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Animal Experiments and Animal Rights

Introduction

This chapter explores grass-roots activism as it is associated with other animals in society. Grass-roots activism works at the level of subpolitics (Beck, 1992) rather than at the level of political parties. Grass-roots groups, such as Greenpeace, the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), endeavour to generate public support for campaigns against the ill-treatment of animals. Other grass-roots groups, such as Pro-Test, try to generate public support for the use of animals when it is beneficial to humans (in this case for the use of other animals in experiments). Sociology has a good deal to say about such subpolitical expression. Using sociological perspectives on social movements that organize around specific goals, this chapter explores the ways in which humans have mobilized around issues associated with the human (ab)use of other animals. Although I draw on a number of issues, the main focus of the chapter is on the contentious issue of experiments on other animals. Experiments on other animals are a major focus of political engagement, with campaigning groups advocating for and against such actions. The chapter provides a more in-depth discussion of animal advocacy than that provided in Chapter 4 and draws out some of the policy issues associated with such experiments. Furthermore, the issue of experiments on other animals draws us back to the notion of the objectivity of sociology, which will be the main focus of the final chapter of this book. Before I turn to philosophical positions on the advocacy of other animals (which is a major focus of grass-roots activism) I want to start with a brief discussion about experiments on other animals. In order to do this I utilize the sociology of risk, as ideas about risks to human...
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health have been most often used to justify experiments on other animals.

Experiments on other animals

Annually an average of 115 million living vertebrate other animals are used in experiments worldwide (Taylor, Gordon, Langley and Higgins, 2008, p. 327). This staggering figure can only be estimated as the majority of countries (79%) do not publish details of the number of other animals used (Taylor, Gordon, Langley and Higgins, 2008, p. 327). However, using statistical calculations Katy Taylor and her colleagues estimate that the USA, Japan, China, Australia, France, Canada, the UK, Germany, Taiwan and Brazil use the highest number of other animals in experiments (2008, p. 327). In 2005 in the European Union (EU) alone, 12.2 million vertebrate living other animals were used in experiments (Commission of the European Communities, 2007), and in 2010 3.6 million other animals were used in experiments in the UK, representing a 3 per cent increase on the figure for the previous year (Home Office, 2011, p. 8). These figures only cover mainly vertebrate other animals; there are many additional invertebrate other animals who are not included in the statistics as they are not considered to be ‘animals’ for the purposes of ‘protection’ (Peggs, 2010) (see below).

The use of other animals in experiments is one element of the overall project of human progress. For hundreds of years other animals have been treated as resources for human progress (Franklin, 1999), for example in the reproduction and manipulation of other animals for human food (Chapter 6), and none more so than in the advancements that are associated with biomedical research designed for human health benefits. To be sure, experiments on other animals do not solely focus on biomedical research as globally other animals are used to determine the effects and safety of a range of products, processes and manipulations associated with warfare, accidental damage, food processing, cosmetic enhancements and genetics (see Grant, 2006). To use the EU as an example, permitted purposes for such experiments are the development, manufacture and testing of drugs, foodstuffs and other products; disease prevention, diagnosis or treatment; assessment, discovery, regulation or modification of physiological conditions in humans, other animals and plants; and the protection of the natural environment (Council of the European Communities, 1986, Articles 3a and 3b) (for further discussion, see Peggs, 2010). Using other animals in any form of experiment is usually controversial. Here I concentrate on biomedical experiments on