

INTRODUCTION

Does Animal Abuse Really Benefit Us?

ANDREW LINZEY

It is quite clear that in abusing animals we abuse our relationship with animals, and that we abuse ourselves. We become less human to the extent that we treat any living beings as things.

R. D. LAING

I

Philosophers and thinkers have long accepted that there is a connection between the abuse of animals and the abuse of weaker human beings. A roster of illustrious names can be garnered in this regard, including Pythagoras, St Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Alexander Pope, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Jeremy Bentham, as well as modern ones like Albert Schweitzer and Mohandas K. Gandhi. Immanuel Kant, regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of Europe and the late Enlightenment, was typical in that regard. In his lectures on ethics, given between 1775 and 1780, he expostulated: 'If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard in his dealings with men'.¹ Although Kant did not believe that we had direct duties to animals, he clearly held that human interests were sufficient in seeking to limit cruel behaviour to animals.

Historically, this view manifested itself in the passing of a range of animal protection measures in the nineteenth century. Cruel behaviour to animals, it was thought, needed to be legally curbed in order to prevent cruelty to human subjects. It found its classic expression in the preamble to Lord Erskine's Cruelty to Animals Bill in 1809: 'The abuse of that [human] dominion by cruel and oppressive treatment of such animals, is not only highly unjust and immoral, but most pernicious in its example, having an evident tendency to harden the heart against the natural feelings of humanity'.² Notice how cruelty is deemed not only unjust but also injurious to ourselves.

The logic, then, seemed inescapable: people who are cruel to animals will be cruel to human subjects. Indeed, such a thought was so established that Kant himself referred to how in 'England butchers and doctors do not sit on a jury because they are accustomed to the sight of death and hardened'.³ People

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thought that there must be such a connection, and assumed that it was so. There was very little strictly empirical evidence, other than pure observation, to support such a link.

Over the last forty years, however, the link has been the subject of sustained enquiry and research. Psychological, sociological, and medical connections have been made by a variety of researchers, and a considerable volume of empirical evidence has been amassed. While some of the research is clearly at a pioneering stage, the case for thinking that there is a link is now stronger than ever. Consider, for example, some of the findings reviewed in the chapter by Marie Louise Petersen and David P. Farrington (*Measuring Animal Cruelty and Case Histories*):

- Of 429 adult inpatient admissions to psychiatric hospital divided into aggressive and non-aggressive samples: 23% killed dogs and cats purposely and 18% tortured them (aggressive sample), and 10% killed and 5% tortured dogs and cats (non-aggressive sample). (1979)
- Of 152 males, divided into aggressive and non-aggressive samples: 25% of aggressive criminals reported five or more acts of cruelty to animals, 6% of non-aggressive, and none of the non-criminals. (1985)
- Of 64 inmates: 48% of those convicted of rape and 30% convicted of child molestation had histories of animal cruelty. (1986)
- Of 28 sexual homicide perpetrators: 36% committed acts of animal cruelty in childhood, and 46% in adolescence. (1988)
- Of 117 inmates, divided into violent and non-violent criminals: 63% of violent criminals committed animal cruelty versus 11% of non-violent criminals. (1999)
- Of 45 violent offenders versus 45 non-violent offenders: cruelty to animals greater in the violent sample, 56% versus 20%. (2001)
- Of 164 battered women and 199 control women: animal cruelty predicted official and self-reported violence in children. (2004)
- Of 261 incarcerated male inmates: 43% had engaged in animal cruelty. Of these, 63% reported that they had hurt or killed dogs and 55% had abused cats. (2005)

All such statistical correlations need to be interpreted with care, of course, but these and many other findings indicate an impressive degree of convergent research. That is not to say that they are themselves conclusive. It needs to be frankly admitted that there are ongoing problems of methodology, control, and definition that need to be addressed: how should one define 'cruelty', 'abuse', or 'harm'? How does one set up control groups as an adequate measurement, and for how long? How can one devise the much-needed longitudinal studies that explore whether abuse is a factor over a significant period of time?

More fundamentally still, how can one detect *one* factor as a cause, or a probable cause, among so many variables at work within abusive relations? Animal cruelty is one of the diagnostic tests employed by the FBI in assessing

dangerousness – will we ever be able to go further than that? These and other questions are variously addressed in the pages that follow.

