

Essays in Philosophy

Volume 5
Issue 2 *Animal Ethics*

Article 21

6-2004

'The Powers That Be': Mechanisms that Prevent us Recognising Animal Sentience

Andrew Linzey
University of Oxford

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Linzey, Andrew (2004) "'The Powers That Be': Mechanisms that Prevent us Recognising Animal Sentience," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 21.

Essays in Philosophy

A Biannual Journal

Vol. 5 No. 2, June 2004

‘The Powers That Be’: Mechanisms that Prevent us Recognising Animal Sentience

I propose to identify and illustrate what might be described as ‘the powers that be’ – four mechanisms that prevent us from recognising sentience in animals, and to indicate the challenges that should follow for future work in this field.

I.

The first is what Denys Turner has recently called ‘that most powerful of human tools, *the power of misdescription*’. In a paper, provocatively titled ‘How to Kill People’, he argues:

Let me tell you how to kill people efficiently; or rather, here’s how to get yourself, and, if you are in the business of doing so, here’s how to get others to kill people. First you have got to call your proposed victims names ... if we propose to kill a fellow human being and justify it, we have to redescribe him in such a way that he no longer belongs to us, becomes an alien being ... and in that way the inhibition against killing is effectively weakened.

He provides the examples of how some newspapers, in the time of the Falklands/Malvinas war, described the Argentinians as ‘Argies’ or ‘wops’, and how, in the Vietnamese war, US soldiers called the North Vietnamese ‘Gooks’. Apparently, General Westmoreland once commented that they [the Vietcong] could be killed with less scruple because they had an ‘Eastern’ attitude to death and the value of human life.¹ These examples are not intended to pass moral judgements on either war, but to illustrate that we cannot easily kill human beings without degrading them at first verbally. In order to kill or abuse we need to create an *artificial* distance from the one who is to be killed or abused.

Similarly, we have created an artificial distance between ourselves and other animals. There are differences, sometimes important ones, both between and among species. It is not difference *per se*, but rather the *denigration* of difference that is significant morally. It is how we *use* differences to justify unjust treatment, and, specifically, how these are embodied in our language. Consider the historic language we use about animals: ‘brutes’, ‘dumb brutes’, ‘unfeeling brutes’, ‘critters’, ‘sub-humans’, ‘beasts’, ‘wild beasts’, and our adjectives, ‘brutal’, ‘beastly’, and ‘bestial’. The Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, which is still in use, recommends that marriage should not be undertaken ‘to satisfy men’s carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding’. By definition, it is difficult to champion the rights (though some undoubtedly have) of ‘beastly’, ‘brutal’, or ‘bestial’ life.

So pervasive is this language that it is difficult even for ‘animal advocates’ (itself not an unambiguous term) to find an alternative nomenclature. ‘Our Dumb Friends League’ was the title of an actual animal-friendly organisation, which existed at the turn of the last century. And the term ‘non-human animals’

(used by pioneering animal advocates in the 1970s) is hardly un-prejudicial either. As one Buddhist friend of mine recently remarked: 'I am getting fed up with being called a *non*-Christian - who wants to be defined by what one is not?' In a class on sexual ethics at Oxford, I recall one student saying how much he opposed adultery because it was 'ratting on one's partner'. I had to point out that some rats are more monogamous than some human beings. In doing so, I had, as it were, 'to take the bull by the horns', not let 'sleeping dogs lie', 'be as sly as a fox', even act as 'a snake in the grass' ... the point to be grasped is that these are not just libels on human beings.

Unless we address the power of misdescription, we shall never be able to *think* straight, let alone *see* straight (that is, impartially, or, at least, with some measure of objectivity). Even 'animals' is itself a term of abuse (which hides the reality of what it purports to describe, namely, a range of differentiated beings of startling variety and complexity). The language we use is the language of *past* thought. We shall not possess a new understanding of animals, unless we actively challenge the language we use which is the language of historic denigration. The challenge is how to create a nomenclature - born of moral imagination and a sense of fellow-feeling - that does justice to animals.

II.

The second is the *power of misrepresentation*. It is important to grasp that the artificial distance between ourselves and other animals does not arise from nowhere. It has been fuelled by both religious and scientific ideologies.

