

# Friends and Nonhuman Animals<sup>1</sup>

*What we look for is no longer the Pax Romana, the peace of imperial Rome, nor is it simply the Pax Humana, the peace among humans, but the Pax Gaia, the peace of Earth and every being on the Earth. This is the original and final peace, the peace granted by whatever power it is that brings our world into being.*

*Thomas Berry, 1914-2009, Evening Thoughts<sup>2</sup>*

In this article, I argue that the question of where we, as the Religious Society of Friends, stand with respect to animals and their lives, is the single most pressing challenge to our values and practices. I begin by examining human relations with, and treatment of, animals and then look at our Society's position.

## Humans using animals

Every year in animal agriculture worldwide, we kill 65 000 000 000 land based animals.<sup>3</sup>

This is a rate of killing roughly equivalent to wiping out every person in Central and Southern Africa every 24 hours and it goes on day after day.<sup>4</sup> Animals used in agriculture do not enjoy idyllic lives. Certainly, those in Confined Feeding Operations (CAFOs), also known as factory farms, have awful lives but animal farming is about exploiting another individual's body for gain and animals are confined, castrated, forcibly made pregnant, have parts of their bodies cut or burnt off, have their young taken away, their families are destroyed and they die a violent death at a young age.<sup>5,6,7</sup> From birth to death their lives are never their own.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter known as "animals"

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> FAO, "FAOSTAT," 2014, <http://faostat.fao.org/site/569/DesktopDefault.aspx?PageID=569#ancor>.

<sup>4</sup> Les Mitchell, "Moral Disengagement and Support for Nonhuman Animal Farming," *Society & Animals* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 38–58, doi:10.1163/156853011X545529.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Davis, *Prisoned Chickens Poisoned Eggs*, 2nd ed. (Summertown: Book Publishing Company, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> C J C Phillips, *Principles of Cattle Production*. (Wallingford: CABI Publishing., 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Les Mitchell, "Discourse and the Oppression of Nonhuman Animals: A Critical Realist Account." (Rhodes,

We also experiment on animals in laboratories and other establishments. Estimates are that the number is well over 100 million a year; rats, mice, cats, dogs, pigs, monkeys, baboons and other species but reporting is very poor or often non-existent so little is known of their suffering behind the walls or of their capture and transportation.<sup>8</sup> What we do know from the sanitised language of reports, journal publications and information from inside laboratories is that in many cases unimaginable suffering is taking place.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these uses we use animals for power, carrying loads, transport of people, for hunting and for entertainment.

While cruelty statutes do exist, they are, for the most part, vague, ambiguous and human centred. UK legislation on experimentation refers to animals who are to be experimented upon as being “protected animals”.<sup>10</sup> The Animal Welfare Act speaks of causing “unnecessary suffering” and of it being an offence to carry out “mutilation” on animals unless that procedure is approved.<sup>11</sup> But what is meant by “necessary” suffering; for whom is it necessary and how can mutilation be approved by anyone?

In legal terms animals are property and they are always owned by somebody or some entity such as the state<sup>12</sup>. Being property means that they cannot be represented in court.<sup>13</sup> We care about the abuse of property because of the hurt it causes the owner not because the property suffers. Our own societal, cultural and economic interests concerning animals drive what is deemed legal or illegal and for this reason examples of legal definitions of animal cruelty or abuse which are free from these influences are very difficult to find.

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2007).

<sup>8</sup> “Normalising the Unthinkable: The Ethics of Using Animals in Research” (Oxford Centre For Animal Ethics, 2015), [http://eprints.port.ac.uk/17079/1/Normalising\\_the\\_Unthinkable\\_Report.pdf](http://eprints.port.ac.uk/17079/1/Normalising_the_Unthinkable_Report.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Great Britain and Home Office, *Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> “Animal Welfare Act UK.pdf,” n.d.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Wise M, *Rattling the Cage. Towards Legal Rights for Animals* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Perseus Publishing, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

One such a definition is given by Agnew and describes the abuse of an animal as, "...any act that contributes to the pain or death of an animal or that otherwise threatens the welfare of an animal".<sup>14</sup> He continues;

Such abuse may be physical (including sexual) or mental, may involve active maltreatment or passive neglect, may be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional, socially approved or condemned, and/or necessary or unnecessary (however defined).<sup>15</sup>

Critically, this is victim centred rather than perpetrator centred and applies as well to humans as animals. But when we look at our uses of animals in light of this, they are shown to constitute abuse. Of course, we might not directly abuse any animals but we may support abuse through, for example, our purchases of animal body parts, skins, milk, cheese and some pharmaceutical products.

Our actions relating to animals have been compared to some of the worst atrocities in our history and the comparisons with slavery are compelling.<sup>16</sup> Slaves at the time of the slave trade were first and foremost property as animals are property today. They were coerced and beaten, bought and sold, inspected intimately, transported long distances and families were broken up.<sup>17</sup> The child of a slave couple was the property of the slave owner not the parents and there were even attempts to breed slaves.<sup>18</sup> All of these practices apply to the animals we use today. But perhaps we should not be surprised because this system of oppression began long before slavery when animals were first "domesticated" and became our captives. In slavery and other forms of oppression, we simply transferred the system onto our fellow

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Agnew, "The Causes of Animal Abuse: A Social-Psychological Analysis," *Theoretical Criminology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 177–209.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>16</sup> Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison. Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, "Discourse and the Oppression of Nonhuman Animals: A Critical Realist Account."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

human beings.