II

Apart from questions of methodology and interpretation, there are wider issues about how we should view the findings themselves. The case for wider recognition of the link still faces two sets of objections – one from the ‘human’ side; the other from the ‘animal’ side.

The first is from some concerned for child welfare especially, who judge that they must keep their work separate from concerns for animals lest their special focus is obscured, or their work mired in wider controversies about the treatment of animals. ‘Including concerns about animal abuse weakens our strategic thrust’, as one child protection officer said to me recently. And this position is buttressed by a number of misconceptions that still, sadly, find a voice. To take just one example, one medical commentator recently discussing the tragic case of a five-year-old savaged to death by her uncle’s pit bull terrier, maintains: ‘It seems to me that the UK remains a proud nation of dog lovers and child haters’.

In fact, it is implausible to think that those who keep dangerous dogs are dog lovers, or do so from motives relating to animal kindness. Many dangerous dogs are kept for purposes of guarding property, where dogs are taught to attack or to fight (illegal dog-fighting is on the increase in the United Kingdom). Even fighting dogs must be trained or at the very least encouraged to fight, which is often achieved by treating them in a cruel manner. And pit bulls themselves were originally bred and reared for the purposes of bull-baiting, hardly an animal-friendly practice.

Our commentator continues: ‘Contrary to the conventional assumption of a direct link between the abuse of animals and that of children, the lesson of history is that it is quite possible for a society to combine concern for animal welfare with indifference towards the welfare of children’,⁴ and he cites Victorian society – and how the SPCA was founded before the NSPCC – as an example. But, as Sabrina Tonutti shows in Chapter 6 (*Cruelty, Children, and Animals: Historically One, Not Two, Causes*), that overlooks the fact that the pioneering anti-cruelty movement in Britain (and in other countries) encompassed both children and animals, and that many luminaries for animal welfare, such as Lord Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, and Fowell Buxton – to take only three examples – were also involved in campaigns for the alleviation of human misery, including help for the poor and child protection. Moreover, members of the SPCA helped found and finance the NSPCC.

But there is another reason for thinking that animal abuse must be taken seriously and that is because it so heavily implicated in cases of family violence and child abuse in particular. Again, Petersen and Farrington review some of the evidence:

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- Of 53 children (who met criteria for child abuse or neglect): 60% of these families abused/neglected their pets. In 88% of families displaying child physical abuse, cruelty to animals was also present. (1983)
- Of 23 families with history of animal cruelty: 35% involved children on the risk register of Social Services. (1998)
- Of 300 children who sexually abuse other children and commit other violent offences: 20% of children who sexually abuse other children and commit violent offences had a history of sexually abusing animals. Many of these children had been severely abused themselves. (1998)
- Of 38 women at a domestic violence shelter: 71% of those who owned a pet reported that the male partners had threatened or harmed the animals. 18% delayed entering a shelter because of fear of what would happen to their pet. (1998)
- Of 72 women at domestic violence shelters: 88% (of 68% that had pets) indicated animal cruelty committed in their presence. In 76% of the cases, children had witnessed the abuse. 54% of the children who witnessed the cruelty copied this behaviour. (1999)
- Of 7,264 women at domestic violence shelters: 16% had animals hurt or killed by partner. (1999)
- Of 107 women at a domestic violence shelter: (of 40% who owned pets) 47% reported that their pet was either threatened or harmed. 40% of these had delayed entering a shelter because they feared for their pet. (2000)
- Of 61 women in shelters: (of 82% who owned pets) 49% reported that the partner had threatened their pet, 46% that their pet had been harmed, and 27% reported that concern for the welfare of their pet had affected their decision to leave. (2003)
- Of 481 sexually abused children, 412 psychiatric outpatient children, and 540 normal children: 18% of sexually abused children were cruel to animals, compared with 3% of normal children. (2003)
- Of 164 battered women and 199 control women: children from violent homes were more likely to be cruel to animals (11% versus 5%). (2004)

These and other findings indicate a common pattern of abuse in which battered women, children, and animals are all victims. With the possible exception of the link between animal abuse and serial murder, the case is the strongest in the literature.

The second concern is from some animal advocates who fear that the focus on the link obscures the moral case for animals. Animal abuse should be regarded as wrong in itself, they claim, regardless of its adverse effects on human beings. Mark Bernstein in chapter 13 (*Responding Ethically to Animal Abuse*) rightly stresses how animals should not be regarded as having only instrumentalist value but intrinsic value because they are sentient beings that can suffer in analogous ways to human subjects. The danger is that we treat animals in an instrumentalist way as ‘canaries in the mine’, as Elizabeth

Clawson indicates in Chapter 14 (*The New Canaries in the Mine: The Priority of Human Welfare in Animal Abuse Prosecution*). In short, the issue is injustice to the victims, not the humanity of the abusers.

