Institutional Logics and Social Movement Transformation: The Case of Animal Protectionism*

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* Please do not cite or quote without permission. After all, this paper was written during my first semester in graduate school and should therefore be treated tenderly. It lacks sufficient empirical evidence, polished theoretical arguments, and citations for many of the ideas discussed herein. However, criticisms are welcome and encouraged by the author at jlarson@u.arizona.edu.
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ABSTRACT
The history of the Animal Protection Movement is discussed as a case of social movement transformation. Transformation here refers to significant shifts in the goals, strategies, tactics, and membership of the movement and that I suggest reflect the shifting institutional bases of the movement. What emerges as a reform movement of aging elite evangelicals in the early- to mid-Nineteenth Century England, by the 1960s becomes a radical abolitionist movement of young middle-class women in the U.S.. The analysis is exploratory and incomplete, but raises unanswered questions in the social movements literature about why a movement changes over time or differs across geographic (and institutional) space.

That the women’s movement is dominated by women is no surprise. That most US civil rights movement participants were black also makes intuitive sense. We may also readily accept that the environmental movement is middle class, the labor movement is working class, and the temperance and anti-abortion movements are Christian. But what about the Animal Protection Movement? Today’s animal rights activist is a young, vegetarian, nonconformist raised on 1960s movements for civil rights, women’s liberation, and environmentalism. In contrast, nineteenth century animal welfarists were conservative, Christian elites—more closely aligned with the temperance movement than the women’s suffrage movement. Animal protectionists have changed; but, what about animal protectionism?

Our theories of social movements account for changes in movements over time by the rise and decline of resources, the opening and closing of political opportunities, or the growth and decay of some exogenous structural strain. But these theories only speak to the fluctuations of mass mobilization and highly publicized protest activity—the peaks of protest activity. What they do not address is the transformation of social movements throughout their lifetimes, such as the animal protectionist movement moving from the right to the left of the political spectrum between 1850 and today. In this paper I aim to extend our
theorizing of social movements to long-term transformations of movements by focusing on the history of the animal protection movement. The question is why has the face of the movement transformed from being conservative, elite and Christian to being liberal, secular and middle class?

As already mentioned, much of our current understanding of who dominates movements (e.g., women in the women’s movement, African Americans in the civil rights movement) can be answered intuitively. Our intuitive explanation begins with an assumption that we can identify ideological affinities between group characteristics (e.g., gender) and a movement’s grievances (e.g., equal rights for women). Our sociological understanding of who will participate in social movements considers such things as one’s network ties to the movement, ties that may dissuade against participation, prior histories of activism, and the recognition and embrace of collective identities. We can infer how these understandings would explain variance of group participation over time. Our intuitive sense is that either group ideologies or movement ideologies change over time—e.g., that conservative Christian women no longer oppose animal suffering, or that the animal protection movement no longer espouses the same ideology that it once did. We have no convincing reason to believe the former, but, as we shall see, the change in movement ideology explanation does have validity. Our sociological knowledge suggests that networks and collective identities change. In the case of animal protectionism we would expect that movement networks began to branch into left-leaning networks and eventually altered the movement’s collective identity enough that conservative Christians no longer identified with it. Nevertheless, we have no explanation of the forces that might produce such a shift. It is this gap in our understanding that we can begin to explore here.

**DATA AND METHODS**

Accounts of the animal protection movement—which is first identified near the beginning of the nineteenth century—are drawn mostly by historians. Charles Niven (1967), William Shultz (1924), and Richard French (1975) each chronicle animal protectionism in its early days, but are unable to consider the important shift in the movement that we are interested in here that took place around 1975, after these books were written. Coral Lansbury (1985), Nicolaas Rupke (1987), and Moira Ferguson (1998) have the advantage of a later publication date, but nonetheless focus on the same early days of the movement, to the exclusion of the modern animal rights campaign. Anthropologist Susan Sperling (1988) takes the first major step toward an empirical explanation of the movement with a diachronic, comparative approach in which she
makes an extended argument for the continuity of nineteenth century Victorian anti-vivisectionism and 1970s American animal rights. This connection is important for the case I will make here that animal welfare, anti-vivisectionism, and animal rights can best be understood as one movement—the animal protection movement. Sociologists James Jasper and Dorothy Nelkin (1992) offer the next and most extensive attention to animal rights as it is situated within the animal protection movement. In their study, the animal rights “crusade” is the radical wing of the movement, and receives the lion’s share of their analysis at the expense of the interaction between the conservative animal “welfarists” and more radical animal “rightists.” In short what we lack is a well developed account of the ongoing interaction within the movement, which limits the extent to which we can draw conclusions about movement transformation.