In Christianity, that ideology is Cartesianism – the doctrine largely originating with Descartes that animals are unthinking automata. The reasoning goes like this: because animals possess no rational (and therefore immortal) soul they cannot therefore think, possess self-consciousness and language, and, therefore, they cannot experience pain. In short: they cannot feel pain because they do not have the mental wherewithal to do so. Supporters of Descartes often want to absolve him of callousness to animals, and perhaps they are right because it is difficult to discover one line that absolutely denies that animals feel any kind of pain. But it is the clear logic of what he writes that animals are little more than machines. Consider, for example, this tortuous argument:

I know that animals do many things better than we do, but this does not surprise me. It can even be used to prove they act naturally and mechanically, like a clock, which tells the time better than our own judgment does. Doubtless when the swallows come in spring, they operate like clocks. The actions of honeybees are of the same nature, and the discipline of cranes in flight, and of apes in fighting, if it is true they keep discipline. Their instinct to bury their dead is no stranger than that of dogs and cats who scratch the earth for the purpose of burying their excrement; they hardly ever actually bury it, which shows that they act only by instinct and without thinking. The most that one can say is that though the animals do not perform any action which shows us that they think, still, since the organs of their body are not very different from ours, it may be conjectured that there is attached to those organs some thoughts as we experience in ourselves, but of a very much less perfect kind. To which I have nothing to reply except that if they thought as we do, they would have an immortal soul like us.²

In other words (and at the very least), animals are unthinking organisms that operate by instinct. We cannot assume that their organs, though similar to our own, carry the same, or even similar, sensation since this is the function of the rational soul, which is unique to human beings. The argument is entirely

a priori. It is difficult to see how any empirical evidence could count against it.

The effect of Cartesianism was to devastate earlier Christian traditions of kindness to animals. Descartes's followers, the Port Royalists, 'kicked about their dogs and dissected their cats without mercy, laughing at any compassion for them, and calling their screams the noise of breaking machinery'.³ It is doubtful whether the Jesuit Joseph Rickaby could have written in 1889 that, 'we have no duties of charity, nor duties of any kind to the lower animals, as neither to stocks or stones'⁴ without the influence of Cartesianism. And even Charles Raven, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, (and himself a biologist) writing as late as 1927, maintained that, 'it may be doubted whether there is any real pain without a frontal cortex, a fore-plan in mind, and a love which can put itself in the place of another, and these are the attributes of humanity'.⁵ Descartes would have heartily approved of Raven's tying of sentiency to altruistic love.

Cartesianism was paralleled by a scientific doctrine called 'Behaviourism'. Behaviourist ideology – which has so influenced American and British psychology – only allows for descriptions of *learned* behaviour. Subjectivity in animals was jettisoned. As Bernard Rollin explains, 'A major victim of this ideology was the notion of felt pain in animals'.⁶ In order to preserve scientific objectivity, scientists 'totally ignored any subjective dimension of feeling, and dealt only with the neurological and chemical substratum, the "plumbing" of pain'.⁷ The result, as Rollin indicates, was an extreme scepticism about the existence of animal pain. 'Animal anaesthesia was known only as "chemical restraint" throughout most of the twentieth-century, and the first textbook of veterinary anaesthesia, published in the United States in the middle of the 1970s, does not list control of felt pain as a reason for anaesthetic use'. Again: 'Anyone doing a literature search on animal analgesia in the late 1970s would have found literally no journal articles on the topic, and such theoretical lack of concern was replicated in laboratories, and in veterinary practice'.⁸ Tellingly, the International Society for the Study of Pain still maintains a definition of pain that makes the possession of language a necessary precondition.

In fact, there is no good reason to deny that all mammals, at least, are sentient. 'Sentiency' is defined in some dictionaries as 'sense perception', but it is commonly used by philosophers to denote the capacity for pain and pleasure. The issue is not just about pain, however. Pain may be defined as an 'adverse physical stimuli', but there is ample evidence that all mammals experience not just pain, but also mental suffering, that is, stress, terror, shock, anxiety, fear, trauma, foreboding, and that only to a greater or lesser degree than we do ourselves. Animals and humans exhibit a common ancestor, show similar behaviour, and have physiological similarities. Because of these triple conditions, these shared characteristics, it is perfectly logical to believe that animals experience many of the same emotions as humans. Logic tells us this. Thus we do not need scientific data to believe in the suffering of animals. Rather, the onus should be on those people who try to deny that animals have such emotions. They must explain how in one species nerves act in one way and completely differently in another. They must explain why we believe that a child who cries and runs away from us after we have stamped on his or her foot is unhappy, while a dog who behaves in the same manner is said to present us with insufficient information for us to make a judgment.

