

Humane Jobs

A Political Economic Vision for Interspecies Solidarity and Human–Animal Wellbeing

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The economy and workforce are crucial spaces of struggle and possibility for human and animal wellbeing. In addition to critiques of harmful patterns and practices, more intellectual and political work is needed to develop and foster workforce solutions and alternatives. The problems are political and economic so the solutions must be, as well. An essential component of such a project and vision are what I call humane jobs which, succinctly, are jobs that are good for people and animals, and that are underscored by multispecies respect. In this paper, I elucidate a preliminary vision of and for humane jobs. The driving questions are these: what areas of work and which jobs benefit humans and animals, and how can more of them be created? I argue for both the creation of new jobs and employment sectors, and the improvement of some current positions in order to make them more humane.

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INTRODUCTION

Worlds of work are crucial political terrain when considering human–animal relations and the lives—and deaths—of other species. Workplaces where animals are present can be violent and oppressive, compassionate and thoughtful, or something more complex and uneven, as is often the case. In this paper I combine and extend labor scholarship and animal studies in order to explore and foster interspecies solidarity, and labor that cultivates multispecies wellbeing.

For-profit industries producing commodities for human consumption are where and why the largest numbers of animals are killed and subjected to short lives of intense suffering. Given the scale and depth of the violence, not surprisingly, there is an established and growing body of scholarship critiquing the institutionalized harm which is normalized and perpetuated in what Barbara Noske (1989, 1997) calls the animal-industrial complex (see also Twine, 2012, 2013). This concept points to the political actors and organizations in the private and public sectors that promote and defend industrialized and corporatized violence against animals. Widespread pain forms the “necro-economic foundation” of the contemporary political economy (Drew, 2016).

Such research is crucial as it unmask and exposes the serious physical, psychological, emotional, and

intergenerational damage being done to animals, how human workers and public health are simultaneously endangered, and how industries like animal agriculture are also among the leading causes of climate change. Proper description of the harm wrought in the pursuit of animal-derived commodities and its multispecies effects is beyond the scope of this paper, and is aptly provided by many scholars (see, for example, Baran, Rogelberg, & Clausen, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2010; Fitzgerald, Kalof, & Dietz, 2009; Gillespie, 2014; Halley, 2012; Jacques, 2015; Nibert, 2013, 2014; Pachirat, 2011; Stull & Broadway, 2013). What is most pertinent here is that everyday, normalized violence in contemporary exploitive industries is dire, deeply disturbing, and unjustifiable.

At a practical level, individual consumption choices can allow people to demonstrate their ethical commitments and condemnations in important (albeit sometimes imperfect) ways, and much contemporary front-line animal advocacy work focuses on encouraging such shifts. The increase in vegetarian and vegan diets seen across the global north, for example, rewards particular forms of farming and certain food businesses, while affecting the bottom lines of others. Although the increasingly globalized food production system poses challenges, the relative consumer demand for food, clothing, and other products derived from or tested on animals has shaped and will continue to affect production practices to some degree. Yet there is a

pressing and simultaneous need for more diversified collective political action to bolster and expand such efforts. In that vein, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2015, p. 53) call for “a wider spectrum of strategies targeting institutions and practices at all levels of society,” and the economy and workforce are essential spaces of struggle and possibility. People need jobs and livelihoods. Thus, in addition to critiques of harmful patterns and practices, more intellectual and political work is needed to develop and foster workforce solutions and alternatives. The problems are political and economic so the solutions must be, as well. Along with condemning problematic employment practices and industries, we ought to be proposing and articulating alternatives.

An essential component of such a project and vision are what I call humane jobs: jobs that are good for both people and animals, and that are underscored by multispecies respect. I propose humane jobs as both a direct response to the ubiquity and severity of human–animal harm, and as an opportunity to envision and cultivate more ethical political economic relations. In other words, the concept of humane jobs can be enlisted responsively to solve specific problems, and/or proactively, to envision and work towards more just, sustainable, and solidaristic multispecies societies. As I have suggested elsewhere,

In order to move workforces and economies away from damaging and destructive practices and industries, humane alternatives must be created which are about helping, not harming others. Some existing jobs can be strengthened and expanded. Others cannot be, and should be replaced with more empathetic and ethical areas of work; new humane jobs and employment sectors should be created. (Coulter, 2016b, p. 215)

In this paper, I further elucidate a preliminary vision of and for humane jobs. The driving questions are these: what areas of work and which jobs benefit humans and animals, and how can more of them be created?

