a key reason to why animals and human–animal relations have received next to no attention within the discipline. However, rather than speculating more about the possible sources of this, it can be more fruitful to ask if things necessarily have to be this way, or if there are ways for IR scholars to take animals and human–animal relations more seriously in their work on international relations. This is already being done by scholars within most other social science disciplines, and if Hellmann (2011, 1311) was correct in arguing that “[a]t the beginning of the 21st century, there are [...] few phenomena that cannot be framed in one way or another as legitimate objects of study under the heading of IR,” then there should be space for this also within IR. Furthermore, if “virtually all aspects of [...] human–animal interactions possess a trans-boundary dimension” (Peters 2017, 253), then IR scholars should be well-positioned to get engaged.

Could We Study IR as if Animals Mattered?

Having paraphrased a chapter title used by Preiswerk (1977), what can it possibly imply to study international relations “as if animals mattered”? To begin with, animals can be considered to matter in the sense that international relations would not be the same without them. This should be clear if one recognizes the historical and contemporary presence of and roles played by them within all spheres of international relations and then tries to imagine how things would be in their absence. Or, one can try to imagine what any human society would be like if there was no other animal species around. Imagination aside, the fact seems to be that no such society has ever existed, that “human and other animals have evolved together and [...] influenced not only each other’s development, but also the form taken by society” (Carter and Charles 2011, 20), and that all existing societies consist of

and are shaped by intricate webs of human–animal relationships. In line with this, Gruen (2015, 63–64) has argued that

Our relationships with human and animal others co-constitute who we are and how we configure our identities and agency, even our thoughts and desires. We can’t make sense of living without others, and that includes other animals. We are entangled in complex relationships, and rather than trying to accomplish the impossible by pretending we can disentangle, we would do better to think about how to be more perceptive [...] to the deeply entangled relationships we are in.

Whether one thinks of international relations as something occurring within the context of a world society, in the interactions among separate societies or states, and/or in the relations among individuals acting independently or on behalf of others, webs of complex human–animal relationships can be argued to be internal to and partly constitutive of it. And, even if many of the relationships in question are power relations that leave animals with little (if any) control over their own lives, IR scholars can at a minimum consider making sincere attempts at identifying and acknowledging their contributions as co-participants in whatever aspect of international relations they are concerned with. In the context of war, for instance, Cudworth and Hobden (2015) have gone beyond treating “military animals” as mere “objects” to conceive of them as active contributors to the formation of distinct human–animal communities.

More importantly, animals can be considered to matter in the sense that they are individually important in, of, and for themselves in general as well as within the context of international relations. This would follow from a recognition of animals being sentient or conscious creatures with a subjective experience of their own lives and the world—implying, for instance, that they have the capacity to experience satisfaction, pleasure, joy, and happiness on the one hand, and frustration, fear, pain, and death on the other. Contrary to how Descartes and many others have conceived of animals as mere “machines,” there now exists an abundance of research within cognitive ethology that unequivocally confirms the Darwinian principle of evolutionary continuity and concludes that animals have rich emotional lives, advanced intelligence, sophisticated communication systems, and complex social lives (Bekoff 2002; de Waal 2016). As noted by Bekoff and Pierce with regard to animal sentience as such:

During the 1960s sentience was treated with considerable skepticism. Animal sentience throughout vertebrate taxa is now a well-accepted fact, and the focus of discussion has shifted to just how far, taxonomically, sentience might reach, with the answer being much further than anyone would have guessed. For example, scientists have gathered evidence for sentience in octopuses, squids, crabs, reptiles, amphibians, and fishes. (2017, 11)

