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See table of contents

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Article abstract

This discussion examines the plausibility of applying an oppression framework to the case of nonhuman animals. I identify two conceptions of oppression, which I call the *social group conception* and the *ideological conception*. The former is the standard account of oppression advanced by feminist philosophers. On this account, the existence of social groups (gender groups, racial groups) is a necessary condition of oppression. The second approach, which is also drawn from Marxist analysis and critical theory, treats oppression as "pejorative" ideology which is both epistemically and morally criticizable. I argue that the application of the social group conception to nonhuman animals faces explanatory and conceptual obstacles. While the application of the ideological conception is more straightforward, it is difficult to articulate an effective notion of ideology critique for the case of nonhuman animals.

OPPRESSION AND NONHUMAN ANIMALS

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ABSTRACT:

This discussion examines the plausibility of applying an oppression framework to the case of nonhuman animals. I identify two conceptions of oppression, which I call the *social group conception* and the *ideological conception*. The former is the standard account of oppression advanced by feminist philosophers. On this account, the existence of social groups (gender groups, racial groups) is a necessary condition of oppression. The second approach, which is also drawn from Marxist analysis and critical theory, treats oppression as "pejorative" ideology which is both epistemically and morally criticizable. I argue that the application of the social group conception to nonhuman animals faces explanatory and conceptual obstacles. While the application of the ideological conception is more straightforward, it is difficult to articulate an effective notion of ideology critique for the case of nonhuman animals.

RÉSUMÉ :

Cet article examine la plausibilité de l'application du cadre de l'oppression au cas des animaux non-humains. J'identifie deux conceptions de l'oppression, que j'appelle la *conception de groupe social* et la *conception idéologique*. La première est la conception standard de l'oppression avancée par les philosophes féministes. Selon cette conception, l'existence de groupes sociaux (groupes de genre, groupes raciaux) est une condition nécessaire de l'oppression. La deuxième approche, tirée de l'analyse marxiste et de la théorie critique, traite l'oppression comme une idéologie « péjorative » qui est à la fois épistémiquement et moralement critiquable. Je soutiens que l'application de la conception de groupe social aux animaux non-humains rencontre des obstacles explicatifs et conceptuels. Bien que l'application de la conception idéologique soit plus directe, il est difficile d'articuler une notion efficace de critique idéologique pour le cas des animaux non-humains.

INTRODUCTION[1]

Is human mistreatment of nonhuman animals a form of oppression that is analogous to sexism and racism[2]? Lori Gruen argues that the "categories 'woman' and 'animal' serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive 'other' in theoretical discourse (whether explicitly so stated or implied) has sustained human male dominance" (1993, p. 61). She employs Iris Marion Young's pluralistic account to argue that human-animal interactions exemplify "five faces of oppression", namely, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Gruen, 2009; Young, 1990). These faces need not correspond to the deliberate or intentional infliction of suffering on nonhuman animals by human agents. Young argues that oppression is 'structural': it is the product of norms, habits, social meanings, and practices, all of which together constitute the background structures that organize daily life and prescribe interpersonal conduct (1990, pp. 40-42). Indeed, Jason Wyckoff suggests that the lens of structural oppression is necessary to explain the intractability of the mistreatment of nonhuman animals:

> If speciesism is understood to be solely an individual prejudice, a conscious willingness of individual human beings to drastically discount the moral significance of animal suffering and animals' deaths, then the amount of suffering and death that humans inflict on animals is very hard to explain (Wyckoff, 2015, p. 530)[3].

Whether oppression is intentional or structural, it is a "manifestation of hierarchy" between groups (Wyckoff, 2015, p. 540). For example, Young's understanding of oppression *qua* exploitation is derived from the Marxist account of class domination: capitalists exploit workers through a "process of the transfer of the results of [the] labor of one social group to benefit another" (1990, p. 49). It is now common to propose that parallel forms of hierarchy, patriarchy and white supremacy, exist between gender groups and racial groups respectively.