That is not to deny, however, that the scientific evidence is not there for those who want it. As early as 1872, Darwin devoted a whole book to *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*.⁹ Since then, there has been a wide range of scientific, especially ethological and epistemological findings on animal learning, tool making, and self-consciousness. One of the founders of the field of animal cognition,

Donald R. Griffin, argued in 1992 that, 'What scientific understanding can provide is evidence against the notion that all animals are incapable of suffering and therefore totally undeserving of sympathy'.¹⁰ And David DeGrazia in his authoritative study published in 1996, concludes: 'The available evidence, taken together, suggests that many species of animal - indeed, there is some reason to think, most or all vertebrates - can experience anxious states of mind.' He adds, 'given the close - probably overlapping - relationship between fear and anxiety, it is reasonable to conclude that these animals can also experience fear. Supporting this proposition is the fact that all vertebrates have automatic-nervous systems and limbic systems, which contain the basic substrates of anxiety and fear.' The conclusion, then, is clear: 'the available evidence suggests that most or all vertebrates, and perhaps some invertebrates, can suffer.'¹¹

The misrepresentation of animals is paralleled by the misrepresentation of their advocates. Jeremy Paxman introduced an item on BBC2's 'Newsnight' concerning the Great Ape Project, by asking: 'Should we give *human* rights to apes?' In fact, no animal advocate (to my knowledge) wants to give apes *human* rights. The notion conjures up – as one suspects it was designed to do – visions of apes in polling booths, ape MPs, apes demonstrating for better pay, ape trade unions, and so on. By the misuse of *one* word, the case for not harming apes was subject to public ridicule. One Canadian newspaper, which in the course of attacking its anti-seal hunt campaign, described the International Fund for Animal Welfare – as 'the International Fund for putting Animals *on Welfare*'. In an increasingly welfare-unfriendly world, that charge betokens fraudulent activity. It conjures up pictures of animals as rival welfare claimants, drawing benefits, claiming the dole, and squandering our tax payer's money. Another welfare fraud. The power of the media to misrepresent can frighten us out of most moral sensibilities. Who wants to be known as a 'bunny hugger', a 'bambi lover', a 'friend of the dumb brutes', or, less benignly, a 'sentimentalist', an 'extremist', a 'fanatic', even (most regrettably of all) a 'terrorist'?

The second challenge, then, is to seek non-pejorative, even convivial, representations of animals, and less than partial labels for those who try to protect them.

III.

The third is *the power of misdirection*. I mean by that, the way in which suffering in animals, even when acknowledged, is minimised, obfuscated, or its moral significance belittled. There are six arguments.

(i) *The first is the 'we can't really know' argument*. Academics frequently exhibit the 'scepticism of the wise' tendency, that is, when presented with what to most ordinary mortals appears as a case of abuse, if not downright cruelty, they invariably inflate uncertainty, and in so doing misdirect our attention away from the harm inflicted. Here is an example:

TV interviewer: 'Don't pigs suffer when immobilised in these crates'?

Respected scientist: 'You are assuming of course that pigs suffer just like we do. We do not really know that. It's a very complex question.'

TV interviewer: 'But don't most animals have the need to turn around?'

Respected scientist: 'But, again, you're assuming that the needs of pigs are identical to our own. We have to move beyond naïve anthropomorphism.'

TV interviewer: 'So you're saying that they aren't suffering then?'

Respected scientist: 'I think we would need a great deal more research in order to reach a

definite conclusion about such a complex question. We can't simply assume that pigs suffer in circumstances that would make us suffer.'

TV interviewer: 'So what do you think should be done?'

Respected scientist: 'I think we need much more research. We don't know how animals feel because they can't tell us about it. We should set up a scientific committee to explore this question, make experiments, obtain research grants, find really objective ways of measuring what may be at issue here'.

TV interviewer: 'Thank you, Professor, for your eloquent insights.'

The interview is imaginary, but not wholly fictional. Such are the legacies of Cartesianism and Behaviourism that academics find it as difficult to talk about emotion in animals as nineteenth-century clergymen found it difficult to talk about sex. It is something that they cannot easily do without blushing. They would have to live with the most dreaded accusation that can be levelled at any academic, namely, being a 'sentimentalist'. For most academics, agnosticism is a life-long 'faith' – and I use that word deliberately. Scepticism has its good side (we surely need people committed to rigorous enquiry), but it misleads us when it becomes an end in itself. In the not wholly unfair definition provided by George McLeod: an academic is 'someone who can hold a vital issue at arm's length for a lifetime'.¹² What is worrying is that this professional scepticism (which, in other contexts, we should welcome) is increasingly taken over by government ministers, officials, and especially by their committees (who are usually packed full of appropriately appointed academics) so that government policy becomes itself unreasonably sceptical about animal sentience. Peter Roberts provides a classic example. In a symposium contribution titled, 'The experts say this is not cruel ...', he refers to how the State Veterinary Service Report to Parliament maintained that there was 'no suffering detected in the keeping of a calf in a 22-inch wide veal crate night and day for all its life, and unable to turn round'. The Report maintained, 'it is not in the calf's interest to be able to turn round'.¹³