I begin by outlining the conceptual roots of humane jobs. Then I paint a more detailed picture of the fundamental elements of humane jobs, and argue for both the creation of new jobs and employment sectors, and the improvement of some current positions in order to make them more humane. I conclude by contextualizing humane jobs within a larger vision for humane societies. Potential roles for the public and

private sectors and civil society are integrated throughout. It is humans’ economic motivations which cause the most harm to animals, and, as a result, most of this discussion will focus on different and better paid work for people. Yet animals’ wellbeing and lives are kept front-of-mind; their suffering and their happiness have been and continue to be prime motivators for my development of the concept of humane jobs. I will also briefly discuss whether and/or how some animals could be actively engaged as workers in the pursuit of humane jobs. This aspect is undoubtedly the most fraught and complex, but I offer some ideas to encourage further reflection about and action on animals’ labor. More thinking and research are needed in this area, without question.

In this exploratory discussion, I bring theoretical approaches and commitments rooted in feminist political economy, anthropology, and labor studies to the fore. I am inspired by and thus strive to honor ambitious and transformative aspirations, but in the interest of encouraging real changes and out of a strong sense of urgency, pragmatic possibilities are also made salient. I feel a tension about whether to paint a bold picture to provide a utopian vision, or if it is more useful to grapple with the realities of contemporary political economies and to identify areas for tangible change. Therefore here I lean somewhat towards pragmatism but with ambitious goals. My proposals are imperfect and incomplete, and would always be context-specific and shaped by different political, cultural, and economic actors and forces. Overall, I maintain a commitment to forging more ethical paths forward and recognize the importance of work, work-lives, and lives. My hope is that this vision will inspire and shape new and more scholarly and empirical inquiry, and real-world political work.

CONCEPTUAL RATIONALE AND ROOTS

A constellation of material and intellectual concerns guides my thinking on humane jobs. Most obviously, the need for a reorganization of political economic relations extends from empirical data and earlier research on the realities of many forms of labor that involve and affect animals. I have posited that it is “by understanding both the areas of harm and the dynamics of hope that we can gain the most thoughtful, thorough, and helpful insights about how to reduce suffering, improve lives, and foster humane action.” (Coulter, 2016a, p.7) In existing labor processes and relations, there are many clear examples of what cannot be ethically justified, as well as illustrations of what sorts

of dynamics, programs, and sectors ought to be improved and/or expanded, or within which the seeds of more laudable possibilities reside.

The need for a positive, multispecies political economic vision also stems from the conceptual, political, and tactical divergences that characterize much (although not all) labor studies and praxis on the one hand, and contemporary animal advocacy on the other. As Claire Jean Kim explains, “most social justice struggles mobilize around a single-optic frame of vision. The process of political conflict then generates a zero-sum dynamic... a *posture of mutual disavowal* – an explicit dismissal of and denial of connection with the other form of injustice being raised.” (2015, p. 19, emphasis in original) This insight is highly pertinent to the politics of work involving animals. Depending on the context and particulars, the “other” group and their concerns may be dismissed, demonized, deemed subordinate, or simply ignored. Many labor advocates defend violence against animals in the name of jobs, do not extend their webs of solidarity to other species, and/or only feel compassion for certain kinds of animals (most commonly companion animals and charismatic wildlife).

At the same time, animal advocates may call for the closure of animal-harming industries yet show little concern for the working class and poor people who must labor therein, and do not propose employment alternatives for them. Certain animal advocates even express hostility, disdain, or indifference towards the people who are themselves often trapped in these difficult and dangerous jobs out of material necessity. Kim (2015) calls for a commitment to multi-optic vision which emphasizes inequities and connections, as she challenges us to see from within various perspectives, within and beyond our own species. A multi-optic and intersectional approach is sorely needed when confronting the politics of work.¹

In a similar vein, the concept of humane jobs extends from the principle of interspecies solidarity. Interspecies solidarity is an idea, a goal, a process, an ethical commitment, and a much-needed pillar for projects of social justice (Coulter, 2016a, 2016b). Solidarity is rooted in empathy and compassion, but it involves a decidedly political commitment and support despite differences. As Val Plumwood (2002, p. 200) writes, “both continuity with and difference from self can be sources of value and consideration, and both usually play a role....” Similarity is not a prerequisite for caring about others or for the solidification of ethical political commitments; animals (or other people) do not have to be

like us or us like them in order for us to feel and promote solidarity. They may even have “different, perhaps entirely different interests from ours,” (Plumwood, 2002, p. 200) and the principle of interspecies solidarity encourages us to take animals seriously as individuals, as social groups, and as members of multispecies communities and ecologies.