If this is acknowledged, then IR scholars can potentially seek to incorporate how animals experience international relations in their knowledge production. That international relations matter to animals should be absolutely clear, because their lives are significantly affected by more or less every aspect of them. To incorporate their experiences can be more challenging, because they do not verbally share them with us in a language that we easily understand. However, this does not imply that “we can’t work to see things from the perspective of nonhumans” (Gruen 2015, 24) and get some kind of access to their experiences. In this connection, cognitive ethology has already produced a lot of knowledge concerning other animal species and their behavior; new methodologies for the study of human–animal relations are being developed (Buller 2015; Hamilton and Taylor 2017); and one’s ability to access animal experiences through attunement to multiple modalities of communication, “biocentric anthropomorphism” (Bekoff 2007, 122–26), and “cognitive empathy” (Gruen 2015) can be trained. Even if

one cannot obtain a complete knowledge of the experiences of any sentient being (humans included), sincere attempts to include animal experiences in accounts of international relations hold out the promise for a more comprehensive and perhaps better understanding of it—including, not least, with regard to the incredible amount of violence and sentient suffering that is internal to and underpins much of international relations.²⁰

Furthermore, if animal sentience is acknowledged, then IR scholars can also consider if this should have implications for how we relate to the positions that animals currently occupy in international relations. Within the field of animal ethics, for instance, there is a growing consensus on sentience being morally relevant, and that this should have implications for how humans relate to animals.²¹ From [Bentham \(1789\)](#) to [Singer \(1975\)](#), utilitarian thinkers have been concerned with animal suffering and argued that the interests of all sentient beings should be granted equal consideration in moral deliberations. Beginning with [Regan \(1983\)](#), rights-based theories have argued that animals not only make moral claims on humans but possess moral rights that must be respected.²² Furthermore, the moral significance of sentience is integral to the application of the feminist “ethics of care” to animals ([Donovan and Adams 2007](#)), and respect for each individual sentient being as an end in itself is a core element of not only [Nussbaum’s \(2006\)](#) capabilities approach to justice, but also efforts to rethink ethical traditions that have historically excluded animals from direct moral consideration.²³ Despite the growing consensus, the ethical schools in question differ with regard to the moral obligations that are seen to follow from animal sentience—ranging from a duty to improve the welfare of animals within the context of their uses as means to human ends on the one hand, to a duty to abolish all human uses of animals on the other ([Francione and Garner 2010](#)).

From within the rights-based tradition, many scholars have argued that moral rights and obligations should be translated into legal rights and protection. In this connection, it can initially be noted that most countries have today legally recognized animals as sentient beings. While this is explicitly or implicitly done in animal welfare legislation in most cases ([Blattner 2019a](#)), some legal entities have done so in their civil codes or the like. A case in point is the EU, which in 2008 included it as a general principle in the Lisbon Treaty ([Nurse 2019](#), 38–43). Irrespective of such recognition, however, animals continue to be covered by laws related to property, which implies that they are constituted as exploitable, alienable, tradable, and killable ([Sowery 2018](#)). In consequence, animals receive only limited protection as “living properties” through what tends to be weak, exemptible, and poorly enforced animal welfare-cum-use legislation. While many legal scholars argue that animal sentience requires a significant strengthening of existing legislation, others go further to argue that the legal status of animals should be changed from property to personhood—this, either for all animals based on sentience as the sole criterion or for some animals based on sentience supplemented with certain cognitive criteria ([Wise 2000](#)). Internationally, calls have been made for the establishment of an “international treaty for animal welfare” ([Favre 2016](#); [Brels 2017](#)) or a “universal animal rights declaration” ([Peters 2018](#)), while Blattner has not only explored how extraterritorial jurisdiction can be used to protect animals better, but also proposed for animals to be recognized as working subjects and service providers in international trade law ([Blattner 2019b, 2019c](#)). Furthermore, calls have also been made for indi-

²⁰ This would at least be the case if one to some extent accepts the basic premise of standpoint epistemology ([Harding 2003](#)). On standpoint theory applied to animals, see [Best \(2014\)](#) and [Donovan \(2006\)](#).

²¹ For a good introduction to animal ethics, see [Gruen \(2011\)](#).

²² While some consider certain rights (e.g., the rights to life and liberty) to be inviolable ([Cavaliere 2001](#); [Francione 2008](#); [Steiner 2008](#)), others use cognitive complexity criteria to argue that animals do not have the same rights and/or the same rights of equal value as humans ([Warren 1997](#); [DeGrazia 2002](#); [Cochrane 2012](#)).