Writers have also compared what we do to animals to genocide and the Holocaust<sup>19</sup> and of course the whole ideology of eugenics comes directly from animal farming – strengthening the stock weeding out the “weak” or “dysfunctional” and breeding those with the “right” characteristics.<sup>20</sup> Abhorrent when applied to humans but best practice when applied to animals.

Carol Adams makes the connection between meat and pornography.<sup>21</sup> Women are often referred to using animal terms such as chick, filly, bitch, cow and sometimes as meat, with fresh meat denoting a woman who has just reached the age of sexual consent. Their bodies are consumed in parts in a similar way to the consumption of the body parts of animals. There is no individual present, no sentience - just parts. We fail to recognise the flesh on a dinner plate as an individual who wanted to live but whose life has been taken in order to satisfy our pleasure.<sup>22</sup> We may have a leg of lamb for lunch but never a lamb’s leg.

One of the great drivers of colonial expansion was the hunger for land and water on which to put “farmed” animals for flesh and other “products’.<sup>23</sup> Indigenous peoples and free living animals were mercilessly abused and killed in the process.<sup>24</sup>

Our language also obscures our actions in regard to animals.<sup>25</sup> We “cull” instead of murdering speak of “humane” slaughter, have cows “giving” milk while their own babies have been taken away and killed and animals in laboratories are simply “models”. We speak

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka* (New York: Lantern Books, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory,” *Carol J. Adams*, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://caroljadams.com/spom-the-book/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> David Nibert A, *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domestration, Capitalism and Global Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Joan Dunayer, *Animal Equality: Language and Liberation* (Derwood, Maryland: Ryce Publishing, 2001).

of humans *and* animals as if these are two separate categories of being. Humans *are* animals but we divide ourselves ideologically from all other living beings. As Johnson points out, we often have a “blindness to being” and fail to see animals as truly other beings.<sup>26</sup>

## The Society of Friends and Animals

There is a great deal more which might be said but what of our Society in all of this?

Certainly, there is a long history of animal friendly religious perspectives in many faiths and none of the major faiths requires the eating of flesh. There is also a long history of Friends being concerned about animals<sup>27</sup> and in the past some Quakers argued that vivisection is incompatible with our Peace Testimony and viewed vivisection as war.<sup>28</sup>

Given the immense suffering humans inflict upon the world, it seems appropriate and urgent to ask where we stand today with regard to our treatment of animals. This is not a trivial question or one which can simply be set aside because we have more human concerns to consider. We surely cannot dismiss the suffering of powerless others simply because they are seen as different.

While it is true that we as a Society do not have a creed, we do have shared values or as some Friends describe them, testimonies. Amongst these are that we believe in justice, nonviolence, equality and speaking truth to power. Yet at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century our Society worldwide is almost totally silent about the mass suffering of billions of individuals at our hands. How can we explain, let alone condone, this collective turning away?

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<sup>26</sup> Lisa Johnson, *Power Knowledge and Animals* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> *Journeys of Compassion.pdf* (UK: Quaker Concern for Animals, 2016), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0FgBKeHb8ISTHNMUIIFclM0RDQ/view?usp=drive\\_web&usp=embed\\_face\\_book](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0FgBKeHb8ISTHNMUIIFclM0RDQ/view?usp=drive_web&usp=embed_face_book).

<sup>28</sup> Hayley Rose Glaholt, “Vivisection as War: The ‘Moral Diseases’ of Animal Experimentation and Slavery in British Victorian Quaker Pacifist Ethics,” *Society & Animals* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 154–72, doi:10.1163/156853012X631360.

Do we claim we should restrict our justice only so far as the species barrier which we have chosen to erect? Can we ask for justice for fellow humans when we deny it to others? And what type of justice is it when it is only for the powerful, which we undoubtedly are in relation to animals?

Are we committed to nonviolence or does this again only apply to our own “kind” and not to others? What of our Peace Testimony? And what about equality – do we believe, as the ancient Greeks believed, that a hierarchy exists in the world where there are greater and lesser beings and those below serve those above?<sup>2930</sup> Certainly our science tells us otherwise and no being is “more evolved” than any other, indeed the term has no scientific meaning.

And what of speaking truth to power? In this case, we are the powerful, the oppressors of the powerless. Who will speak truth to this power? We surely need to honestly and openly examine our complicity in this ongoing violence. This is not about being nice to animals but about respecting and practicing our core values. But more than this, it is about recognising that Light which also shines undimmed in our suffering fellow beings.

And if we do come to acknowledge our deep embroilment in this mass violence, as I believe we must, how are we called to act because surely we must act? Perhaps trying to answer this query might be a starting point for our deliberations.

*“Do we recognise the suffering imposed upon billions of nonhuman animals by human animals in the flesh and milk industry; in vivisection laboratories; in using them for power and entertainment and in the taking of their natural habitat? Given that nonhuman animals are utterly powerless to resist this oppression how is our Society called to act?”*

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<sup>29</sup> Rod Preece and David Fraser, “The Status of animals in Biblical and Christian Thought: A Study in Colliding Values,” *Society and animals* 8, no. 3 (2000): 245–63.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

*Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting*

*Heronbridge, South Africa 2006*