Philosophers have sometimes compounded the scepticism of scientists by reason of their own agnosticism. Modern discussion has been influenced by Thomas Nagel's well-known essay, 'What is it like to be a bat?'¹⁴ His answer (not surprisingly) is that we cannot know much – actually nothing – about what it is like to be a bat. But we do not need to know precisely how a bat thinks, or feels, or mentally encounters the world, in order to know basic things about how it can be harmed, for example, by mutilation, by deprivation of its instincts, by isolation from its peers, by subjecting it to invasive procedures, and by the infliction of adverse physical stimuli. We can, and do, know these things, without scientific evidence, and without knowing everything possible, philosophically, or scientifically, about the mental consciousness of a bat. We can know these things, at least, *as reasonably* as we know them in the case of most humans. The same is also true of the many millions of mammals that we regularly harm in research, recreation, and farming. We should not allow not knowing everything to prevent us from acting ethically on what we can reasonably know.

(ii) *The second is the 'we must have scientific evidence before we can make a judgment' argument.* The desire for data, for evidence of all kinds, rather than simply assertion, is to be welcomed in moral debate, but when it comes to animals this desire is hardened into a pre-condition of judgment. The Burns Report on Hunting with Dogs provides an example. Commissioned post-mortem evidence showed that hunted foxes died from 'massive injuries to the chest and vital organs'. Yet, the Report concludes that there is 'a lack of firm scientific evidence about the effect on the welfare of a fox of being closely pursued, caught and killed above ground'. Hunting is judged to 'seriously compromise the welfare of the fox',¹⁵ but it is

not ‘cruel’. Lord Burns, in a subsequent speech in the House of Lords, explains why:

Naturally, people ask whether we were implying that it was cruel but in true Sir Humphrey style were not prepared to say so. The short answer to that question is no. There was no sufficient verifiable evidence or data safely to reach views about cruelty. It is a complex area ... One cannot ask an animal about its welfare or know what is going on inside its head.¹⁶

‘Cruelty’ is sometimes defined as the act of *deliberately* harming, but it is not cruelty in that sense that Burns appears to be referring to. By ‘cruelty’ he seems to mean ‘real suffering’, and to reach that judgment one apparently needs ‘sufficient verifiable evidence’, *in addition to* physical post-mortem evidence. Thus, even *prima facie* evidence of harm is not sufficient to reach a definite judgment about suffering. But the idea that there must be ‘sufficient verifiable evidence’ before we can know that a fox suffers when it is being disemboweled by dogs is as unreasonable as supposing that we cannot know that a whip lashing a child’s back is ‘cruel’. If Burn’s attitude of extreme scepticism were maintained in the face of similar evidence of cruelty to children, the noble Lord would justifiably be the subject of public ridicule, even though infants cannot tell us ‘what is going on inside their heads’ either.

(ii) *The third is the ‘we mustn’t be anthropomorphic’ argument.* There is a bad as well as a good anthropomorphism. Bad includes the attempt to project obviously human needs and emotions onto animals as when, for example, we enter the Beatrix Potter world of animals dressed up in human clothes and enjoying gardening. But these fantasies should not detract from the truth of good anthropomorphism, which accepts, as a reasonable assumption, that, in their own individual manner, mammals suffer only to a greater or lesser extent than we do. The ‘anthropomorphic’ view was ably expressed by the ‘Ethical Approach’ of the former Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee in 1970: ‘the fact that an animal has limbs should give it the right to use them; the fact that a bird has wings should give it the right to spread them; the fact that both animals and birds are mobile should give them the right to turn around, and the fact that they have eyes should give them the right to see’.¹⁷

Yet, making that – fairly minimal assumption – appears to some a step too far. Colin Tudge, for example, argues that, ‘many of the things done to animals in the name of farming *seem* cruel. It seems cruel to stand a sow in a stall, too small for her to turn round ... It seems cruel to make a cow lie on concrete’. But, he continues: ‘We cannot assume that animals are unhappy simply because they are in situations that would make us unhappy; we cannot assume they are unhappy because they look unhappy to the casual observer ...’.¹⁸