²³ See e.g., [Korsgaard \(2018\)](#) with regard to Kantian ethics.

vidual welfare considerations to be injected into international wildlife law, which is conventionally oriented toward conservation at the species level (Scholtz 2019).

Beyond possible moral and legal implications, several political scientists have argued that the sentience of animals should have more comprehensive political implications. By the time the field of Human–Animal Studies had been established, Garner (2002, 7) could rather unproblematically state that “[t]he issue of human/animal relationships [...] has been virtually ignored by the political studies community.” Since then, however, the Aristotelian legacy in political science has been forcefully challenged, and there is now a steadily growing body of scholarship on “politics and animals.”²⁴ Much of this is undoubtedly internal to what is referred to as the “political turn” in animal ethics (Garner and O’Sullivan 2016), which consists of explicit engagements with the political dimension of claims related to all sentient beings having moral worth and rights that should be acknowledged and protected.

In *Zoopolis*, for instance, Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011, 1) offer a framework that “takes ‘the animal question’ as a central issue for how we theorize the nature of our political community, and its ideas of citizenship, justice and human rights.” While accepting the core premise of a fairly strong animal rights approach, they move beyond a concern with “negative rights” to consider “what *positive obligations* we may owe to animals” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 6). In this connection, they argue that such obligations are a product not merely of “the intrinsic characteristics of animals (such as their consciousness),” but also of “the more geographically and historically specific relationships that have developed between particular groups of humans and particular groups of animals” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 6). Against this background, they apply rethought versions of the conventional frameworks of “citizenship” and “sovereignty” and argue that domesticated animals should be included as full citizens within existing political communities, wild animals should be constituted as sovereign communities on their own territories, and non-domesticated wild animals residing within human settlements should be recognized as denizens.

A more recent contribution is *Sentientist Politics*, where Cochrane (2018) takes issue with attempts to incorporate animals within the confines of the existing states system and argues that a “sentientist cosmopolitan democracy” will better protect “the moral worth and rights of all sentient creatures” (Cochrane 2018, 3). Despite the significant differences between *Zoopolis* and *Sentientist Politics*—including with regard to the underlying theories of animal rights, and the positive obligations that humans are seen to owe to different animals within the respective political orders—many will likely regard both as utterly “utopian.” On their part, Donaldson and Kymlicka could not disagree more and argue that theirs is rather “a case of theory catching up with the practice of thoughtful ecologists, animal advocates, and animal lovers of various stripes” (2011, 16). In contrast, when comparing his own theory with Garner’s (2013) earlier and explicitly “non-ideal” one, Cochrane (2018, 10–11) acknowledges that it is “far more utopian in its ambitions,” and states that “[i]t belongs to those theories that John Rawls has labelled as searching for a ‘realistic utopia’.”

Whether the quest is for a new “ideal” or “non-ideal” political order, most scholars involved in the “political turn” in animal ethics are driven by a commitment to the idea that animals have intrinsic moral worth and at least some rights that should be acknowledged and protected. In this way, they are part of a much broader trend whereby steadily more humans and societies are concluding that animals matter as individual sentient beings and that this should have implications for how we organize ourselves politically, socially, and economically. The global animal advocacy movement is central to this, as are the previously mentioned efforts to

²⁴ For overviews, see Ahlhaus and Niesen (2015), Donaldson and Kymlicka (2017), and Hamilton (2018).

introduce animal-related legislation and standards at different levels of political organization. Most of the latter is currently done in terms of “animal welfare” rather than “animal rights,” and while the part of the animal advocacy movement oriented toward “sustainable” or “humane” use of animals is positive to that, animal liberationists keep pushing for the abolishment of all animal use.²⁵ Irrespective of such differences, the overall trend in question seems set to continue, and it can potentially make sense for IR scholars to begin exploring the impacts it might or should have on various aspects of international relations.