But this is surely a one-sided view of 'liberation' (for want of a better word). For example, the emancipation of women involves (as many feminists have pointed out) not only the liberation of women from unjust or abusive relationships, but also the liberation of men themselves. Men need to be liberated from their own machismo and their own complicity (and more) in the abuses and injustices meted out to women. No one, it might be said, is truly free until they are free from being both perpetrators as well as victims.

Viewed from that more holistic perspective, it can be seen that exploring and discovering how animals suffer from common patterns of abuse, far from weakening the case for their respectful treatment, only strengthens it. There is empirical evidence in that regard also. One of the saddest features of 'abuse literature', concerning both humans and animals, is reading accounts of how those who abuse have themselves been abused. The pattern is now so familiar to welfare agencies that it almost passes without comment, but it indicates, at the deepest level, how we are witnessing a common pattern of dehumanization which urgently requires action at all levels. It would be folly, even if acting out of the highest motives, to fail to see how animal abuse is intricately related to our own.

While some child and animal advocates may be wary of stressing the link, for more than two decades the Humane Society of the United States has pioneered collaborative programmes for many professionals in the US. In the UK it is heartening to note the existence of 'The Links Group', formed in 2001, which commands the support of mainstream charitable organizations in the fields of human and animal welfare (including the NSPCC, RSPCA, British Veterinary Nursing Association, The Buster Foundation, Paws for Kids, Refuge, Wood Green Animal Shelter, and the PDSA). Since its inception, the group has successfully worked together to promote an understanding of the links between child abuse, animal abuse, and domestic violence.

III

A holistic perspective, as put forward here, requires also that we challenge abuse, even and especially when there are apparent 'benefits' (what is often called 'necessary cruelty'). And that issue arises most directly in relation to our treatment of animals than anywhere else. We now give scant attention to those who seek to justify child labour in terms of economics or inferior status for women on the basis of cultural homogeneity, so why should we find ourselves so vulnerable to the argument that animal abuse is justifiable if humans benefit?

Well, of course, the simple answer is that our estimate of human advantage is such that we automatically suppose that almost anything that 'benefits us' is

morally right. But that moral calculus should at least be questioned, and we should go further and ask the most basic question of all: can any practice that involves animal cruelty or abuse benefit humans? For it is certainly true that the unquestioning assumption in almost all debates about animals is that benefits justify abuse. And the implications are that we know what these benefits are and they are almost all in favour of abuse. We accept justifications for abuse of animals that we would never (or rather seldom) accept in relation to human subjects, especially infants and children. And the means through which we do this is by reference to anthropocentric utilitarian calculations in which we count ourselves as all-important and animals as totally unimportant.

Not all utilitarianism is the same, of course. Classical utilitarianism or modern philosophical utilitarianism has, in most forms, been sympathetic to animals. Rather the problem lies with a kind of speciesism or egoist-speciesism, defined as the *arbitrary* favouring of one species over another. It is a kind that still predominates in the media. The sort that questions: 'how can you be concerned about the suffering of a few animals when children are starving?' Or 'how can you oppose such and such development if it is of benefit to human beings?' The assumption is that human advantage – no matter how indirect, undefined, hypothetical, or incoherently argued – always trumps animal suffering no matter how severe.

But this appeal to 'benefits' can and should be challenged on its own terms. The problem, or rather one of many problems, with utilitarianism is: who determines the calculation or calculus – by which we balance the utilities or benefits? And of course how is the calculus to be determined?

Consider the ways in which animal abuse might harm us through, for example, de-sensitization, loss of empathy, habituation, and denial. Let us briefly address these factors.

Desensitization refers, *inter alia*, to loss of feeling. We kill but feel nothing. We inflict suffering but feel nothing. Perhaps there are very few that feel absolutely nothing, but some appear to do so. More likely, they are socialized to discount such feelings, or to submerge them, or disregard them through 'emotional political correctness'. My concern here is the form of social authoritarianism regularly practised by parents on children: 'It's only an animal for heaven's sake!' 'You must grow up', 'This is just childish'.