The concept of interspecies solidarity is not a blueprint or a monolithic prescription, but rather “an invitation to broaden how labor as a daily process and a political relationship is understood and approached, by emphasizing empathy, dignity, and reciprocity.” (Coulter, 2016b, p. 213) Humane jobs are one necessary extension of the principle of interspecies solidarity, however. As Melanie J. Rock and Chris Degeling argue, “many people care deeply about places, plants and non-human animals, to the extent of offering assistance, expecting others to provide assistance, and codifying this expectation in contracts, policies, and laws.” (2015, p. 63) Humane jobs are a compelling way to respond to developing and deepening interspecies ethics, and to promote more solidaristic political-economic and labor relations.

THE POLITICS OF HUMANE JOBS

Wayne Pacelle, President of the Humane Society of the United States, has proposed the term “humane economy” (2016) to both reflect and propel growing consumer and corporate interest in alternatives to animal harming practices and products. His discussion shares the spirit of my vision of humane jobs and is complementary in some ways. For strategic reasons, Pacelle commends smaller steps taken by major corporations (moving away from pork derived from pigs kept in gestation crates, for example). I understand the *realpolitik* rationale at play, the challenges front-line advocates grapple with as they negotiate the complexities of political-economic relations, and why they sometimes choose to recognize initiatives that do not go far enough or fully reflect their organizations’ or their own goals. However, the fact remains that humane jobs must be good for people and animals. In specific cases, killing can be an act of mercy, about self-preservation, or entangled in a more complex epistemological and subsistence-rooted web, particularly in indigenous communities. Being killed prematurely for the production of profit and commodities is different. It is not of benefit to animals, nor is it in their interest. My vision for humane jobs strives to move away from killing and to find alternatives to it.²

Moreover, unfortunately Pacelle includes little about workers' wellbeing or perspectives, the quality of jobs offered by the employers discussed, or how working conditions could be improved, where needed. Humane jobs prioritize multispecies respect and dignity. Working people and their interests also matter. It would not be acceptable simply to stop one form of harm or violence while allowing other injustices to continue, or to replace animal harming practices with alternatives that exploit and devalue human workers. Humane jobs involve higher and more multi-faceted standards. Pacelle also has more faith in unfettered capitalist processes and interests than I have. I recognize and consider many roles for the private sector and individual actors in creating humane jobs. Yet I also envision a more prominent and robust role for the public sector as a space for policy making, regulation, leadership, and employment, and as essential to a more humane future.

We do not need to nor should we defend violence against animals in the name of jobs:

Arguments that labor advocates cannot take animals' well-being seriously because jobs are implicated are insufficient and flawed, both politically and ethically. Unionized workers create armaments, from munitions to weaponry, but this does not prevent labor advocates from speaking out and organizing against war.... [There is] a long history of critical thinkers and advocates envisioning societies that do not trap working people into defending violence in the name of jobs. (Coulter, 2016a, p. 161).

The fact also remains that the industries which are particularly damaging to and fatal for animals are also bad for workers, physically and psychologically (e.g. Baran, Rogelberg, & Clausen, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2010; Jacques, 2015; Nibert, 2013, 2014; Pachirat, 2011; Stull & Broadway, 2013). If given a choice, most people would prefer a good or decent job which helps others, or which at least does not actively harm them. However, many people do not have much choice about where they work. Political and economic action is thus needed in order to expand and create new humane jobs which do not harm or which actively help animals, to give people more choices, and to combat unemployment and underemployment. There is a broader and serious need for more and better work, period, so why not use this challenge as an opportunity to grow labor forces and

economies in more ethical and humane ways—to feed many birds with one fruit, as it were?

