

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

By Dom Ambrose Agius, O.S.B.

THE question of our relation towards animals, which is the subject of our discussion, is a difficult and vexed one, and this chiefly because it has been debated on purely sentimental grounds, and because the wish has been father to some illogical deductions. But if we argue on these grounds, we give the whole position away; for it will be assumed that we have no other grounds to argue upon, which is not the case.

General Principles

It is necessary, above all, to avoid sentiment, to get back to first principles and solid fact. Then we shall find that the Catholic Church has no reason to be ashamed of her history: that her teaching demands consideration for animals: that Popes and Cardinals have urged it and Saints have been its most illustrious exemplars.

Let me say that some would-be friends of animals are often their worst enemies, “heaping excessive affection on animals and bestowing on them what has been denied to our fellow-men.” (Cardinal Donnet, 1866.)

Further, animal lovers are sometimes cruel in their kindness, destroying the health and fine instincts of their animal companions by excessive pampering.

The Church, therefore, is careful not to (as Cardinal Gasparri says) “disturb the admirable order of Creation by despoiling man of his royal crown to cast it down at the feet of inferior creatures.”

And the Church must be cautious because there are many heresies concerning animals, based chiefly on Metempsychosis (belief in the transmigration of souls) and animal-worship.

Now let me lay down the principles which we must keep in sight if our work is to be sane and helpful, and effective in winning sympathy for suffering animals. And I would ask you to read an argument right through before judging it.

Man was created in the image and likeness of God: animals were not. Man is rational, animal is irrational, in the sense that although they have a mind, and can feel what the late Archbishop Downey called ‘psychic pain,’ yet they are not capable of grace or spiritual contact with God. Man therefore is a person; animals are non-persons. Man is a person because he is an end in himself, and not a mere means to the perfection of beings of a higher order.

Animals are not persons or moral beings, because devoid of reason and free will (and so of responsibility) and because they were created for the service of man, and as a means (if properly used) towards his perfection. Next after animals comes vegetative creation, not sentient, and destined for the service of man and beast.

The Question of Rights

Now a right or ‘jus’ is the moral faculty or power of doing, having, exacting, or omitting something. This is a moral, not a physical, power derived from eternal law, which is the fount of all laws and rights. Therefore animals, as non-moral beings, have no ‘jus’ or right, in themselves, no personal rights, as against man, and the question of ‘injustice’ (which means acting against ‘jus’) does not arise. (Prummer.) This is exactly where we have to be very careful. The callous man says: “That’s all I want. Now you can’t touch me!” The animal-lover says: “I am disappointed in the Catholic Church!”

Both are wrong. For the same Lawgiver who “set up creation and disposed it to perfection in a wonderful ordered concord, so that the whole scheme of nature is subject to man as sovereign, because it helps him to attain his own end” (Gasparri), while He refrained from raising animals to the moral order so as to put them on a level with man, yet He provided for them a greater safeguard than mere sentimental attachment; for He made care and consideration for animals an integral part of the moral order of the universe. Right-thinking man acknowledges the animal world as a commission from God, given for his use; for which use he will have to render an account to the Creator.

And so we say to the callous: “Beware, lest you infringe, not the animal’s rights, for as such he has none; but God’s rights over him,” and to our friends we say: “The Catholic Church elevates and ennobles work for animal welfare into something of eternal value, meritorious, and deserving recompense from the justice of God.”

As Cardinal Bourne said to the children in Westminster Cathedral in April, 1931, “There is even in kindness to

animals a special merit in remembering that this kindness is obligatory upon us, because God made the animals, and is therefore their Creator.”

The Evidence of Scripture

Let us examine these principles in the light of Holy Scripture. In the Book of Genesis we read: “God created every living and moving creature, which the waters brought forth, according to their kinds, and every winged fowl according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.” (1: 21.) “And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and cattle, and every creeping thing on the earth after its kind. And God saw that it was good.” (1: 25.)

God therefore made all the animals and made them good. That is, they corresponded to the pattern in His divine mind, wherein the Father sees Himself in the Son through the Holy Ghost. He saw them good, He looked on them with pleasure; the work of His hands, obedient to the law of nature He had set in them, even as “The heavens show forth the glory of God: and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech; and night to night showeth knowledge.” (Ps. 18 : 1-2.)

Moreover God’s Providence extends to His animal creation. When God remembered Noah “He remembered also all the living creatures and all the cattle which were with him in the ark.” (Gen. 8 : 1.) When He made the rainbow, He said to Noah, “Behold, I will establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you, and with every living soul that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast that is of the earth.” (Gen. 9:9-10.) The Sabbath was appointed, “that thy ox and thy ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid and the stranger within thy gate may be refreshed.” (Ex. 23 : 12.)