In contrast, of course, our feelings at human killing or human suffering are put in an entirely different category. Consider, for example, the weight placed by judges and others who pass sentence on offenders. Lack of remorse in these contexts is invariably, and surely correctly, construed as a form of pathology. But is it possible to be desensitized about animals and not about humans? Moreover, why should we assume that this bifurcation is not morally suspect?

The same is true of loss of empathy, the loss of the ability to empathize and to relate to others who suffer. As Andrea Beetz shows in Chapter 4 (*Empathy as an Indicator of Emotional Development*), empathy is an essential component in our emotional development. Empathy or sympathy deserves more theolog-

ical and philosophical attention: without sympathy it is difficult to have any moral imagination of the lives of others, as is also shown in Daniel B. Williams's Chapter 16 (*'Vile attentions': On the Limits of Sympathetic Imagination*) which illustrates its pivotal role in the remarkable novels of J. M. Coetzee.

What is worse is that we acclimatize ourselves to such losses of feeling through habituation. George Bernard Shaw famously wrote that 'Custom will reconcile people to any atrocity; and fashion will drive them to acquire any custom'. Again he says of people who are cruel: 'Far from enjoying it, they have simply overcome their natural repugnance and become indifferent to it, as men become indifferent enough to anything they do often enough'.⁵ Familiarity thus breeds consent. Violence or abusive treatment is regarded as normal. And such abuse is buttressed by a range of institutions (corporations, industry, peer groups, families) that variously benefit from the institutionalization of abuse. Perhaps it is that sense of habituation that most concerned our forbears as shown, for example, by Hogarth's famous engravings of four stages of cruelty in 1751, which begins with cruelty to dogs and ends up with murder and public dissection. Habituation may hurt us because it means that cruelty has become routine.

And then there is the phenomenon of 'denial', which functions as a way of pushing aside uncomfortable moral reality. What might be called a mechanism of 'willed ignorance', of looking the other way, of moral pretence. As T. S. Eliot once remarked: 'Mankind can bear little reality'. Most of us are animal abuse deniers in that sense; we have some inkling that – for example – the products we buy and our food preferences have some costs to the animals involved, but we push such reality aside.

None of this means, of course, that humans who are cruel to animals will automatically be cruel to other humans. There is no simple cause and effect. But these mechanisms are uncomfortably familiar to those whose job it is to combat abuse of weaker human beings. We do not yet know – at least with any degree of certainty – whether the same people who abuse animals will also abuse weaker humans; some may, some may not. Just because the same excuse is given does not, by itself, show the link. The phenomenon of bifurcation is much more subtle. If someone acts violently towards another who is weaker in order to rob him, this only shows that he has no compassion for the person he has robbed, but it does not establish that he lost his compassion for his fellow humans through his previous ill treatment of animals. If half the number of violent criminals abused animals, what does this say of the other half? Does this mean that half of them loved animals and simply hated their fellow humans? We are far from having anything like a complete answer to these, and many other, questions.

Despite these necessary qualifiers, it must at least be right to pose the question of whether these mechanisms (as well as other factors) only harm us in relation to the abuse inflicted on human subjects. Ought not a 'cost/benefit' analysis – which is now regularly employed in ethical evaluation – mean that we should also logically explore the debit side of our abuse of animals? Since

we often appeal to a range of benefits, including those that are purely hypothetical or indirect, in justifying the abuse of animals, are we not also right to count in a range of costs, or at least risks, when it comes to animals? We need a full moral audit whenever it is claimed that abuse ‘benefits’ us. By doing so, we may at last begin to challenge the terms of public debate.

IV

The issue of violence and abuse has become more and more prominent as we begin to wrestle with the complexity of abusive relations and recognize their many, hitherto largely unfamiliar, aspects. It may not be too much to say that there is now a new consciousness of abuse that is spurring on a much deeper, more diligent searching of our consciences than ever before.

The value of this volume is in bringing to light one strand in this complexity – one that has often been misunderstood or insufficiently recognized. No one is claiming that this aspect holds the key or, by itself, answers all the problems, but it is surely one aspect that deserves a great deal more careful attention than it has received so far.