The following discussion evaluates the application of the oppression framework to the case of nonhuman animals. I first identify two possible ways to specify the concept of oppression that I call the *social group conception* and the *ideological conception*. Both are discussed in the literature on oppression, but they are not adequately distinguished. The social group conception corresponds to the standard conception advanced by feminist philosophers (Frye, 1983; Young, 1990; Cudd 2006). On this account, the existence of social groups is a necessary condition of oppression. The ideological conception is also drawn from Marxist analysis and critical theory, but it articulates oppression as "ideology in the pejorative sense" rather than as primarily involving hierarchy between groups (Geuss, 1981; Haslanger, 2017; 2019)[4]. Section 1 outlines the main elements of the social group conception and Section 2 argues that the social group conception is not easily transferable to the case of nonhuman animals. Section 3 turns to the ideological conception. Drawing on a recent discussion by Charles Mills

(2019), I claim that while the application of the ideological conception to the case of nonhuman animals is more straightforward, it is limited in significant respects.

1. THE SOCIAL GROUP CONCEPTION

Prominent feminist philosophers–most famously, Marilyn Frye (1983), Young (1990) and Ann E. Cudd (2006)–provide somewhat different accounts of oppression, but all claim that oppression is distinctive because it is a group-based form of injustice[5]. Frye describes oppression as "an enclosing structure of forces or barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people" (1983, p. 11). Young says that "oppression refers to structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group" (Young, 1990, p. 42). Cudd offers an analysis of the concept of oppression that has four conditions. First, it is a group-based phenomenon that presupposes social groups "whose identity exists apart from the oppressive harm" (2006, p. 25). Second, both material and psychological harms of oppression are experienced in virtue of membership in social groups. The "relations of power" between groups constrain people's access to material resources and their opportunities to develop their capacities (Young, 1990, p. 58). Negative stereotypes that are applied to groups as a whole damage people psychologically through generating experiences of humiliation or shame (Cudd, 2006, pp. 155-186). Third, oppression assumes the existence of another social group that is privileged and benefits from the oppression of a subordinated group (Cudd, 2006, p. 25; Young, 1990, p. 42). Finally, oppressive hierarchies come into existence through force or coercion exercised by the privileged group and remain in place due to the power of the privileged group (Cudd, 2006, p. 25).

The core idea of these approaches–that oppression is a group-based harm–captures injustices that are overlooked by individualistic moral theories. For instance, the rights framework adopted by early feminists aimed to secure equality by extending rights to women and members of other historically marginalized groups. This approach does not capture the systematic, patterned inequalities that affect individuals in virtue of group membership. Frye argues that the harms of oppression are often the result of "cultural and economic forces and pressures" that act as invisible barriers or "wires of a birdcage" (1983, p. 15). They can go unnoticed, or, if they are noticed, they are often welcomed–for example, the door-opening ritual in which men routinely open doors for women (Frye 1983, 13), or the way in which affection is expressed in the context of a heterosexual romantic relationship by a man putting his arm around a woman's shoulders (Voigt, 2020, p. 9). Although door-opening might seem innocuous in isolation (and does not amount to a rights violation), when such rituals are due solely to group membership and are part of a pattern of interpersonal treatment that occurs across all aspects of individual women's lives, they reinforce "a status hierarchy in which the man is the protector and leader, the woman the dependent follower" (Anderson, 1993, pp. 18-19). Similarly, stereotypes and social meanings that are applied to women as a group can be sources of harm that are

distinct from individual rights violations. For instance, impermissible sexual objectification can occur not only by way of the instrumentalization of particular women, but also when 'sex object' status is imposed on women as a group (Jütten, 2016). When the generalization 'women are sex objects' is applied to the whole group, it is a distinct group-based form of injustice.

However, group-based harm is not *sufficient* for oppression. While it may be plausible that men are also confined by Frye's birdcage–that is, there are gender stereotypes that apply to men as group–they do not suffer oppression (Higgins, 2019, pp. 4-6). The social group conception limits the distinctive injustice of oppression to situations in which another social group is benefited. For instance, Young's notions of exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness imply that the privileged group accrues material benefits, typically by the transfer to them of the fruits of the labor of the subordinated group. Similarly, rituals like door-opening which reinforce norms of women's dependency, serve to promote the social and economic privilege of men. Hence, even if some groups, like *men*, are subject to group-based constraints, they do not count as oppressed.