And this providence of God over animals is indicated more than once, for example, in Jonas (4:II), “Shall I not spare Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons that know not how to distinguish between their right hand and their left, and also many beasts?” And in the New Testament, you remember our Lord saying: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father” (Matt. 10:29) and, “Behold the birds of the air, for they neither reap nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them.” (Matt. 6:26.) God then made all the animals and cares and provides for them, and takes note if they perish, even the least of them.

Now, still taking our stand on Holy Scripture, we can go a step further. To God, as Creator, belongs dominion, or right of possession and use over them. This dominion He has, with reservations, delegated to man.

“And He said: Let us make man to our image and likeness; and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth. And God created man to His own image; to the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them. And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.” (Gen. 1 : 26-28.)

And because He had delivered his dominion to Adam and would not interfere with it (we read) “The Lord God having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; for whatsoever Adam called any living creature, the same is its name.” (Gen. 2 : 19.)

Man’s Limited Dominion

Now man, receiving this dominion, is answerable to God for its use. For he is a free creature, having free will, and therefore is responsible for his actions. As with all the gifts he has received from God, so with this dominion over living things, he must render an account of his actions to the Lord who gave.

Besides, man is made to God’s image, and must in his own sphere act as God does, and reflect the actions of his Maker. As God cares for, and loves and refrains from abusing the animal creation, so must man do. This is the primary and fundamental reason for working for animal welfare and preventing cruelty towards them; that we are restoring God’s order; refashioning fallen creation to His pattern; expressing our love for Him in the right use of His creatures. (And in so doing, as we shall presently see, we find ourselves in the good company of the Saints.)

A Further Restriction

It is an obvious deduction that this dominion, so granted to man, does not reduce to the same level animal nature and vegetative nature, sentient beings and non-sentient. For the animal is a nobler manifestation of God's power than the vegetative; and as animals are created for the service of man, so vegetative nature is created for the service (and apparently, at first, for the sole sustenance) of animal and man.

“And God said: Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat. And to all the beasts of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to all that move upon the earth, and wherein there is life, that they may have to feed upon.” (Gen. 1 : 29-30.) And only after the Fall and the Flood do we read, “And every thing that moveth and liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herbs have I delivered them all to you.” (Gen. 9:3.)

Fr. Fox, a Professor of Philosophy, points out the moral. “In imparting to the brute creation a sentient nature, capable of suffering, a nature which the animals share in common with ourselves, God placed on our dominion over them a restriction which does not exist with regard to our dominion over the non-sentient world. We are bound to act towards them in a manner conformable to their nature.”

God's Fatherhood extends to Animals

I quoted to you just now Cardinal Bourne, who always picked his words very carefully. This is the end of his remarks: “God made the animals and is therefore their Creator, and, in a measure, His Father-hood extends to them.” You will have noticed, too, how our Lord speaks of His Father caring for and providing for animals. So we, in caring and providing for them, are imitating His action. “Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5 : 48.)

There is another sense in which God's Fatherhood extends to animals. “Of Him,” says the Apostle, “all paternity in heaven and earth is named.” (Eph. 3 :15.) All parenthood, in men and animals therefore, is in some sense a reflection of the divine Fatherhood. You remember our Lord's metaphor, “How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings.” (Matt. 23:37.) And St Augustine says, “You have only to see a hen to know her for a mother” (so solicitous is she for her young).

Reason must be followed

Now we come to a simple principle of universal application. In the use of all gifts which God has given us we are bound to follow the dictates of right reason. Therefore in the use of this dominion over animals which God gave man, we are bound to follow reason. For, as St Thomas says, “There is an order, not only in things, but also in the use of things.” In giving us dominion, God did not give us unrestricted power over creation, which belongs to Him alone, but power limited by the principles which govern us in the case of anything lent us for use. These principles are three:

- (1) To use it as the owner himself would use it (and certainly not against his interests).
- (2) Not to exceed, without special permission, the limits imposed by the end in view of which the use was given.
- (3) To observe, *ex justitia*, the conditions imposed by the owner.

If these principles were universally observed in the case of animals, the need for a Society like the R.S.P.C.A. would not exist. Unhappily, human nature being what it is, such a Utopia shows no signs of appearing.

Have Animals Rights of any Kind?

We have insisted that animals, not being moral persons, have no personal rights as against their masters. Yet they have rights, ‘ratione Creatoris,’ that is, they cannot be maltreated without infringement of the rights of their Creator, and ‘ratione ordinal creatae,’ that is, without dislocating God's order in nature. To the question: “Have animals rights of any kind as against their masters or owners ?” the Holy Office, whose answers are of course authoritative, replied: “YES.”

As a commentary on this, I add two passages written in another connection. The first is brief but clear from the theologian Cardinal Zigliara. “The service of man is the end appointed by the Creator for brute animals. When, therefore, man, for no reasonable purpose, treats the brute cruelly, he does wrong, not because he violates the rights of the brute, but because his action conflicts with the order and design of the Creator.”