For the purposes of this paper I make use of the existing research on the animal protection movement to piece together what we currently know about its transformation from its nineteenth century Victorian roots. From this historical account I discuss the implications and possibilities for future research of social movements and their transformations over time. Have we given sufficient attention to ideologies for movement emergence and recruitment? What prevents or allows social movements to grow into new populations, new networks? Is there something inherent in existing networks or populations (e.g., ideologies), or do homogenous movements tend to reproduce themselves by drawing groups of similar activists into them? These are some of the questions we should bear in mind as we study movement transformations.

**The Animal Protection Movement—History**

Though animal protectionism has been traced to the likes of Pythagorus, St. Francis of Assisi, Leonardo da Vinci (Niven 1967), and to colonial American common laws (Shultz 1924), the first formal organization of this ideology dates to England in 1824. Begun by a group of aristocratic elite men, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) first targeted dubious cases of “unnecessary” cruelty against carriage horses and farm animals (distinctly working class targets), and passed an early resolution proclaiming its fundamental ties to Christian principals (Niven 1967). Early animal protectionists generally accepted the use of animals, but campaigned for their more humane treatment. Analysts root the emergence of the movement in major structural shifts in England at the time. As the country led the world in industrialization, and as it became more urbanized, people relied less on animals as tools of labor than as pets for companionship. Parallel
developments occurred in the United States where, in 1866, the American
SPCA was founded. American adherents were also elite, Christian men.

At odds were an emerging institutional logic of capitalism and
industrial technology with that of evangelicalism and its corresponding
calls for charity to protect the “weaker” beings—particularly children, but
soon also including other animals. Whereas capitalist markets are
grounded in the efficient use of resources (which includes animals),
evangelicalism—in this case, among English elites—began with moral
concerns rooted in religious ideals. These institutional contradictions
arose from and were aggravated by this particular mix of conditions in
Victorian England at the time, and led to the initial emergence of the
animal protection movement.

By the latter half of the century technological advances in science
spurred a transformation in the movement, even if the entire movement
did not follow. An Englishwoman, Francis Power Cobbe, first challenged
the use of animals in laboratories in Italy and then England, four years
after Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution virtually erased the heretofore
impervious line between humans and other species. On one hand,
Darwinism coalesced with industrial advancement and led to the rapid
increase of animal use as physiological models of humans. The counter-
reaction, on the other hand, is visible in the simultaneous rise of anti-
vivisectionism which was born among the humane societies of the day.

The institutional contradictions of the time, led by the rise of
animal use in laboratories, engaged a different group of animal welfarists.
Anti-vivisectionists arose from within the ranks of animal welfare
societies to form new organizations with an abolitionist agenda, in
contrast to the reformist tact of the welfarists. They were predominantly
middle class, evangelical women who targeted the medical and scientific
professions—distinctly different than the working class targets of their
animal welfare counterparts. Cobbe and other British adherents connected
the exploitation of animals with the exploitation of women, both of whom
represented emotions and nature, as contradictory to the institutional logic
of rational, material science (Sperling 1988). Although politics had little
room for women at the time, this logic of evangelicalism—in which
animals, nature, and women are of the same moral fabric1—presented
anti-vivisectionists with the legitimacy they needed to coordinate
collective action.

In contrast, U.S. anti-vivisectionists were more conservative than
their British feminist counterparts. Many held cross-memberships in the

1 All are sacrosanct categories of the exploited in need of protection, and women, above all,
are society’s moral guardians.
Women’s Christian Temperance Union, which included vivisection in its wide ranging moral agenda to rid society of cruelty and sin, and “was inclined to perceive the brutalized vivisector as cousin to the cruel drunkard” (Bue ttinger 1997; 860). American anti-vivisectionists were much less inclined than Cobbe and her British colleagues to ally with the women’s suffrage movement. More commonly, they believed that, “as Christians and mothers their goal was to uplift society, not to champion women’s rights as individuals” (Bue ttinger 1997; 863).

This divergence between British and American anti-vivisectionists may be understood by the institutional logics that were driving them. Whereas Francis Power Cobbe and her fellow English advocates drew from evangelical roots, which stressed the value of revelation and feelings over the cold, rational logic of science and even theology, American activists drew from another brand of Christian logic. They saw vivisection as sinful and decidedly un-Christian, contrary to teachings of mercy for the innocent. School children, when exposed to in-class vivisection demonstrations, are corrupted of the kindness taught them by their mothers (Bue ttinger 1997).