The social group conception illuminates the intractability of oppression. Oppression involves hierarchies of power and status between social groups not merely prejudiced "psychological states of human actors" (Wyckoff, 2015, p. 529). Such hierarchies cannot be modified easily by individuals or institutions. Since they are often structural, they are maintained by norms, habits, and background social practices, and so can persist despite being actively repudiated. Interestingly however, the social group conception does not *entail* the absence of an agent who perpetrates oppression. It is compatible with oppression being perpetrated by group agents who intentionally and coercively subordinate other groups. (Legal systems that officially assign certain groups inferior status would be examples of agent oppression.) Hence, the social group conception is neutral between agent oppression and structural oppression; whether a social arrangement constitutes either or both will depend on how the relevant social groups are understood and how they operate in particular contexts. For instance, since human collective agents often deliberately exercise power over nonhuman animals to promote their own self-interest, the oppression of nonhuman animals could be conceived as a hybrid of agent and structural oppression. The next section examines the assumption that the social group conception is transferable to the case of animal oppression. In particular, do nonhuman animals constitute a social group for purposes of the social group analysis?

2. THE SOCIAL GROUP CONCEPTION AND NONHUMAN ANIMALS

The word 'oppression' has significant rhetorical and condemnatory force. There are groups besides women, such as racial groups, disability groups, and nonhuman animals, that appear to experience analogous forms of oppression. Therefore, it might seem both intuitive and important to employ the conception of oppression that is articulated by Frye, Young and Cudd to explicate how these other groups are also oppressed. As outlined above however, a condition of the

social group conception is that the relevant social groups exist. This section addresses the question of whether the category *nonhuman animal* is a social group. If not, the social group conception cannot be transferred to the case of nonhuman animals.

Philosophers writing about social groups have noted their ubiquity and variety. Brian Epstein observes that there are not only groups but *kinds* of groups:

> Among the kinds of groups are sports teams [of all kinds], research groups, musical groups, pop bands, symphony orchestras, marching bands, social classes, races, genders, demographic cohorts...rioting mobs, marching platoons, processions of mourners,...we could go on and on, listing kinds and sub-kinds (Epstein, 2019, p. 4900).

A preliminary question concerns the metaphysical debate over realism and eliminativism: is the idea of a social group defensible *at all*[6]? More precisely, do groups have a distinct metaphysical status from the individuals that constitute them? Elanor Taylor argues that there are two ways that feminist theories of oppression intersect with the debate over the metaphysics of social groups (Taylor, 2016). The first, which she attributes to Cudd, claims that positing groups is essential for explanatory purposes but does not require an independent ontological commitment to groups (Taylor, 2016, p. 523; Cudd, 2006, p. 46). This approach preserves ontological individualism[7]. The second, which she attributes to Young, is committed to an ontology of groups and hence rejects ontological individualism. Taylor questions both approaches. She analyzes the ontological commitment to groups as a form of metaphysical strong emergentism, a theory that is subject to plausible objections (Taylor, 2016, pp. 531-533). Taylor also questions Cudd's claim that positing social groups (as opposed to *beliefs* about groups) is essential and indispensable for explaining phenomena like the apparent group-based ritual of door-opening. Taylor claims that if there is a plausible explanation of apparently group-based phenomena exclusively in terms of the activities and beliefs of individuals, positing groups might be 'pragmatically valuable' but not indispensable (Taylor, 2016, p. 525)[8].

I cannot address this issue further here, so I will assume for the sake of argument that social groups exist. Nevertheless, Taylor's discussion brings out that there are two important questions to be addressed about whether nonhuman animals constitute social groups. The first is the explanatory question of whether positing nonhuman animal groups is indispensable for explaining the injustices perpetrated on nonhuman animals. The second is a metaphysical question, not of whether groups in general exist, but rather of whether aggregates of nonhuman animals count as social groups. As Amie Thomasson puts it, even if "the question 'are there any social groups' may be given an easy and obvious answer: 'yes'...that doesn't answer the question: What are social groups?" (2019, p. 4833). In other words, what conditions does an aggregate of individuals have to satisfy to count as a social group and do nonhuman animals satisfy these conditions?