Equally clear, and more merciful, is Cardinal Manning: "It is perfectly true that obligations are between moral persons, and therefore the lower animals are not susceptible of the moral obligations we owe one another, but we owe a sevenfold obligation to the Creator of those animals. Our obligation and moral duty is to Him who made them; and if we wish to know the limit and the broad outline of our obligation, I say at once it is His nature and His perfections, and among these perfections one is, most profoundly, that of eternal mercy. And therefore although a poor mule or a poor horse is not, indeed, a moral person, yet the Lord and Maker of the mule is the highest lawgiver, and His nature is a law unto Himself. And in giving a dominion over His creatures to man, He gave it subject to the condition that it should be used in conformity to His perfections, which is His own law, and therefore our law." (Zoophilist, April I, 1887.)

This striking declaration covers much of the ground we have already traversed, but I want specially to emphasize the Cardinal's point, that creation is not a mere arbitrary act of God, a superfluous exercise of His power as it were, but the reflection of His nature, so that if mercy and consideration are part of God's nature and the norm of His activity, so should they be of ours.

Cruelty is Sinful

For Catholics there is another incentive to work for animal welfare and the eradication of cruelty, in the knowledge that wanton cruelty to animals is sinful and degrading.

Two other answers of the Holy Office run as follows :

"Does the Holy Office hold it to be sinful to torture dumb animals?" "YES."

"Does the Holy Office hold such sins to be degrading to the soul and disposition of the tormentor?" "YES."

And so, even if animals are non-moral beings, they enter the sphere of morality if they become the instruments or occasions of sin. We may insist there-fore that anyone who has dealings with animals is bound by certain moral obligations, binding under sin, to treat them according to the purpose of the Creator.

And so a powerful secondary motive to work for the repression of cruelty is the realization that cruelty is an irrational and ugly thing, whereas, on the contrary, "he who shows pity to animals is more disposed to exercise the same feeling towards his fellow man." So St Thomas, cited by the late Prior Kuypers, who also quotes Bishop Vaughan, "Of all the motives to persuade men to practise kindness and consideration to the lower animals, a due regard to their own character is surely one of the strongest."

Much cruelty is of course mere thoughtlessness and want of a sense of responsibility. All the more reason to begin with the young and inculcate consideration for animals during the formative years.

Faithful Service deserves Gratitude

Again there is a sense in which we owe and may pay 'gratitude' to dumb animals for faithful service. Not in the same sense in which we express gratitude towards persons endowed with soul and reason, if you like, but real gratitude nevertheless; gratitude for constant affection, for faithful allegiance, for the saving of life and property. It is a deep-rooted and worthy human instinct to wish to make some return for a favour received. I say, human; but doubtless any-one could give many instances where animals have shown gratitude for some service done to them. I remember, at Westgate many years ago, I was able to direct a fine collie dog that had been trapped by the tide on the beach, to a sloping groyne near by, up which he was able to make his escape. He was not my dog, but he found my home, and ran upstairs to my room, and I had some difficulty in persuading him to return to his proper owners.

One reason why we treasure the companionship of animals is because they are not critical, as human beings sometimes are; nor selfish, avoiding us in our bad moods, just when we look for friendship. Rather they seem to sense our need and feel sensitively with us. It would be a poor return to treat them cruelly, or to allow them to be so treated by others when we have power to prevent it.

Consideration for Animals shown by Our Lord

I have mentioned how our blessed Lord expresses the providence of His Father for the animals He created. Let me add to it that when St Mark records the temptation in the wilderness (Mk. 1 : 13) he (alone) adds that Our Lord was

with the beasts, not before the Temptation, as if the presence of the beasts was one of the horrors of the wilderness, but AFTER, as if the beasts came with the angels to comfort and congratulate our Lord on His victory. We are reminded of Isaias 11: 6, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. The calf and the lion and the sheep shall abide together; and a little child shall lead them.” The Saints, as we shall see, also taught beasts to resume their original gentleness towards mankind.

I like also to remember that Our Lord, when He rode into Jerusalem in triumph, fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias (62 : 11) by riding in “Meek, and sitting upon an ass and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke” (Mt. 21 : 5) and the tradition is abroad to this day that therefore the back and shoulders of the ass are marked with the sign of the Cross.

If our ambition is to be able to say with St Paul, “I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2 : 20), consideration for animals will be one sign of the indwelling Christ.

The Declaration of Popes

The list of Popes who have directly or indirectly blessed work for animal welfare includes Paul II (1464-71), Pius V (1566-72), Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI and the present Holy Father.