In key ways, the human–animal workforce challenge parallels tensions that have arisen between labor and environmental movements. Good jobs and environmental protection have and, in some cases, continue to be constructed as dichotomous and antithetical. Yet through the promotion of good, green jobs and green collar jobs, researchers and advocates alike have sought to overcome such alleged divides. As the political slogan rightly attests, there are no jobs on a dead planet, and it is possible to create good paid work which focuses on protecting the environment with political will and strategic thinking. Insights which are helpful for the development of humane jobs can be extrapolated from the labor–environmental trajectory.

One important lesson is that working people become justifiably anxious at the prospect of job loss. Even if the work is unpleasant and they have an ambivalent or hostile relationship with their employer or the industry in which they work, workers rely on the wages they earn as the foundation of their lives, and their identities are often entangled with how they have made a living, their coworkers, and their shared working class cultures. This is particularly relevant and evident in coal mining communities. Political proposals to replace the declining number of jobs in coal are met with skepticism by many miners for a few reasons, including because the promised high-tech green energy jobs do not seem within their reach. Some green energy plans offer what many of us would deem better quality jobs which should be of greater interest to people who have had difficult and dirty work all their lives (and often for generations). However, if workers in the industry which is in decline or being proactively replaced do not have the educational background or training, and cannot imagine themselves obtaining either the skill-set or type of jobs being offered, they will grasp onto what they know.

Similarly, green jobs projects can simply reproduce inequities, such as those based on gender and/or race, or they can be opportunities to create more equitable and just workplaces and societies (e.g. Cohen, 2017). These linked insights should inform thinking about humane jobs. Proposals should envision and promote diverse kinds of work suitable for people of different backgrounds, classes, genders, ethnoracial identities, ages, and abilities. Moreover, there is a need to recognize and enlist working people's own knowledge

and ideas, and to actively engage workers in identifying improvements and humane alternatives.

The idea of *creating more humane jobs* is thus two-fold. First, more positions and new employment sectors ought to be developed in order to create more humane jobs numerically. Second, some existing employment should be improved in order to make better quality work, that is, to create jobs that are more humane for workers. Quantity and quality figure when thinking about jobs that benefit both people and animals.

Creating More Humane Jobs: 1. New Positions and Employment Sectors

To create more humane jobs numerically, new positions and employment sectors are needed. Two areas warrant particular attention: a) employment fields that benefit animals, and b) the jobs and sectors that can directly replace harmful industries. Both are important to a vision for humane jobs.

a) Areas of human work that involve caring, helping, and/or protecting other animals should be thoughtfully expanded as part of creating a greater number of humane jobs. All countries' labor forces already include some such jobs. This can include a cross-section of different positions in cruelty investigations, animal rescue and protection, companion animal care (e.g. dog walking, grooming), conservation, and the veterinary field. More humane jobs can be created by growing these types of jobs, as could job creation in complementary but under-developed areas like humane education. One way this can be achieved is by purposefully increasing the number of positions in current programs or workplaces. Possibilities can also be generated by examining a hole, need, or problem through a humane jobs lens, and then identifying specific areas for expansion, or ways to develop new programs or sites which would benefit animals and create paid work for people. Entrepreneurially-inclined individuals can take up the challenge of humane jobs and create employment for themselves and/or others.

The potential for creating humane jobs is a strong argument for governments or cross-sectoral coalitions to envision and implement new initiatives. Some kinds of work that are the responsibility of nonprofits in most countries, such as cruelty investigations, could be brought into the public sector, or deemed worthy of increased public funding to create more jobs. Such work is normally legally mandated by governments, physically and psychologically risky (Coulter & Fitzgerald, 2016), and there are connections

between some kinds of violence against animals, and the simultaneous or subsequent abuse of women and children (e.g. Brewster & Reyes, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2005; Flynn, 2012; Gullone, 2012; Linzey, 2009), so there are many compelling multispecies reasons for investing in and improving this field. Conservation is another area which is normally pursued by both governmental actors and nonprofits, and more partnerships or greater public investment could buoy humane jobs in this sector.

At present, due to its location in the private sector, in most contexts veterinary medicine expands or contracts based on the number of licensed and practicing veterinarians. Given the growing number of companion animals and the increasing lengths to which many people will go to provide care to the animals in their homes and lives, we can expect there to be an expansion of small animal medicine in the coming years and decades even under the current model, thus the field will likely grow as an employment sector. Yet the promise of humane jobs is also an opportunity to consider ways to augment and/or diversify how medical care is provided to other species. Is there a greater role for the public sector to play? Some would say that there is not sufficient health care delivered to people, therefore spending public money on animals' care is unjustifiable, even if doing so creates new jobs (in addition to helping more animals). Others would argue that if animals are going to be part of our families, communities, and societies, then it is not unreasonable to allocate a small part of the collective resource pool to their care. Some public money is already spent on animals in most contexts, after all, and some of it is spent funding or subsidizing industries that do them harm.