Consider the explanatory question first. As discussed above, feminist philosophers introduced the social group conception of oppression to explain patterns of injustice that affect women as a group and (by hypothesis) cannot be adequately captured by individualistic moral theories. Is it similarly indispensable to posit a group *nonhuman animal* to explain the injustices suffered by animals? One reason for scepticism is that the category *nonhuman animal* is so broad and diverse that it is questionable whether it is illuminating to employ it without further specification[9]. The category encompasses thousands of biological species and large numbers of different kinds of interactions between animals and humans. The interactions vary according to whether animals are wild or domestic, and there are numerous different cultural and religious norms that govern them. Wyckoff observes that intersectionality arguments can be applied to animals: even "animals that share some feature may have their subordination constructed differently along some other dimension—the guard dog, the seeing-eye dog, the show dog, and the sled dog occupy different roles in the human social world" (2015, p. 537). In short, both the category *nonhuman animal* and the possible forms of human-animal interaction are exceptionally diverse. The nature of the injustices suffered by nonhuman animals differs drastically from context to context. It is implausible therefore that positing a broad group *nonhuman animal*, that is characterized negatively as including all animals not belonging to the species *homo sapiens*, would be indispensable to explain these injustices. It would be more explanatorily powerful to point to human-animal interactions in specific contexts. Further, applying the social group conception to the category *nonhuman animal* would require a complementary privileged group that benefits from the oppression of animals, namely *human being*. While the latter constitutes a biological species, it is neither plausible nor explanatorily helpful to claim that the species corresponds to a single social group.

A more promising hypothesis is that there are smaller aggregates like *domestic animal* or *wild animal* which constitute social groups and are needed to explain the specific contexts in which mistreatment occurs. For example, positing a group *domestic animal* might explain practices that treat certain nonhuman animals as suitable for being held in captivity and cultivated by humans for food. A more fine-grained approach would also allow distinctions to be drawn among human groups to explain differences in human behaviour towards animals, such as between the groups *vegan* and *dairy farmer*. If the language of group is indispensable in such explanations–and is not just convenient shorthand–the metaphysical question arises of whether aggregates of nonhuman animals could be genuine groups. The answer depends first on whether there are restrictions on the kinds of individuals that can constitute a social group. Epstein proposes the following definition: "x is a social group if and only if x is an entity constituted by and only by people" (2019, p. 4914). Thus, although he claims that this definition is "broad and inclusive," it excludes animal groups. But many nonhuman animals live in groups and rely on cooperation with other members of the group for survival: for instance, pods of dolphins and herds of elephants appear to be groups (Ritchie, 2018, p. 14). Moreover, many animals, in particular primates (chimpanzees, orangutans), exhibit sophisticated sociality markers like self-

awareness (Lei, 2023, p. 6). It seems arbitrary to exclude the possibility that animals might be governed by social norms and could, like people, form social groups. Therefore, I will assume that certain aggregates of nonhuman animals could, in principle, constitute groups. What conditions would these aggregates have to meet to count as social groups?

Katherine Ritchie proposes a broad distinction between "organized social groups" (Type 1) and "feature social groups" (Type 2) (2015, p. 314)[10]. Organized groups, such as teams, committees and courts, are characterized by their "structural-functional organization" and the presence of collective intentionality: "individuals are members of organized social groups like teams or committees because of successfully carrying out particular roles (e.g., playing the role of pitcher or treasurer) and perhaps having the right sorts of intentions" (Ritchie, 2015, p. 314). Type 2 social groups such as "racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation groups [seem] to rely on some apparently shared features. For example, features like one's skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and ancestry may be relevant to the way individuals are racialized or categorized in a racial group" (2015, 314). It is possible that aggregates of human beings that are relevant for explaining animal oppression–e.g., *vegan* and *dairy farmer*–could count as Type 1 social groups. It is doubtful however that nonhuman animal groups (with the exception of primates) manifest the collective intentionality that would be sufficient to satisfy the conditions of a Type 1 group. Hence, if animal groups like *domestic animal* or *wild animal* are to count as social groups, they must be Type 2 groups that are delineated on the basis of shared features. I will consider three possible accounts of shared features: biological, psychological and social/normative.

The categories *domestic animal* and *wild animal* are comprised of different species so are unlikely to have shared biological traits. Even if shared physical traits are identified for smaller aggregates like *pods of dolphins* or *factory-farmed animals*, this would not automatically generate a social group. When human beings are classified into categories on the basis of shared biological or physical features, for instance "the set of individuals with a longer second toe, or with hazel eyes" this does not thereby constitute a social group (Thomasson, 2019, p. 4835). An alternative possibility is that the relevant shared feature is psychological, for instance a subjective sense of belonging in a social group, or a shared "sense of identity" (Young, 1990, p. 44). Young says that social groups are "differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices or a way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience" (Young, 1990, p. 43). However, even for human groups like women or racial groups, intersectionality arguments challenge the idea of a shared sense of belonging or "specific affinity" among the members (cf. Stoljar, 2011)[11]. It not impossible that animal groups, like *pods of dolphins* or *factory-farmed animals*, could have shared ways of life or experiences, but any account that relies on such subjective conditions would have to do more to articulate–even in a preliminary way–the common psychological traits that could ground a Type 2 animal social group.