Perhaps due to their relative lack of resources, the overwhelming appeal of scientific technological advances involving animals, the growing distance between feminism and animal protectionism, anti-vivisectionists all but disappeared in the Progressive years. Welfare organizations, though, with their emphasis on urban issues such as stray pets and enforcing anti-cruelty statutes, persisted throughout the war years. Soon after the end of the second world war welfarists began to expand their attention to issues of trapping animals for fur, slaughterhouse conditions, and wildlife protection. New organizations, including the Humane Society of the United States, formed at this time of economic prosperity and the post-war resurgence of moral rectitude. The early post-war years – despite the glaring exception of McCarthyism – were distinguished by a renewed emphasis on democracy, an institutional logic of inclusion, equality, and fairness that may have facilitated the extension of concern to animals long lost throughout the wars.

As the 1960s wave of protest swept across the political landscape, new opportunities for organized advocacy opened up both in England and the US. The leftist disposition of the dominant movements at the time—e.g., civil rights, women’s liberation, environmentalism—and the popular rhetoric of “rights” influenced a new contingent of animal protectionists to emerge. An often cited catalyst for animal rights is the 1975

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2 One important evangelical believed that women had an “exalted spiritual role” in evangelical groups (Sper ling 1988; 45).
publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, a very readable philosophical treatise likening racism and sexism to the new concept of speciesism. While welfare organizations maintained their reformist agenda, the new campaign for animal rights developed a rigid abolitionist stance, extending far beyond the scientific research focus of the antivivisectionists, to include any use of animals for food, entertainment, research, or clothing.

The new constituency was, for the most part, avowedly leftist, secular, young, and female, and remains so to this day. Not only did this new animal rights constituency grow, but animal welfare organizations also experienced an explosion of new members, probably attributable to the visibility that animal rightists brought to the movement. Jasper and Nelkin (1992) point out that movement adherents differed in their goals along a spectrum of reformism to abolitionism, with hard-liners eschewing any reformist goals that they believed weakened or even contradicted their efforts to end animal exploitation. Welfarists remain at the more conservative end of the spectrum, holding popular views about improving conditions for the animals we use, and have had much better luck than animal rightists in securing political support for their agenda. For example, amendments to the US Animal Welfare Act, the only such act that governs the humane use of animals in this country, were introduced by conservative Republican senator and later presidential candidate, Bob Dole. Welfare organizations have found themselves on municipal payrolls, running local shelters and enforcing anti-cruelty laws, while animal rightists are more likely to find themselves on the streets protesting, creating traffic-stopping visual displays of animals suffering, participating in civil disobedience, or even direct action to free animals from laboratories and farms. Today's animal protection movement is a sometimes awkward mix of conservative reformists—remnants of nineteenth century welfarism—and liberal abolitionists, oftentimes more closely allied with the ideologies of women's liberation and environmentalism than animal welfarism.

**Discussion**

The first important caveat to note is that important gaps in our data must be filled if we are to adequately explain the transformation of the animal protection movement. Prior to the post-war resurgence of the movement, we have less information about the characteristics of rank and file members than of movement leaders. Nineteenth century welfare leaders were exclusively elite men, but we cannot say for certain that this reflected the general makeup of the movement. We do know that antivivisectionists were predominantly women, and that British movement
leaders held a feminist perspective, American leaders held a pro-Christian perspective, and they both spoke to other women’s issues of the day, but again we do not know the extent to which this accurately portrays all antivivisectionists. Historical accounts of the movement say little about who the welfarist adherents were over time. This changes by the 1960s when data is more readily available. Nevertheless, given what we do know about animal protectionism over the past two centuries, a reasonably coherent story emerges.

The movement’s major transformations occurred as structural shifts and political opportunities allowed for various groups to exploit contradictory institutional logics. The rise of capitalism and increased urbanization led to challenges by elites whose evangelical roots conflicted with the rationalist logic of industrialization. As scientific laboratories opened their doors to animals as research specimens, Victorian evangelical women found opportunities to draw connections to their own oppression, and American women campaigned to preserve Christian values, though the anti-vivisection campaign essentially died by the Progressive hand of “efficiency.” The institutional logic of the family, in which women are the moral caretakers, more emotional and natural, along with evangelical influences to protect and care for others, collided with the rational and technological logic of science. 1970s and 80s women drew similar connections between feminism and animals, and also at a time of rapid technological advancement, but with more of an emphasis on liberal democratic ideals of equality, inclusion, and freedom reminiscent of the other movements of the 1960s cycle of protest.