If we want to use the public sector to expand veterinary care and thus create more humane jobs by doing so, there are different possible frameworks. One is through the lens of equity, and particularly the ability for poor and low-income people to access lower cost veterinary services delivered by a modest public system or network. Only in rare cases such as in Cuba or in specific publicly-funded initiatives are veterinary salaries paid for by the state, and this translates into minimal costs for animal caretakers. Some veterinarians in other contexts working within the private sector choose to provide lower cost care to poor and/or marginalized people (or to work for nonprofits which focus on wild animals). Some cities and regions around the world have developed modest publicly-funded programs to spay or neuter the animals of low-income people or to care for

wild animal populations. These approaches should be studied in more detail and potentially expanded for the benefit of animals and people, and to create more jobs.

One Health, an interdisciplinary framework which recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health and care, also warrants attention (see, for example, Lerner & Berg, 2015; Mackenzie, Jeggo, Daszak, & Richt, 2013; Woldehanna & Zimicki, 2015). This approach responds to evidence of the entanglements of multispecies harm and wellbeing (e.g. Akhtar, 2012; Blue & Rock, 2011), and medical doctors, veterinarians, epidemiologists, public health promoters, and researchers are uniting to propose and pursue various practical linkages and action plans (Rock, 2012). Yet there has been little political or labor analysis of One Health so far and more is needed. There is potential to foster a more integrated approach to health promotion and care which conceptualizes multiple species as worthy of care and corresponding investment. If thoughtfully approached, One Health programs and services could play an important role in generating a range of new humane jobs.³

These are but some ideas with potential and there are many more possibilities. Diverse job creation in these and similar areas would benefit people by providing more paid work and be good for the animals who benefit from these kinds of human labor.

b) Given the amount of economic activity that causes animal suffering and death, there is a simultaneous need to grow occupations, sectors, and industries that offer direct alternatives. Different problems and sites can be examined through a humane jobs lens and we can ask: how could this be replaced this with more ethical practices and humane jobs? The loss of jobs is a frequent refrain used to defend harmful industries. The response is not to concede that the violence against animals should continue because livelihoods are implicated. The more ethical response is to work collaboratively to identify alternatives that reflect people's need for income.

The spirit of this idea is already enlisted by some of the fashion and cosmetics companies producing cruelty-free and animal-free products, and by a number of the farmers and food businesses growing and creating food without killing sentient beings or exploiting the bodily processes of female animals. There are also non-governmental organizations and governmental programs that help former poachers and hunters become wildlife guardians, park rangers, ecotourist guides, and conservationists. If people are given real alternatives and

engaged in the process of transformation, many, if not most, will embrace a more ethical path, and become allies who, in turn, work to convince others.

Given the staggering number of animals killed in industrial agriculture, alternatives for food production are of particular importance. A humane jobs agenda must respect rural communities and take the wellbeing of farm workers, farmers, and farming regions seriously. There are many kinds of agriculture that produce food without killing anyone. There are also urban possibilities in food research, product development, distribution, and so forth. More humane jobs can be created to grow, develop, process, sell, prepare, and serve ethical food. Farmers, entrepreneurs, and businesses of various sizes are already putting this idea into action around the world as they transition to animal-free products, and, of course, there are many longer histories of such farms and farming practices. A small but growing number of animal advocacy organizations are also facilitating proactive shifts as well as striving to work with people who are losing their jobs in animal-harming industries. With a humane jobs lens, these efforts can be expanded, improved, and diversified.

