PART TWO

ANIMALS AND MODERNITY
CHAPTER THREE

THE UNDERDOG IN HISTORY: SERFDOM, SLAVERY AND SPECIES IN THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM

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Alongside the modern evils, we are oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production, with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations. We suffer not only from the living, but the dead... Perseus wore a magic cap so that the monsters he hunted down might not see him. We draw the magic cap down over our own eyes and ears so as to deny that there are any monsters... (Marx 1976, 91)

Contemporary scholars (Speigel 1996) and animal rights activists (e.g., PETA, 2004) contend that non human animals incarcerated in modern factory farms, vivisection laboratories, the sport and entertainment industries and pet producing puppy mills are slaves. In this essay I will demonstrate that this claim can be solidly substantiated through the application of Marx’s social theory. To develop my argument that Marx’s social theory provides a solid theoretical basis for the claim that the situation of many, if not most, animals in modern society is one of slavery I will begin by looking at theoretical debates about the transition from feudalism to capitalism and what Marx had to say about the development of capitalism. I will outline what Marx had to say about slavery and serfdom in pre-capitalist society, and consider his view that slavery would be replaced by free wage labor in capitalist society. I will point to the fact that the scholarly debate about the transition from feudalism has, to date, failed to perceive the significance of non human animals as slaves for the development of capitalism. I will use aspects of Marx’s analysis of capitalist society to explain this analytic lacunae with respect to the situation of non human animals as slaves in the creation and development of capitalist society.

Theoretical debates about the transition from feudalism to capitalism have been significant in the development of sociological and