A third alternative is that nonhuman animals can be Type 2 groups in virtue of socially constructed features (cf. Gruen, 2009, p. 167). Ritchie writes that "the feature of being assigned a particular status might be what makes one a member of some racial, gender, or sexual orientation group" (2015, p. 314). For instance, on Sally Haslanger's analysis of gender, (roughly) someone is a woman if and only if they occupy a subordinated position in a social hierarchy and are "marked" for this treatment on the basis of real or imagined female bodily features (Haslanger, 2000, p. 39). This approach has been applied to the case of nonhuman animals. Wyckoff articulates a parallel notion *animal*: (roughly) S is an animal if and only if S's bodily features are presumed to be evidence of non-membership in the species *homo sapiens* and having such features marks S (within a dominant ideology) as suitable to occupy a social position in which S's interests are lesser than those of humans (Wyckoff, 2015, p. 543)[12]. On these accounts, being assigned inferior status in a social hierarchy on the basis of real or perceived bodily features corresponds to the shared social feature that is necessary and sufficient for a Type 2 social group.

However, as Thomasson points out, the socially constructed account involves normative considerations. The concepts *woman* and *animal* pick out the "particular social groups we tend to care about, and that form a prominent role in our lives [and are] distinguished by the relevant norms—not necessarily by a shared feature" (Thomasson, 2019, p. 4841). They are 'target' or 'ameliorative' concepts; they are stipulated precisely because it is useful for promoting social justice to delineate groups that occupy positions of subordination (Haslanger, 2000, p. 36). In fact, because the proposed shared feature is being assigned inferior status on the basis of real or perceived bodily features, the groups *woman* and *animal* would not exist if there was no assignment of inferior status to them– in other words, if their oppression were eliminated. This account of shared features therefore undermines a necessary condition of the social group conception, namely, that the relevant social groups have an "identity that exists apart from the oppressive harm" (Cudd, 2006, p. 25). Young claims that "[t]hough some groups have come to be formed out of oppression, and relations of privilege and oppression structure the interactions between many groups, group differentiation is not itself oppressive" (1990, p. 47). For example, "Roman Catholics are a specific social group, with distinct practices and affinities with one another, but they are no longer an oppressed group" (Young, 1990, p. 47). Thus, on the social group conception, the existence of social groups is logically independent of their oppression, and whether a group is oppressed (or not) depends on historical and social circumstances. This condition is not compatible with the proposed socially constructed account of shared features.

To sum up, I have argued that the application of the social group conception to nonhuman animals faces significant challenges. It is not needed (or even helpful) for explanatory purposes to posit the broad social groups *human animal* or *nonhuman animal*. Even if positing smaller animal groups is needed to explain animal oppression, it is unclear whether the aggregates of individuals in such groups share biological or psychological features that could form the basis of

Type 2 social groups. The hypothesis that there are animal social groups in virtue of shared socially constructed features, like those delineated by the concepts *woman* and *animal*, challenges the condition that social groups must exist apart from the oppression in which they are implicated. While these explanatory and conceptual obstacles may not be philosophically insurmountable, they indicate that there is a burden of proof on proponents of the position that the relationship between human and nonhuman animals is a form of social group oppression.

3. THE IDEOLOGICAL CONCEPTION

I now turn to an alternative analysis, which I will call the *ideological conception*. Under the label 'cultural imperialism', Young identifies a "rather different form of oppression", namely the "universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (1990, p. 58). This form of oppression is close to the notion of ideological oppression that Haslanger has recently drawn from critical theory (2017; 2019). Ideological oppression functions within a social imaginary or cultural technē, which is a "network of social meanings, tools, schemas, heuristics, principles and the like, which we draw on in action and which gives shape to our practices" (Haslanger, 2017, p. 155). It corresponds to an aspect of the social imaginary that is "pejorative" because it "functions to stabilize or perpetuate unjust power or domination, and does so through some form of masking and illusion" (Haslanger, 2017, p. 150). For instance, stereotypes like *Women are submissive* are components of pejorative ideology. They are both morally and epistemically incorrect because they serve to perpetuate male domination over women and to "constrain imaginative possibilities by presenting contingent social features of the world as natural, immutable features" (Wyckoff, 2015, p. 545). The ideological conception thus emphasizes how pejorative aspects of the social imaginary legitimate and 'naturalize' unjust power dynamics. It does not focus directly on hierarchies between pre-existing social groups.