In keeping with an intersectional and multi-optic vision (Kim, 2015), the quality of the jobs created matters and so does their distribution. As noted, simply removing one form of harm while allowing others to continue does not meet the full potential of humane jobs. A fruit, vegetable, or pulse crop farm, or a vegan restaurant or grocery store is not automatically ethical simply because animals are not being harmed; human workers must also be respected and provided with fair working conditions. This is a reaffirmation of the need for a multispecies vision and for both intra- and interspecies solidarity. Animal advocates have particular responsibility to be allies to migrant workers whose labor makes so much plant-based food possible. Food without killing is crucial, but so too is truly cruelty-free food.⁴

In some cases, the humane job alternative may be a direct replacement which creates similar jobs but without killing. In other cases, comparable but different or even quite distinct but suitable humane jobs could be created. For example, new humane jobs could be created in rural communities in areas like green care. Green care is an umbrella term for health care programs that incorporate positive interactions with nature, such as care farming, therapeutic horticulture, and animal-assisted therapy (e.g. Berget, Lidfors, Pálsdóttir, Soini, & Thodberg, 2012; Sempik, Hine, & Wilcox, 2010). Green

care is more developed in western and northern Europe, where care farming in particular is supported by farmers' groups, local, national, and transnational governments, and health care organizations due to its social, environmental, and economic benefits. Care farming can be integrated with preventative and therapeutic health care, child care, social services, education, and job training. Care farms are diverse in their approaches to animals and some simply reproduce instrumental thinking and integrate clients/service users into industrial and exploitive agricultural practices. Humane jobs could be created through the thoughtful expansion and diversification of green care, provided that both human and animal wellbeing is emphasized.

The question of animals' direct engagement in labor for people is a complex one. Theorists and front-line practitioners, particularly in social work and other care fields, increasingly are grappling with ethical questions and tangible ways to ensure animals' wellbeing in their workplaces. Since these fields are underscored by an ethic of care, this fact is not entirely surprising. These efforts are encouraging, and there is more to do. Elsewhere I have recognized and analyzed animals' own forms of labor (such as subsistence work, care work, and what I call ecosocial reproduction) and the many different kinds of work humans ask or require animals to do in more detail, as well as the debates about animals' agency, subjectivity, and rights (see, Coulter 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2017). I have posited that animals' work can be understood as situated on a continuum of suffering and enjoyment, and where it fits will depend on the individual animal, the species, the work required, the co-workers, the employer, the day, and other contextual factors. At this point, my view is that it is not unreasonable for some domesticated animals to be engaged in certain kinds of work, if both the jobs and the labor relationships are characterized by respect and reciprocity, and if animals are afforded protections and positive entitlements underscored by interspecies solidarity, particularly if buttressed by formal political frameworks. Animals can enjoy and even benefit from certain kinds of work and labor relationships as members of multispecies workplaces and societies.

Alasdair Cochrane (2016) makes similar arguments, including a call for fundamental daily protections like bodily security and safety, time for rest and leisure, and consideration of animals' own interests, as well as the creation of formal political structures in labor unions or other appropriate organizations to oversee animals' wellbeing. Many labor standards, akin

to those we employ or propose for people, have relevance for animals. Like Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011), I believe that animals deserve protections from harmful practices, as well as positive entitlements (freedom from and freedoms to). They "deserve to receive and to provide care – and they want to live." (Coulter, 2016b, p. 215) Animals are members of their particular species as well as individuals with particular ways of communicating, behaving, and relating. As we strive to recognize, properly understand, and honor both of these realities, we can consult ethology, behavioral ecology, and cognitive ethology (and comparable fields), and interweave other kinds of qualitative, ethnographic, and sociocultural research to recognize both species-level patterns, and individual animals' distinct personalities and preferences.

Building from but extending feminist political economy, I recognize that workers, regardless of species membership, are individuals with bodies, minds, desires, interests, families, and relationships. I encourage the use of the concept of work-lives to explicitly recognize these broader connections, factors, and dynamics as they intersect with and affect all sentient beings (Coulter, 2016a, 2016b). Accordingly, humane jobs must include respect for people and animals before and after formal employment, on a daily basis and over the course of their lives.

Creating More Humane Jobs: 2. Improving Existing Work

In addition to creating more jobs numerically, there are some existing jobs that meet most of the criteria for humane jobs, but which should be improved to make better quality working conditions to fully realize their humane potential. Precarious jobs and good jobs are two ends of a continuum. Precisely how good jobs are defined varies somewhat depending on the context, but normally includes material elements like fair and reliable pay and some tangible workplace benefits, along with experiential factors like feeling respected or even proud of your work. For some, definitions of good jobs also include relative autonomy, union protection, and/or possibilities for upward mobility. In contrast, precarious jobs are characterized by low pay, erratic hours, few, if any, benefits, and job insecurity. They usually mean both social and economic devaluation.