This book is for all those who have a stake in this debate, either because their academic work relates to the issues involved, or because their professional role involves contact with the abused or the abusers, both human and animal. The list includes, but is not limited to: child care officers, community carers, law enforcement officers, health visitors, veterinarians, anti-cruelty inspectors, animal protection officers, social scientists, lawyers, psychologists, and criminologists. It comprises a remarkable range of contributions: variously they provide critical reviews of existing research in the field, examine the latest evidence, and consider the implications for legal policy as well as the role of key professionals. There is also a large section that addresses the underlying philosophical and ethical issues.

The chapters that follow will also be of interest to the growing number of students who take university and college courses in Animal Ethics, Animal Law, Animals in Philosophy, as well as the large number of well-established courses in Human–Animal Studies. After many years of apparent neglect, it is a delight to see the emergence of such university courses in which students are encouraged to ask normative questions about the ethics of our treatment of animals.

The eight sections of the book are gathered around the most important issues in the debate. Short introductions are supplied by the editor for each part which briefly outline the central arguments of each chapter. As might be expected, almost all the contributions concern animal abuse or cruelty that is illegal in most of the countries under discussion, relating for the most part to domestic or companion animals. But that leaves, of course, the important issue of abuse or cruelty that is perfectly legal. Legal abuse in factory farming, in puppy mills, in entertainment, in research labs, in teaching seminars, in the fur

industry, are some examples of institutionalized abuse that is often not considered abuse. We have not, even within this lengthy work, been able to deal adequately with all the multifarious problems thrown up by the *legal* abuse of animals. However, **Part VIII** tries to grapple with the abuse of wild, free-ranging animals, which in many forms, especially hunting, is still legal throughout the world. These four chapters at least raises the important question of whether socially and legally sanctioned abuse – in this one area alone – might be harmful to human participants as well as the animals concerned.

Quite deliberately, the book has an international flavour. It comprises contributors from seven countries, including a major focus on work in the UK and the US. Abuse, after all, is international in scope, as are the various attempts – both academic and professional – to understand and prevent it. The collection gives prominence both to those who are accomplished researchers in the field, as well as up-and-coming scholars who are likely to be major players in the generations to come.

Most of the contributory chapters began their life as presentations to the International Conference on the Relationship between Animal Abuse and Human Violence held under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics at Keble College, University of Oxford, in 2007. As the collection developed, some papers were included which arrived too late for presentation at the conference, but which were important in adding to the range of the book and making it as comprehensive as possible.

The conference was the first major academic gathering on this topic in the UK and built on the previous work begun in 2001 by the Links Group. The Centre is grateful to the many sponsoring bodies, including the Links Group, Learning about Animals, One Voice, Women's Aid, Paws for Kids, and especially to the League Trust, the charitable arm of the League Against Cruel Sports. Only the foresight and generosity of the League Trust, together with the many other supporting bodies, made the groundbreaking conference possible.

Although the League, like the other sponsors, is hardly a neutral bystander on the issue of abuse, it is much to its credit that it offered to be the major sponsor of an academic conference where papers were selected by the Centre solely on the basis of their academic merit. A 'Call for Papers' was issued and circulated to all relevant departments in universities throughout the world, and the selection of speakers was based on the scholarly promise of their submitted abstract. As a small recompense for the League's work, the royalties from the book will be divided equally between the League Trust and the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics.

On a more personal note, my thanks are due to my wife, Jo, who has helped share the burdens of editing and proofing; to Professor Priscilla Cohn for her immense and invaluable assistance at all stages of the preparation of the manuscript; to Kate Kirkpatrick, who has copy-edited the manuscript from start to finish with great skill and forbearance, and to Daniel B. Williams whose



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generosity and dexterity in copy-editing and proofing immeasurably improved the final text. Finally, special thanks are due to Alastair and Sarah Harden who compiled the index.

ANDREW LINZEY
Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics
June 2008

Notes

- 1 Immanuel Kant, 'Duties towards animals and spirits', in *Lectures on ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1963), p. 240.
- 2 Lord Erskine, Second Reading of the Bill for Preventing Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals, *Hansard*, House of Lords, 15 May 1809, p. 277.
- 3 Kant, *Lectures on ethics*, p. 240.
- 4 Michael Fitzpatrick, 'Our desire to put dogs before children leaves a Nazi taste', <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2007/07/25/105259/our-desire-to-put-dogs-before-children-leaves-a-nazi-taste.html>.
- 5 George Bernard Shaw, 'Killing for sport' and 'The doctor's dilemma', in *Prefaces to the plays of George Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable and Co., 1934), pp. 144, 258–9.