Common throughout the life of the movement is the contradictory logics of capitalist markets with either family, evangelical (or Christian), and democratic institutions, or some mixture there of. This has led scholars to characterize animal protectionism as a critique of instrumentalism, which “reduce[s] nature and women, as well as other humans—all with inherent value as ends in themselves—to the status of things and tools...[and] promotes technologies, markets, and bureaucracies—all intended to be the means for attaining the good life—to the status of ends” (Jasper and Nelkin 1992; 5). The women's and environmental movements are among many movements to share this critique.

Notable transformations in the animal protection movement are reflected by the changing constituencies. Until the rise of animal rights, fully one hundred fifty years after the appearance of the first animal welfare organization, religious ideology drove the movement. Animal rights, on the other hand is largely secular, yet still extends protection to animals. In fact, it extends much more protection to animals, and the
immediacy of its grievances is reflected in the often shrill tone of its rhetoric and its aggressive tactics. Though it shares important qualities with the earlier campaign against vivisection, direct ties between the two are hard to find. It rather seems that the major transformations of the movement (welfare to anti-vivisectionism, and welfare to rights) originate within particular institutional matrices of logic and flourish and deteriorate with the opening and closing of political opportunities. The groups who dominate the movement, or any particular part of the movement, at a given time appear to depend upon particular characteristics of the historical time and place in which the opportunities open up.

Social movement theories of differential participation have largely avoided analyses of the complex institutional logics which facilitate and shape the face of movements. The usually ahistorical theorizing of movements identifies resource fluctuations, network embeddedness, and political opportunity structures to account for the rise of protest activity, but has not addressed who holds the resources, dominates the networks, or identifies political opportunities. Preliminary evidence from the animal protection movement suggests that the movement is neither monolithic nor homogeneous. Our data limitations do not allow for analyses of movement networks or the activist histories of individual participants. To account for transformations or even the particular populations in the movement at any given time, the data do suggest that the relative importance of institutional logics (e.g., capitalist markets, family, bureaucracy, Christianity, and democracy) can determine who joins a movement and when. This warrants a renewed call for movement scholars to consider ideologies as they interact with shifting macro-structures.

**Conclusion**

Given the incompleteness of the available historical data for the animal protection movement, I conclude with thoughts for future research that may strengthen the hypotheses suggested here. Furthermore, social movement theories have not adequately addressed the transformations of movements throughout their lifespans, and so leave important questions unanswered. I will suggest a few.

Further data collection for the early days of the animal protection movement may be difficult to find intact. Newspaper coverage of movement activity might include comments about the gender or background of (some of) the participants, as might the archives of animal welfare societies (e.g., in newsletters, correspondence, periodicals). We do not know whether historians of the movement focused almost exclusively leaders for the sake of brevity or due to data limitations, so we
may find further detail from their citations. Some of the major welfare organizations of the twentieth century have survived through today and so offer hope that archival records may be readily available in their libraries.

Research on movement transformations must, of course, eventually examine many movements in order to assess the generalizability of these findings. This is another direction to take if animal protectionism data proves elusive. The environmental movement, like the animal protection movement, also dates back to the nineteenth century, and is also characterized by a split in ideology (e.g., conservationism, preservationism) that appears to coalesce by 1970. As scholarly attention focuses more and more on transnational social movements, we will undoubtedly see increasing attention given to the local institutional contexts as they interact with transnational phenomena. Whether across time or across space, social movements are more varied than current theories suggest.

Understanding variation within movements may yield insights into the external forces that shape and constrain them. Do political opportunity structures open for everyone, or only for some? Though political opportunities became available to African Americans in the late-1950s, the same clearly did not occur for Communists. Why do some movements successfully expand into new populations while others remain internally homogeneous? The women’s movement has reached immense global proportions, now including women from every continent. In contrast, animal protectionism is limited primarily to industrialized western nations. Have women successfully bridged their messages across very diverse cultures while animal protectionists have not? Do movement transformations help or hinder a movement’s chances for success? Do movements with more homogeneous constituents experience less factionalization, and therefore weakens their influence? Or, does membership diversity strengthen social movements by generating more inclusive frames and tapping a broader range of personal networks?

The emphases of this paper have been twofold, to suggest the importance of historical specificity in understanding the emergence and shape of the animal protection movement, and to refocus our analytic attention on the internal dynamics and heterogeneity of movements across time and space. To these ends further theoretical development is needed.

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3 Such transformations might reset the clock on the liability of newness as has been observed in organizations. Moreover, if the transformation is highly innovative, the movement may face an uphill battle to gain legitimacy in a low-density niche.
Jeff A. Larson is a struggling student searching for a focus, an unflagging inner dynamism, and connections between the professional logic of Sociology and the political logic of social movements. The struggle continues...
REFERENCES