The employment areas discussed above within which people care for, protect, and/or help animals warrant consideration for a numerical expansion of jobs, but there is also work to be done to improve many of

the occupations therein. As is true of human-focused workers in care and social service sectors in particular (e.g. Baines, 2011), people working for animals, particularly in nonprofits, are commonly motivated by a commitment to the animals and are often willing to do work for free or for minimal pay under trying conditions as a result. The material reality is that, at present, many animal-assisting organizations would not function without the unpaid or minimally-paid labor of passionate people. Doing work that makes a difference is undoubtedly important and laudable, but it is not a substitute for economic security, and working for animals should not have to mean extensive self-sacrifice. In certain cases, there may be potential to turn some current unpaid and volunteer positions into humane jobs. The prospects will greatly depend on the context and specifics. With organizational restructuring, or new or greater public sector investment or targeted volunteer grants, there are some possibilities.⁵

Indeed, there are clear connections between the number of jobs and the quality of jobs. If people in animal care sectors, cruelty investigations, and so on, feel materially and experientially respected and are working in the most efficacious ways, they benefit from a positive working life, but so too do animals. Moreover, if there are more people employed in jobs that help other species, even more animals benefit. The challenge is thus to ensure that these positions are both good jobs for people, and that there are more of them, so that a larger number of animals can be reached, to ensure that workloads are of a reasonable size to facilitate the provisioning of proper care, and to facilitate a higher quality working experience.

Some human-focused care workers engage in what Linda Briskin (2013) calls the “politicization of caring” as they seek to directly link the quality of their working conditions to the quality of care that can be provided. Front-line animal workers and their allies could employ this same principle to foster greater support for the people whose working conditions directly affect animals. There is also a need to challenge the perception that nonprofits which allocate a portion or even a sizeable portion of donated funds to salaries are somehow detracting from animal care or not worthy of support. If people can secure a decent living, they are more likely to stay with the organization and thus provide quality and continuity of care. Whatever the organization’s emphases and particular ways of helping and caring for animals, labor makes them possible. It is disproportionately women who are employed in such

occupations, and racialized workers are more often responsible for the “dirty work” and more emotionally and physically trying tasks (see, for example, Collard, 2014; Parreñas, 2012; Sanders, 2010; Taylor, 2010). These gendered and intersectional factors provide further motivation for improving working conditions.

Unionization is one of the primary strategies workers use to improve their working conditions. Outside of Scandinavian and Nordic countries, many, if not most, people who work for animals are not unionized. People working with/for animals may eschew political action intended to improve their working conditions out of a perception that it may negatively impact the animals, whether this is true or not (Miller, 2008). Many animal-centered workplaces are also smaller and geographically scattered. Workplaces of this kind are less likely to be unionized whether animals are present or not. Moreover, most unions have concentrated their organizing efforts on human-focused workplaces, although some represent workers in industries that harm animals, like slaughterhouses.

As a result, some labor unions may not support calls for humane jobs and will instead work to defend their existing members in such industries. Others will understand the need to foster interspecies solidarity, and may see a parallel between the history of the labor–environmental questions and labor–animal issues. Unionization as a strategy for improving workplace quality may or may not take root in more animal workplaces, but it is an option for workers interested in using conventional labor relations tools to self-advocate, and more unions may start to take animal workers seriously or could be encouraged to do so. My hope is that they will play a positive role in the promotion of humane jobs. In 2016, Kommunal, the municipal workers’ union in Sweden and the country’s largest, organized a seminar specifically to discuss the wellbeing of animals involved in the care sector, a promising first step.

A growing number of corporate leaders and entrepreneurs are seeing the potential and need for more ethical economic actions, whether they are motivated by concern for other species and/or their own profits. It would be a significant disappointment and lost opportunity if more labor unions did not recognize the harm being done to other sentient beings and the need for alternatives, and the growing interest in animals’ wellbeing among their own members, potential future members, and in societies more broadly. Labor unions are advocates for social progress and justice. “Genuine

human and social progress cannot be based on the suffering of others, period. A just and caring society cannot be created on a mass, unmarked animal graveyard.” (Coulter, 2016a, p. 162)

In the areas highlighted above, animals are not normally co-workers or laborers; these kinds of jobs are beneficial to animals because human labor focuses on helping, caring for, protecting, and/or rescuing them. Some existing workplaces where animals have been put to work do not have the potential to become humane jobs and could not be justified, even with improvements to animals’ working conditions. In these cases, alternatives should be found. In contrast, some of the work animals currently do, particularly in the care sectors, has greater potential, and could be improved in keeping with the ideas proposed in the previous section.