Haslanger distinguishes between repression that is "forced on people through coercive measures" and ideological oppression (2017, p. 149). She employs what social psychologists call 'mindshaping' to explain how our mental lives become enculturated and "fluent" in the tools and social meanings that constitute the social imaginary (Haslanger, 2019). Due to the mechanism of mindshaping, ideologies such as gender oppression not only appear natural but *are* natural. People's mental lives are dictated by the norms, expectations and habits that are instilled by the ideology in which they are embedded, including pejorative ideology. People have "dispositions to participate in the practices fluently [but also] to correct those who don't" (2019, p. 19). They treat the social meanings with which they are fluent, even if these are unjust, as correct. There are also significant incentives, both psychological and social, to conform to pejorative ideology. For instance, acting in accordance with the social imaginary is a precondition to functioning in cooperative interactions in the social world (Haslanger, 2019). The ideological conception therefore provides a different diagnosis from that of the social group conception of why oppression is so

intractable. Oppression is especially persistent and difficult to dislodge, despite compelling moral arguments, precisely because it is perpetuated *non-coercively* through mindshaping. Gender oppression, at least in a contemporary Western context, persists because "men and women hardly notice their participation in practices that sustain men's privilege and power" and enact it "unthinkingly or even willingly" (Haslanger, 2017, p. 149). Ideology continually perpetuates itself.

If pejorative ideology is responsible (at least to an extent) for the way cognition operates, the question arises of how to extricate people's mental lives from it. A crucial aim of the ideological conception is to identify what is required for *ideology critique*. The goal is "to theorize the possibilities of emancipatory change–which is... the ultimate point in the left tradition of... ideology critique" (Mills, 2019, p. 65). One way to effect ideology critique would be to recommend that people individually engage in strategies to revise their own attitudes–e.g., their implicit biases–or to undermine other people's complicity in pejorative ideology. For instance, Haslanger argues that oppressive stereotypes like *Women are submissive* typically implicate false claims about natures: they "introduce implicitly into the common ground a proposition about how...[people] *are* by nature or intrinsically" (Haslanger, 2011, p. 193). In response to others' use of such stereotypes, people should repudiate the implicatures using the device of "metalinguistic negation" which "blocks the falsehood from entering the common ground" (Haslanger, 2011, p. 189). Another form of ideology critique aims to modify aspects of the cultural technē itself. For instance, Haslanger employs Bourdieu's distinctions between *doxa*, *orthodoxy* and *heterodoxy* to explain how social meanings that are embedded in the pejorative ideology can be challenged and revised. The category *doxa* corresponds to the "available social meanings in a context," (2019, p. 15) namely to the cultural technē with which we are fluent. *Orthodoxy* comprises the "(dominant) set of attitudes that are taken in that context to be correct or appropriate" (Haslanger, 2019, p. 15) and *heterodoxy* is the set of attitudes that challenges the orthodoxy. Within both orthodoxy and heterodoxy, there can be both public and hidden "transcripts" (Haslanger, 2019, p. 17). Hidden transcripts can be produced by resistance to domination by subordinated groups but can also result from the interplay of different, competing social practices, e.g. "Black feminists created hidden transcripts that challenged the male dominance of the mainstream Civil Rights Movement" (Haslanger, 2019, p. 20).

The account of ideological oppression and the associated strategies of ideology critique have been applied to the case of nonhuman animals. Wyckoff argues that "animal advocates must put pressure on the linguistic norms that govern speech about animals, lest they reproduce in their advocacy the same oppressive ideology that they seek to challenge. What is needed is some form of *ideology critique* wherein the concept of animality is itself interrogated" (2015, p. 536). In other words, heterodox transcripts should be developed by re-articulating the concept *animal* so that it functions to promote social justice. This presupposes a distinction between 'manifest' and 'ameliorative' concepts (Haslanger, 2005).

The former are the concepts that people actually have in mind, which seem natural and correct due to the molding effects of pejorative ideology. These are part of orthodoxy and serve to perpetuate the status quo. For instance, submissiveness may be a component of the manifest concept *woman*–it may be one of the features people have in mind when they refer to women. Stereotypes that employ the manifest concept reinforce ideological oppression, for instance by implicating the false claim that women are submissive by nature. Similarly, the concepts *pet* and *meat* are manifest concepts regarding animality that function "so as to reproduce the systemic oppression of the beings referred to in that discourse" (Wyckoff, 2015, p. 541). In contrast, ameliorative concepts function to promote the "fight against injustice" (Haslanger, 2000, p. 36). Wyckoff offers the ameliorative concept *animal* both to accommodate the diversity and intersectionality of the social positions occupied by nonhuman animals and to reveal that these social positions correspond to unjust subordination.