In fact, it is a very reasonable assumption that animals denied use of most, or all, of their natural instincts – without any compensating factors - are ‘unhappy’. That is exactly what we *can* – and *should* assume. We do not need science to know that intensive farming harms animals, deprives them of their natural life, and makes them liable to suffering. In 1974, John Napier, then, Chair of the Farm Livestock Advisory Committee of the RSPCA stated that, ‘No good ethologist would regard even a modicum of anthropomorphism as the proper way to present a case [for animal welfare] in the long run’.¹⁹ Thus began a thirty year industry in which academics have been paid sometimes huge sums to investigate whether animals in intensively farmed conditions are ‘suffering’. But if anthropomorphism is so ‘unscientific’, and so flawed, why is it that subsequent research has vindicated almost all the objections to factory farming, based on ‘naïve anthropomorphism’, that were advanced as early as 1964? The very systems that attracted criticism – battery cages, sow stalls, veal crates – have all been shown to make

animals liable to harm or to engender suffering. The words of Konrad Lorenz cannot be gainsaid: ‘The similarity [between humans and animals] is not only functional but historical, and it would be an actual fallacy not to humanise’.²⁰

(iv) *The fourth is the ‘everything has feelings’ argument.* Those who want to reject the idea that animal suffering matters apparently see pain and suffering everywhere. The case of fish is instructive. Although the case for sentience in mammals is stronger than that of fish, some apparently regard fish as wholly insensible. Thus three scientists conspired to apply bee venom and acetic acid to the lips of trout and learnt that it had ‘adverse behavioural and physiological effects’.²¹ The conclusions were hardly surprising, and, despite the claims, had already been anticipated by earlier research.²² Nevertheless, even this evidence was not enough for some. In the words of a columnist of *The Times*: ‘We should ignore this codswallop hook, line and sinker’. The argument is that if we allow ourselves to be persuaded by evidence of pain in fish, ‘it is illogical to deny the possibility that your lawn cannot feel a thing when you attack it with your flymo’.²³

There is no evidence or reason, however, to suppose that plants are sentient, but that does not prevent our columnist. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) will, we are assured, shortly become the ‘People for the Ethical Treatment of Vegetables’.²⁴ Those who place their hopes in science might like to reflect that, for some, evidence of whatever kind will never count against their opinions. The issue, as always, is not about science, even about the sensibility of fish or plants, but about *our* moral sensibility. As Lorenz remarked: ‘The man who cannot distinguish between slicing a live dog and slicing a live lettuce is a suitable candidate for suicide.’²⁵

(iv) *Fifthly, there is the ‘they may feel pain, but not as we do’ argument* – reminiscent of Mr Spock's famous line in *Star Trek*, ‘yes, it’s life, but not as we know it’. The origin of this view is the idea, so central to Cartesianism, that animals are incapable of rational thought, and therefore cannot really suffer like us. But the moral issue is not whether their suffering is identical in all respects to our own, but rather whether their suffering is *as important to them as ours is to us*. Rationality may, plausibly, increase suffering if there is anticipation or foreboding involved. It may be, for example, that animals have no concept of death and therefore cannot fear it. But it does not follow that the suffering of non-rational beings (if that is what mammals are) is always less intense.

Consider: if animals are (as we are told) devoid of rational thought, and therefore live closer to their instincts, then it may be that a calf immobilised in a crate, or a lion caged up in a zoo, experiences a mental kind of torment that we can only imagine. Terry Waite who suffered five terrible years in captivity said that in order to alleviate his suffering he, *inter alia*, composed novels in his head.²⁶ But such consolations are not available to animals. If animals are not rational, then it follows that their suffering cannot be softened by an intellectual comprehension of the circumstances – they just experience the raw terror of not knowing what has happened, why it has happened, and how long it will endure. If, as philosophers have claimed, animals are not intelligent like us, it is possible that some forms of suffering are actually *worse* for them, than they would be for us. Rationality requires (of us), at least, an attempt at even-handedness.

There is a kind of snootiness about the way in which humans regard their own interests or pleasures as self-evidently more important than those of other species. It was epitomised some years ago when a researcher on television defended animal experiments on the ground that animals were incapable of

understanding poetry. Well, every individual – both within and between species - has different interests and pleasures. Mine happen to include reading political biographies, smoking ‘Three Nuns’ pipe tobacco, arguing about theology, watching romantic films, and consuming cheap red wine. My half-Persian cat, on the other hand, enjoys being tickled on the chin, chasing table tennis balls, stalking in the long grass, and reclining on my wife’s pillow. What gives pleasure to other animals – and other humans - is often different, sometimes very different, to what gives *me* pleasure, but I can see no *rational* ground for supposing that my ability to enjoy pipe tobacco – rather than, say, an ability to chase table tennis balls – justifies me, or any of us, in supposing that our suffering or pleasure matters more to us than theirs does to them. We must beware of the ‘aristocrats of the mind’ tendency which supposes that the only, or highest, pleasure in the world (and the only one worth defending) is the contemplation of Aristotle’s metaphysics.