Returning to the political science scholarship discussed above, its strong reliance on liberal political theory can potentially be considered a significant limitation. That the question of “how political communities ought to govern their relations with non-human animals” can be approached from a range of theoretical perspectives is clear from an earlier book by [Cochrane \(2010\)](#), where he explored this in terms of utilitarianism, liberalism, communitarianism, Marxism, and feminism. Beyond extending an ethics of care and standpoint theory to animals, feminist scholars have been centrally concerned with interrogating various dualisms (man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, and human/animal) within Western thought and analyzing the ways in which the oppression and exploitation of women and animals have been interlinked ([Adams and Donovan 1995](#); [Adams and Gruen 2014](#); [Cudworth 2016](#), 39). On their part, Marxist scholars have both analyzed domesticated animals as slave labor and part of the proletarian class and made sense of today’s intensive exploitation of such animals as workers and commodities as a product of the quest for profit within the global capitalist system ([Murray 2011](#); [Sanbonmatsu 2011](#); [Painter 2016](#)).²⁶ More broadly, standpoint theory, intersectionality analysis, and a focus on the role played by the structures of capitalism in maintaining the entangled oppression of humans and animals are integral components of Critical Animal Studies, which draws also on critical theory, anarchist thought, and an abolitionist animal rights perspective when producing knowledge in support of a radical form of politics oriented toward not merely animal liberation but “total liberation” ([Best 2014](#); [Nocella et al. 2014](#); [Sorensen 2014b](#); [Nibert 2017](#); [Taylor and Twine 2014](#)).

In addition to this, there is an emergent body of political science scholarship drawing on a yet wider set of theories ([Grant and Jungkunz 2016](#); [Woodhall and Garmendia de Trindade 2017](#)). This includes work framed in terms of “biopolitics,” which either extends [Foucault’s \(2010\)](#) conception of it as “a modality of power that utilizes an array of technologies and discourses to address biological life and population as an object” to interrogate human (ab)uses of animals ([Wadiwel 2018](#), 81) or extends [Agamben’s \(2004\)](#) conception of it as an “anthropological machine” of differentiation that “constantly produces a violent division between the human and the nonhuman” ([Wadiwel 2018](#), 83) to interrogate the exclusion from society and politics of not merely animalized humans but also animalized animals. The latter connects with work known as “posthumanist” which, in the context of animal studies, seeks to not merely deconstruct the “ontological hierarchy between the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’ (and the animality of the human),” but also explore the implications and possibilities that follows from reconceiving the “human” as something always already *becoming* within both a multiplicity of relations with “other forms of life that live and die as we do” and the “semiotic systems and codes [...] that make the world cognitively available to us in the first place” ([Wolfe 2018](#),

²⁵The activism on the part of the latter has challenged powerful interests within the “animal–industrial complex” ([Twine 2013](#)) and increasingly been criminalized through the terrorism discourse ([Sorensen 2014a](#)).

²⁶Note that there is next to no focus on animals as anything but resources and commodities within liberal economic theory. For an exception, see McMullen’s ethics-informed call for a “change [in] the character of the economy for animals, while retaining the responsiveness and productivity of our current market institutions” ([2016](#), 4).

357–58).²⁷ The ethico-political difference that parts of this work make can be briefly indicated with reference to Calarco’s (2015) account of three different ways of conceptualizing the human–animal distinction. In this connection, much of the work discussed earlier in this section exemplify an “identity approach,” with sentience treated as a fundamental and ethically relevant *similarity* between humans and animals that should have legal and political implications (e.g., extension of rights to animals). In contrast, a “difference approach” associated primarily with Derrida (2008) and Wolfe (2010, 2013) emphasizes the heterogeneities among humans and animals alike and nurtures a relational “ethics of difference” centered on encounters with and responsibilities for “singular Others” (whether human or animal). Finally, an “indistinction approach” associated with scholars such as Deleuze (Beaulieu 2011) and Haraway (2008) points to ways in which “human beings are like animals” and “animals manifest their own forms of agency, creativity, potentiality, and resistance” and seeks to both challenge “structures of power [...] perpetuating violence against animals” and create new “ontologies and ways of thinking” that can lead to “alternative, less violent ways of living with and among animals” (Calarco 2015, 56, 63). If “politics itself is [currently] a product of the anthropological machine” (Oliver 2009, 229), then such new “ways of living” will necessarily imply a reconceptualization of the political.²⁸