HUMANE JOBS IN HUMANE SOCIETIES

The many opportunities for profit-driven and not-for-profit interests to create more humane jobs are clear. Both the quality and quantity of jobs can also be affected by the public sector. There is a need for new laws and policies, and new programs and services that create humane jobs. How to fund any such initiatives is a question that will undoubtedly arise. Revenue generating mechanisms like taxes on financial transactions or specialized taxation targeting harmful or unsustainable areas or practices could certainly play a role. Governments can directly fund initiatives, offer grants or tax credits, and/or help create fertile ground for innovative, ethical practices by shifting subsidies away from industries like fur farming, commercial hunting, and industrial animal agriculture, towards sustainable avenues that will create humane jobs. As always, people who gain meaningful employment, or whose pay increases, contribute more to public coffers through the income and consumption taxes they pay. The benefits of humane jobs are many-fold.

In keeping with feminist anthropology and political economy, I conceptualize paid work not in a vacuum but as one part of a larger sociopolitical context. Humane jobs should a) prioritize both human and animal wellbeing, b) not reproduce existing inequities, but rather be interwoven with feminist, anti-racist, and other intersectional commitments, and c) be approached as one part of a larger, multi-faceted vision for humane and caring societies (Coulter, 2017). My vision shares the spirit of recent generative multispecies political theorizing that imagines better futures for individuals and groups, as well as strengthened and expanded

political structures (e.g. Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011; Cochrane, 2016). I conceptualize people and animals as social individuals who “have social needs and responsibilities and ... our ability to give or receive these are interdependent and intertwined.” (McKeen, 2004, p.9; see also Bezanson, 2006; Winkler, 2002) The ultimate goal is that humane jobs are positive materially and experientially, and located within a larger humane sociopolitical context and culture. Humane jobs would fit best with progressive and redistributive political approaches and within a web of complementary policies and programs that respect work-lives such as living wages, affordable child care, universal education, etc. The idea of humane jobs can and ought to be enlisted to tackle specific, localized challenges in the here and now, but ideally should be interwoven with the pursuit of truly just, sustainable, solidaristic, and caring societies.

This discussion is an invitation to think differently about the politics of animals and labor, and more work is needed to refine, revise, deepen, and further develop the ideas presented here. I have offered conceptual fodder, key vocabulary, and some practical ideas with the goals of strengthening and extending theories of work and multispecies relations, helping to cultivate a positive, forward-looking human-animal labor scholarship, and, ideally, inspiring, shaping, and propelling both new and stronger political work. Contemporary political economic relations significantly affect animals, but they are not natural, preordained, or automatic. They are socially constructed, and they can be improved and remade, if we work to transform them.

NOTES

¹ It is important to note that early animal advocates often employed what we might today call an intersectional lens, and some contemporary activists and animal organizations are committed to multispecies politics and wellbeing. In the scholarly arena, animal ecofeminists such as Carol J. Adams, Greta Gaard, and Lori Gruen, as well as some other critical animal studies scholars, have consistently highlighted interlocking and intersecting forms of violence, oppression, and justice.

² The term “humane” is used in different ways depending on the context and on the person/people using the word. It has come to have quite distinct and even divergent meanings, particularly within animal advocacy and agricultural communities. My usage of the concept and intentions are elucidated throughout this paper.

³ An expansion of veterinary medicine and One Health programs could also inspire more reflection about the animals who are used and killed in veterinary education, and the role

of veterinarians in caring for farmed and wild animals, among other issues.

⁴ Corporate food politics are undoubtedly complex, particularly as large animal agribusinesses buy up smaller vegan companies or develop their own animal-free products to be sold alongside animal-derived commodities. A larger discussion of these dynamics is needed.

⁵ How care is provided to animals, for how long, and in what ways will also be governed by organizations' policies. This raises important questions about the effects of such policies and about structural constraints on workers' abilities to shape the processes and outcomes of their labor. Scholars are reflecting on how organizational practices, even those that are well-intentioned, affect the animals in such spaces. These issues are important and are part of larger discussions beyond the scope of this paper.

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