(vi) *Sixthly, there is the ‘animals experience pain, but it’s not morally important like our pain’ argument.* Looked at objectively there are good rational grounds for regarding the suffering of animals as especially significant morally. Consider the case of children, specifically infants. In recent years there has been an increase of sensitivity towards children, which is rather remarkable in the light of their low status historically. Is this sensitivity well-founded philosophically? I think it is. Consider further: infants are, strictly speaking, morally innocent, they are vulnerable and powerless in relation to us, they cannot fully represent themselves, or articulate their needs, and they are subjects of a special trust. All these considerations make the infliction of suffering upon them not *easier* but *harder* to justify.

Now, these considerations also apply to animals, perhaps even more so. Animals also are morally innocent – they cannot morally be bettered by pain, or be improved by it; no pain in animals can be ‘deserved’ (as some have argued may be true in the case of some humans); they are also, at least mostly, vulnerable and powerless in relation to us, and they are incapable of representing themselves, of giving ‘informed’ consent, or articulating their needs. They are also subjects of a special trust in that they are (in the case of domestic animals) wholly dependent upon us; we have (in most cases) deliberately chosen to make them so dependent. It is precisely these considerations that should mark out both infants and animals as justifying special moral solicitude.²⁷

In short: we need to reject the common rationalisations that animal pain, even when acknowledged, is not morally important like *our* pain. On the contrary, not only is human pain not the only morally significant pain in the world, but there are also rational grounds for supposing that suffering in animals, like suffering in children, should make a special moral claim upon us. There is something particularly poignant about the sheer vulnerability and helplessness both of infants and animals. When we grasp that fact, it should inform our moral reckoning.

In addition to these philosophical considerations, there is an underlying theological one. It concerns the Christ-like nature of animal suffering. What should ‘move our very hearts and sicken us’, according to John Henry Newman, is the realisation that animals are morally innocent, ‘that they have done no harm. Next, that they have no power of resisting; it is the cowardice and tyranny of which they are the victims that makes their suffering so especially touching ... there is something so dreadful, so satanic [sic] in tormenting those who have never harmed us, and who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly in our power, who have weapons neither of offence nor defence that none but very hardened persons can endure the thought of it’. And he concludes: ‘Think then, my brethren, of your feelings at cruelty practiced upon brute animals, and you will gain one sort of feeling which the history of Christ’s Cross and passion ought

to excite within you.’

The third challenge, then, is to find the moral and intellectual resources to face the full reality of animal sentience without trivialisation or obfuscation.

IV.

I turn, lastly, to the *power of misperception (or, rather, to the power of perception)*. I begin with an example that I have used before.²⁹ The University where I once used to work as chaplain was situated in acres of eighteenth-century parkland. From my office, I was able to look out over the undulating hillside populated with rabbits. At first, I used to just notice things moving here and there as I occasionally looked up from my computer. But as the weeks and months progressed, I slowly began to marvel at the complexity, intricacy, and beauty of their lives. I used to say – only half-jokingly – that it ‘was worth coming to the University to see the rabbits’. Whenever visitors came I used to point out the rabbits, and some would indeed say, ‘How wonderful’, but for many others it was if I had pointed out the dust on the carpet, or the faded colour of the paint. Whatever they saw they did not *see* rabbits.

I trust I am labouring the obvious here. But many people still do not *see* animals. They may have seen things moving, objects out there, even ‘pests’ that invade ‘their’ territory. But they have not yet seen other living, sentient beings. Our language, our philosophy, our science, our history, our theology, our culture, by and large, prevents us from seeing. We should not be surprised when major voices in our history have regarded animals as machines that in the end we treat them as machines. It was Ruth Harrison’s prophetic work in 1964 on farm animals, titled *Animal Machines*,³⁰ that helped us appreciate how we had reduced other creatures to just that. I recall after lecturing one day in Oxford, a student came up to me and said: ‘Well, Dr Linzey, I found all your arguments very interesting, but there’s something I don’t understand. What are animals for, if they are not to be eaten?’ The person concerned was being perfectly serious and sincere. She just had not seen animals as anything more than lumps of meat. We have to move from an anthropocentric – indeed gastrocentric – view of animals.