While much of the very limited and recent IR literature on animals as something else than natural resources or biodiversity sources has been inspired by posthumanist thinking (e.g., Cudworth and Hobden 2011, 2014, 2015; Youatt 2014; Cudworth, Hobden, and Kavalski 2018; Leep 2018; Fishel 2019), the diversity of theoretical engagements with animals and human–animal relations in political science can serve as a source of inspiration for IR scholars to consider how both mainstream and less conventional IR theories can be refashioned in ways enabling an engagement with them in the context of international relations. Furthermore, just like political scientists have fully acknowledged that scholarship within other disciplines has “touched upon many political themes and [...] re-politicized many naturalized dimensions of the human–animal relationship” (Boyer et al. 2015 2), it is clear that much scholarship on animals and human–animal relations within other fields touches also upon central IR themes. While this certainly concerns the disciplines highlighted by Boyer et al. (i.e., sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history), it is also the case with regard to fields such as geography, criminology, law, and psychology.²⁹ Against this background, there are plenty of opportunities for IR scholars to engage with and draw inspiration from existing non-IR scholarship when considering to take animals and human–animal relations seriously in their own work on whatever aspect of international relations it might be.

Concluding Encouragement

While it is clear that IR scholars have paid minimal attention to animals and human–animal relations until now, this essay has argued that there is no good reason to why this cannot and should not change: If we look, then we can see animals within all spheres of international relations; if we make a sincere and empathic attempt, then we can develop a fairly good sense of how various animals are affected by and experience international relations; and if we “must not endure so very well the injustice that does not affect” ourselves,³⁰ then we might have

²⁷ These two elements correspond respectively to what Ginn (2018) calls a “critical anti-humanist” and “ontological-ethical” way of doing posthumanism.

²⁸ On the politics of posthumanism, see also Cudworth and Hobden (2018).

²⁹ In addition to work cited earlier, recent overviews include Taylor and Fitzgerald (2018), Taylor and Sutton (2018), Keane and Howell (2019), and Gibbs (2020).

³⁰ The quote is from Kim Wingerei’s translation of Arnulf Øverland’s poem “Du må ikke sove” (You must not sleep) of 1936 (<https://kimwingerei.com/arnulf-overland>; accessed July 7, 2019).

an ethical responsibility related to the rather horrible fate imposed on so many animals within the context of international relations. The neglect of animals and human–animal relations is far from innocent, as it silently consents and contributes to reproduce a world in which animals are subjected to forms of treatment that are no sentient being worthy. Rather than doing this, IR scholars are hereby strongly encouraged to start taking animals seriously and contribute not only to the steadily growing body of academic scholarship on human–animal relations, but perhaps also to make life far better for *all* sentient beings sharing planet Earth.

That said, I have no naïve expectation of IR scholars quickly acting upon this and becoming concerned with animals and human–animal relations in the context of international relations. No, quite a few scholars will likely argue that this simply falls outside the scope of IR—this, as if the scope of any discipline has ever been or should be set in stone and beyond contestation and change. Others might see the relevancy of animals and human–animal relations for the study of international relations, but think that it hardly can be of great significance—this, as if such thinking can make much sense before the potential significance in question has been thoroughly explored. Yet others might react negatively to the normative dimension of my call for animals and human–animal relations to be taken seriously—this, as if any piece of IR scholarship can be considered non-normative in all respects. And, among scholars having no problem with a certain explicit dose of normativity, some might consider there to be much human suffering and inter-human injustice requiring our attention first—this, as if one cannot be concerned with multiple sufferings and injustices at the same time and perhaps also explore ways in which they can be interrelated. More generally, some might simply feel disturbed by thinking about humans and animals as something more and/or other than “human” and “animal” respectively, as this easily challenges not only what we have come to think ourselves to be, but also so much else that we tend to take for granted in our everyday lives. Despite all of this, I am confident that it is but a matter of time before animals and human–animal relations will be taken seriously also in the study of international relations, and my modest hope is for this essay to contribute toward this end.

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