As Wyckoff's analysis shows, certain elements of ideology critique–particularly the introduction of heterodox ameliorative concepts to replace orthodox manifest concepts–are nicely applicable to the case of nonhuman animals. However, other features of the ideological conception seem less easily transferable. In a response to Haslanger's work, Charles Mills argues that the ideological conception may be ill-suited to the case of nonhuman animals (2019). Broadly, Mills' challenge is threefold. First, he points out that beliefs in the moral status of nonhuman animals that justify their subordination are more entrenched, foundational and "part of the background" than beliefs that underpin other forms of oppression:

> Precisely because [speciesism] can be found in social systems premodern and modern, slave and free, capitalist and socialist, oligarchical and democratic, its immunity to questioning seems all the more guaranteed. This is not one possible way of organizing society among other alternatives; this is simply the way things are (Mills, 2019, p. 68).

This means that while the epistemic critique demanded by ideological oppression is not impossible in the case of nonhuman animals, it will be quite difficult for it to gain purchase. Mills observes that "we fall short of the epistemic ideal of the open-minded cognizer who calibrates her belief to evidence and sound inference, and is ready to interrogate her inherited conceptual schemas" even more so than for other oppressive ideologies (2019, p. 68). Further, ideology critique depends on dominant groups being at least minimally receptive to a challenge to their group interests. Given the "foundational" nature of the subordination of nonhuman animals, of which human beings are the beneficiaries, humans will be unmotivated to be epistemically open to "recognizing the objective lack of warrant" for this form of subordination (Mills, 2019, p. 66). In other words, although the ideological conception of oppression may offer a persuasive diagnosis of why the oppression of nonhuman animals is entrenched, the epistemic critique required by the ideological conception, which may be (somewhat) achievable for gender and racial oppressions, is more out of reach in this case.

A second challenge focuses on one of central claims of the ideological conception of oppression, namely that mental states and agency, of both the privileged and the subordinated, are thoroughly shaped by ideology (Mills, 2019, p. 64). Haslanger's proposals for emancipatory change assume the potential of members of oppressed groups to effect change through their own agency. Drawing on their own experiences of subordination, they will be in a position to develop (albeit slowly and only under certain conditions) new labels, cultural tools and social meanings that will create heterodox and hidden transcripts to challenge the orthodoxy. However, as Mills points out, in the case of nonhuman animals, "it is only the cognition and agency of the subordinating (human animal) group that is shaped by ideology, at least directly, not that of the subordinated (nonhuman animal) group themselves" (Mills, 2019, p. 63). This has two consequences. First, the explanatory power of the ideological conception is diminished when it is applied to nonhuman animals. One of the important features of ideological oppression is its explanation of the intractability of oppression: even the subordinated enact oppression "unthinkingly or even willingly" because they do not notice "their participation in practices that sustain [the oppressors'] privilege and power" (Haslanger, 2017, p. 149). If the mental lives of the subordinated are not dictated by ideology, and they do not themselves collude in their own oppression, this explanation of the persistence of oppression loses its force. The second consequence is that the possibilities for emancipatory change offered by ideology critique are much more limited. To the extent that heterodox and hidden transcripts can be developed, this will not be achieved by the oppressed group themselves on the basis of their own experiences of subordination but rather by humans who are "spokespersons" on behalf of nonhuman animals (Mills, 2019, p. 65). If ideology critique in the case of nonhuman animals must rely on human spokespersons, it is unclear how construing the relationship between humans and animals as ideological oppression would serve animal interests more effectively than critiques drawn from (for instance) Kantian or utilitarian moral theories that are also advanced by human spokespersons.

The final point is connected to the first two: an important feature of the ideological conception of oppression is to open conceptual space for oppression that is *non-coercive*. Again, the non-coercive nature of oppression is an important explanation of its intractability. But, as Mills notices, in the case of nonhuman animals, the only minds molded are human minds; "force alone is responsible" for the oppression of nonhuman animals (2019, p. 64). Therefore, a moral critique of the treatment of nonhuman animals that focuses directly on the coercive aspects of this treatment, rather than on ideological oppression, might prove more successful.