The change of perception – or rather insight – can be stated quite simply: it is the move away from ideas that animals are machines, tools, things, commodities, resources here for us, to the idea that animals have their own value – what we may call an ‘intrinsic value’. Animals are not just ‘objects’ out there; they are – in the words of Tom Regan – ‘subjects of a life’, and they bring *subjectivity* into our world.³¹ As I have put it elsewhere, ‘this is a moral and spiritual discovery that is as objective and important as any other fundamental discovery, whether it be the discovery of the stars or the discovery of the human psyche’.³² It is the ‘Eureka!’ experience, the ‘Aha!’ experience – the moment when the penny drops – experience. It is when we make the *moral* discovery that animals matter in themselves, that they have value in themselves, and that their suffering is as important to them as ours is to us.

There are still many human beings out there who just have not had this experience, this insight. They do not think that animals matter, or that there are other creatures of value in the world. They think that human beings matter, but that the rest is just ‘the environment’, theatre, or backdrop, to what really matters, namely themselves. They suffer, theologically, from the terrible delusion that God only cares for the human species – among the millions of species that she has made. That great animal champion Henry Salt wrote in his fiftieth year an autobiography entitled *Fifty Years Among the Savages*³³ Well, having passed my fiftieth year, I sometimes know how he felt.

Now, this insight cannot be programmed or, even worse, indoctrinated. But animal advocates have been too hesitant about insisting that this insight should, at least, be on the programme. While others have been shameless in promoting their concerns on the educational agenda, animal advocates have hardly begun to articulate the case for theirs. There are few examples of where the possibility of seeing animals differently forms part of the curriculum at any level of education: primary, secondary, tertiary, or higher. In many courses, whether they be in animal husbandry, animal conservation, animal science, or even sometimes in animal welfare, students are not required to challenge, or at least address, the dominant perceptions of animals as commodities, resources, tools, machines or things.

Indeed, courses in Animal Conservation seem to miss the point entirely. For they often presuppose that animals are not individuals, but just collectivities or species. Hence, so-called ‘conservationists’ are in the forefront of killing ruddy ducks, hedgehogs, or grey squirrels, in order to preserve other species. Conservationists see species, but they fail to see *individual* animals that deserve our protection. Similarly, courses in Animal Science are often so ‘scientific’ that they fail to see animals as anything more than objects of dissection or complex machines. It never seems to occur to zoologists, any more than conservationists, that animals are not just animals but *individual* animals – each with their own unique, morally significant, individuality.

History, it has been said, is the province of the winners; what we see all around is the embodiment of what was once thought. Think of what a zoo or a factory farm is – it is not just a building or a piece of geography – it is a living embodiment of the past view, the historic view, that sees animals as commodities to be put on display, or simply bred for human use. Education needs to give people the chance to think and imagine differently, to conceive of other, better worlds for humans and animals. Animal advocates need more resolve, more tenacity, and more resources to embody and institutionalise this insight. There should be courses, centres, institutes, degrees, even universities, dedicated to new perspectives on animals. The Humane Society of the United States, to its credit, has recently funded its own Humane Society University with an impressive array of ground-breaking courses.

The final, and most important, challenge, then, is to find ways of institutionalising, embodying, and incarnating new perceptions of animals so that as a matter of course all students in education – at whatever level – are encouraged to rethink the dominant intellectual paradigm. Only then shall we be in a position to effectively counter the moral and spiritual impoverishment revealed in our maltreatment of animals. ‘We need another, and wiser, and perhaps more mystical, concept of animals’ wrote the enlightened conservationist, Henry Beston, ‘they are not brethren, they are not underlings, they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth’.³⁴

Andrew Linzey*
University of Oxford

Notes

1. Denys Turner, *Faith Seeking* (London: SCM Press, 2002), p. 61.
2. Rene Descartes, letter to Henry More, 5 February, 1646, in Anthony Kenny (ed and trans), *Descartes: Philosophical Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); extract in Tom Regan and Peter Singer

(eds), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, second edn (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 15. The argument is odd in many ways, not least the assertion that because dogs and cats do not adequately cover up their excreta, they must lack rational sense. When have humans adequately cleared up their mess, we might ask?

3. J. P. Mahaffy, *Descartes* (London, 1901), p. 118; cited and discussed in A. Richard Kingston, 'Theodicy and Animal Welfare', *Theology*, Vol. LXX, No. 569 (November 1967), pp. 482-488.

Kingston's article is also reproduced in Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (eds), *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 71-78.

4. Joseph Rickaby, *Moral Philosophy* (London: Longmans, 1889), p. 249; also discussed in Kingston, in Linzey and Regan, *ibid*, p. 72.

5. Charles E. Raven, *The Creator Spirit* (London, 1927), p. 120; also discussed in Kingston, in Linzey and Regan, *ibid*, p. 77.