In 1950 Pius XII made this important statement:

“The animal world, as all creation, is a manifestation of God’s power, His wisdom and His goodness, and as such deserves man’s respect and consideration. Any reckless desire to kill off animals, all unnecessary harshness and callous cruelty towards them are to be condemned. Such conduct, moreover, is baneful to a healthy sentiment and only tends to brutalize it.

“This said, one will also recognize that the Creator has given the animal to serve man (Gen. 1: 28), who because of his intelligence is essentially superior to the entire animal world.”

The Holy Father reiterated his statement in an Address in November, 1957: “The Catholic Church strives to influence individuals and public opinion to ensure the acceptance of these principles and their legal protection in daily life!”

Of Cardinals I have mentioned Cardinal Manning and Cardinal Bourne in this country. Cardinal Newman noted, “Cruelty to animals is as if we did not love God.” Cardinal Gibbons may be added for the United States, Cardinal Donnet for France, and Cardinals Gasparri and Merry del Val for Rome. And the replies of the Holy Office are an authority of the first order.

There is not, I think, any necessity to labour the point that the highest Catholic officials have frequently and emphatically expressed themselves in favour of work for animal welfare, and no high official has delivered an opinion in the contrary sense.

The Example set by Saints

The pleasant history of the happy relations between animals and holy men of God may be introduced by a quotation from Lecky. He says of the literary output of the Monasteries in the Middle Ages, “it represents one of the most striking efforts made in Christendom to inculcate a feeling of kindness and pity towards the brute creation” (H. E. Morals, II, 161). This is not surprising when we read that the Founder of Western Monasticism made friends with the wild life near his monastery. In this connection Abbot Tosti, his learned biographer, writes as follows (1896): “Men like St Benedict, always intent on the love of the Creator, could not withhold their love from the things He had created. Hence they felt themselves bound by the bonds of fraternal love with everything in God’s universe. On the other hand, the irrational animals, by divine ordination, often gave their services to these holy men, who, in the desert, far from human society, committed their lives into the hands of God alone. Wherefore, though defenceless and solitary, they never died from the violence of wild beasts; indeed, we find in the lives of the Fathers of the Desert, a crow bringing bread to St Paul (the first Hermit), and two lions coming forth from the depths of the solitude, to dig a grave for St Antony. And in this outpouring of love for all irrational creatures St Francis called the birds his brethren and even the wolf his brother.

“The love therefore of holy men for the irrational creatures is a consequence of that which they have for God, who called them out of nothing and preserves them in life. Indeed in the lyric outpouring of the mind to the Lord in Ps.

168, David praises Him for His creative omnipotence, and calls upon not only men, but even the beasts to join him in his song, and he gives the reason: 'For He Himself spoke and they were made: He commanded and they were created.' Add to this, in the last place, that the sin of the first man, as it separated him by rebellion from God, so did it separate from himself, by rebellion, the irrational animals, which were subject to God. (N.B.—Hence God's reassurance that He would command animals not to take human life. Gen. 9:5.) Those men, who by special penance and purity have turned again to God, have frequently, by extraordinary divine permission, acquired again their empire over beasts; and these, rendered mild by the virtue of the saints, have returned to their former subjection." (Life, p. 66.)

One may add, that if the saints so loved animals as God's creatures, it follows that the nearer we are to God and sanctity, the more we will imitate them in this love, and contrariwise, the further we are away, the more it will appear in this characteristic also.

Finally, one may sometimes observe a fierce watch-dog allowing a tiny child to pull its ears or put a finger into its mouth, as if it recognized in the innocence of the child some link with the golden age and a long forgotten world.

Animals are God's Gift to Man

To conclude: "every good and every perfect gift is from above." God who made the animals gave them to us for our service and for companionship. I like to recall the sturdy peasant life among the Basques in the Landes country beyond Bordeaux, where St Vincent de Paul was born, and in whose house a window in the living room could be opened, and there, beyond, would be the oxen who pulled the plough, sharing the same roof as their masters, companions, and not mere beasts of burden. All our duty towards animals is summed up in five words, "God lends them to us." And Cardinal Newman indicates how they may help even our spiritual life. "Think then," he says, "of your feelings at cruelty practised 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. And let me add, this is in all cases one good use to which you may turn any accounts you read of wanton and unfeeling acts shown towards the inferior animals; let them remind you, as a picture, of Christ's sufferings. He who is higher than the Angels, deigned to humble Himself even to the state of the brute creation, as the Psalm says, 'I am a worm and no man; a very scorn of men and the outcast of the people.'" (Ps. 21: 7.)

I hope I have said enough to show that kindness towards animals is the tradition of Scripture and the Catholic Theologians, of Popes and Cardinals, of Saints and Religious Orders, that it is in accordance with logic and principle, and that it stands for not sentiment merely, but also what the late Archbishop Downey called "Reason and Social Sanity."