CONCLUSION

This discussion raised the question of whether an oppression framework is applicable to the case of nonhuman animals. I distinguished two analyses of oppression that I called the social group conception and the ideological conception. The social group conception requires that social groups exist independently of

the oppressive harm. However, positing animal social groups is problematic for both explanatory and metaphysical reasons. The ideological conception has a more straightforward application to nonhuman animals, and offers promising possibilities, for instance the rearticulation of concepts like *animal* to serve the purpose of justice. Nevertheless, the possibilities for successful ideology critique are more limited in this case than they are for other forms of oppression. Hence, whether oppression is understood as a hierarchy among social groups or as ideological, the oppression framework may be less powerful to serve activism on behalf of animals than critiques based in standard moral theories.

NOTES

[1] For helpful comments on a previous draft, I am grateful to Valéry Giroux, Kristin Voigt and two anonymous reviewers. This paper is a revised version of remarks delivered at a workshop on Speciesism and Other Forms of Discrimination held in 2021 the Centre for Research in Ethics in Montreal. It is limited in scope and does not attempt to deal with the broad literature in animal ethics.

[2] There is a variety of approaches to articulating our moral obligations to nonhuman animals, such as a utilitarian principle of equal consideration of human and nonhuman interests (e.g. Singer, 2023); a Kantian argument that there is an obligation to treat animals with dignity and as ends in themselves (e.g. Korsgaard, 2018); a capabilities approach on which humans are morally required to promote animals' flourishing (Nussbaum, 2022); and an argument based on relationships of empathy and care (Gruen, 2015).

[3] The term 'speciesism' can be understood as "bias in favor of one's own species" (Gruen, 1993, p. 78) or as a moral claim that it is permissible to "give more weight to the interests of humans than to the equal interests of non-humans" (Jaquet, 2022, p. 995). It can also indicate an unacceptable moral hierarchy in which humans subordinate nonhuman animals. Since the term is is contested, I will not use it unless it occurs in a quote from another author.

[4] On my view, it is not essential to the notion of ideological oppression to posit social groups, although ideological oppression may presuppose *beliefs* or *attitudes* about groups or social practices that presuppose such beliefs or attitudes. (I will not argue for this claim explicitly in this paper.)

[5] I do not here provide a full account of these views. For an excellent summary of the social group conception, see Higgins, 2019, pp. 3-6.

[6] See Ritchie's discussion of "Group Realism" versus "Group Eliminativism" (Ritchie, 2015, pp. 310-313).

[7] Ontological individualism is one sub-thesis of methodological individualism. Taylor says that "methodological individualism... is a position about the nature of the social sciences. [It consists of] an explanatory thesis and an ontological thesis. According to the explanatory thesis, in order to explain social phenomena we need only appeal to individuals. According to the ontological thesis, the social world is composed entirely of individuals, and there are no groups or other social entities beyond individuals" (2016, p. 523). On Taylor's interpretation, Cudd adopts the latter but not the former .

[8] There is an issue of whether and how to separate the explanatory thesis from the ontological one, which I cannot explore further here. For instance, one argument for an ontological commitment to social groups is precisely that they are indispensable in our explanations (Ritchie, 2015, pp. 312-313).

[9] Gruen acknowledges this issue. In response, she writes that the category of nonhuman animals "serves a central symbolic role in human social lives and in our self-understanding" and that it has a "social reality, even if not a meaningful biological or conceptual basis, [and can] be thought of as akin to the human social groups" which are "the products of social processes" (2009, p. 167). I discuss below the possibility that nonhuman animal groups are socially constructed.

[10] Epstein criticizes this distinction, including to question how 'feature' should be understood, but I set aside his discussion here (2019, pp. 4901-4903)

[11] We often assume that women or others (e.g., people with disabilities) constitute social groups. But diversity and intersectionality arguments suggest that members of these groups are in fact very different from each other, both socially and psychologically. There appears to be no single feature (universal) that all members have in common. I have argued in previous work that women constitute a group not a heterogeneous aggregate due to participating in a "resemblance structure" that is picked out by a cluster concept (e.g., Stoljar, 2011). Further work would be required to assess whether this approach could be applied to nonhuman animals.

[12] I have omitted additional conditions that Wyckoff includes in his definition (Wyckoff, 2015, pp. 543-544).

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