6. Bernard E. Rollin, 'Animal Pain' in Andrew Linzey (ed), *Animal World Encyclopedia* (Plymouth: Kingsley Publishing), forthcoming 2004. I am grateful to Rollin for these insights into pain and behaviourism. See also Bernard E. Rollin, *The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), which is a landmark book on scientific and philosophical attitudes to animal pain.

7. Rollin, 'Animal Pain', *ibid*.

8. Rollin, 'Animal Pain', *ibid*.

9. Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* [1872] (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) (Reprinted from the authorised edition of D. Appleton and Company, New York and London, n.d.). I am grateful to Priscilla Cohn for this reference.

10. Donald R. Griffin, *Animal Minds* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 251.

11. David DeGrazia, *Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 123. Chapters 4-7 survey and analyse the latest empirical evidence about animal consciousness and sentience.

12. George McLeod, cited in Ronald Ferguson, *George McLeod: Founder of the Iona Community* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), p. 194.

13. Peter Roberts, 'The Experts Say this is not Cruel ...' in David Paterson and Richard D. Ryder (eds), *Animals' Rights: A Symposium* (Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press, 1979), p. 131. I am aware that I have not considered the effect of tradition and social conformity, let alone commercial influences on how we view animals. Those influences will be the subject of future papers.

14. Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?' (chapter 12), *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 164-180.

15. *Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs*, chaired by Lord Burns (London: HMSO, 1999), para

6.49, p. 117.

16. Lord Burns, Debate on the Hunting Bill, *Hansard*, 12 March, 2001, p. 533.

17. *Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock*, Report by the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, (London: MAFF, 1970), p. 5; discussed in Linzey, 1976, *ibid*, pp. 65-66.

18. Colin Tudge, 'Farmers in Loco Parentis', *New Scientist*, 18 October, 1965; cited and discussed in Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment* (London: SCM Press, 1976), p. 2.

19. John Napier, 'Introductory Address', *Stress in Farm Animals*, proceedings of a joint symposium held by the Society for Veterinary Ethology and the RSPCA, *British Veterinary Journal*, no. 130, 1974, p. 85; discussed in Linzey, 1976, *ibid*, p. 64.

20. Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression*, trans by M. Latzke (London, 1966), p. 54; cited and discussed in Stephen R. L. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 38-39.

21. 'Trout Trauma Puts Anglers On the Hook', News Release, Royal Society, 29 April, 2003, p. 1. For the full research see, Lynne U. Sneddon, Victor A. Braithwaite and Michael J. Gentle, 'Do fish have nociceptors: evidence for the evolution of a vertebrate sensory system', *Biological Sciences*, Vol. 270, No. 1520, to be published in June 2003.

22. See, for example, the previous work by Verheijen at the University of Utrecht discussed by John Webster, *Animal Welfare: A Cool Look at Eden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 224.

23. Ross Clark, 'We should ignore this codswollop hook, line and sinker', *The Times*, 1 May, 2003. The same dismissive attitude is taken by fisherman Keith Elliot who assures us that 'the research was a load of tosh', 'Fishing lines: Make-up? My face needs a miracle', *The Independent*, 4 May, 2003.

24. Clark, *ibid*.

25. Konrad Lorenz, in Clark, *ibid*.

26. See Terry Waite, *Taken on Trust* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993). It is a remarkable story of how a human being in conditions of captivity can nevertheless rise above the worst that other humans can do to him.

27. I have wrestled with this theme in Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994), Chapter 2, 'The Moral Priority of the Weak', pp. 28-44. See also my paper, 'Why Animal Suffering Matters Morally', in preparation.

28. John Henry Newman, 'The Crucifixion', *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8 Vols (London: Rivingtons, 1868), Vol. II, pp. 136-137.

29. The effect of this experience is such that it is mentioned in many of my writings. See, for example, Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), pp. 45-46.

30. Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines* (London; Vincent Stuart, 1964). Ruth often said that she would

write a follow up book called *Since Animal Machines*, but she was always too busy working practically for farm animal welfare to complete it. Perhaps, one day, someone will write it for her, or sympathetic academics will produce a collection in her honour.

31. Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 243-248. See also the discussion, Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (London: SPCK, 1987), pp. 82f.

32. Andrew Linzey, 'Foreword' to Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xi.

33. Henry Salt, *Fifty Years Among the Savages* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1902). Twenty years later, he wrote another autobiography, titled, *Seventy Years Among the Savages*.

34. Henry Beston, *The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1928), p. 25. I am grateful to Brian Klug for this reference.

*I am grateful to Professor Priscilla Cohn of Penn State University for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper.