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## Have Animals Souls? The Late-Nineteenth Century Spiritual Revival and Animal Welfare

Although many of the nineteenth-century arguments against vivisection were based on its supposed adverse effects on those who performed or witnessed it, the status of its animal subjects was not inconsequential. One could not be cruel or heartless to a Cartesian automaton that lacked feeling, and perhaps not to animals that had, as some Christians claimed, been put on earth solely to provide for human needs. The art critic and social reformer John Ruskin (1819–1900), addressing the Oxford branch of the Victoria Street Society in 1884, said that: ‘It is not the question whether animals have a right to this or that in the inferiority they are placed into mankind, it is a question of what relation they have to God...’<sup>1</sup> To see animals from a divine perspective, it was necessary to decide whether they possessed rational souls, and what happened to those souls after death.

For most of the nineteenth century, the idea that animals might have afterlives was a decidedly unchristian one. The epitaphist of Lord Byron’s dog Boatswain (d. 1808) derided the sort of Christians who disapproved of memorialising a dead dog for trying to keep ‘a sole exclusive heaven’ for themselves. Almost a century later, when the following lines in memory of Rocket the hunting dog were published, the poetic

conceit that dogs would be reunited with their keepers in paradise still had a decidedly heathen ring to it:

Is a man a hopeless heathen if he dreams of one fair day  
 When, with spirit free from shadows grey and cold.  
 He may wander through the heather in the 'unknown far away',  
 With his good old dog before him as of old?<sup>2</sup>

What became of one's canine companion after death was not a trivial matter; for some Christians, the idea that animals' souls could exist apart from their bodies seemed 'absurd in the extreme' or even 'dangerous'<sup>3</sup>: the divine spark of immortality was the one incontrovertible barrier between humans and other animals, however many biological resemblances scientists might go on to discover.

It is sometimes claimed that science, and Darwinism in particular, improved the lot of animals by replacing the traditional Christian model of a static created order with humans at its earthly summit (just below the angels) with a dynamic model in which higher forms were continually evolving from lower.<sup>4</sup> To put it crassly, people were less likely to ill-treat animals to which they were distantly related. Darwinism certainly made many people think about their kinship with animals, although the idea of a serial affinity between different species (the 'ladder of creation' or 'great chain of being'), and even of species change itself, had been current long before the publication of *The Origin of Species* in (1859).<sup>5</sup> For anatomists, the human–animal boundary had been blurred since at least a century earlier, when the great taxonomist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) wrote that he was unable to discover 'the difference between man and the orangoutang, although all of my attention was brought to bear on this point'.<sup>6</sup> By the 1840s, there seemed no prospect of anatomists finding any structure that would categorically distinguish humans from apes in terms of morphology: the popular press responded with sensational tales of ape–human hybrids and mocked the 'siantificle' vogue for dissecting monkeys 'to see ... whether like our own specius inside as well as out'.<sup>7</sup>

The most obvious distinction between apes and humans in the nineteenth century was the Christian claim that humans alone had souls

made in the image of their Creator, and even this was being challenged, in a religious and philosophical setting rather than a scientific one, through ideas gleaned from classical paganism, Hinduism and transcendentalism. This nineteenth-century re-evaluation of the spiritual status of animals would have profound consequences for animal welfare, by bringing to the theological debate, as evolution did to the scientific one, a changed understanding of the relationship between humans and animals.

It would be a mistake, as some freethinkers did (and some still do), to blame cruelty to animals on the low status accorded them in the Judaeo-Christian tradition before Darwinists, orientalist and humanists managed to knock humans off their pedestal: Christian anti-cruelty campaigners were instrumental in giving Britain the most comprehensive animal protection laws in Europe, which they did for the most part without questioning their God-given dominion over the animals they were protecting.<sup>8</sup> As Coral Lansbury (1929–1991) wrote in *The Old Brown Dog* ‘the debate between Singer and [Tom] Regan over the moral status of animals would have bemused the Victorians...’<sup>9</sup>: what mattered to them were the moral consequences of inflicting pain on creatures inferior to themselves. Though they did not owe animals a duty of care, they were bound to pity them, and to avoid any imputation of callousness. Rod Preece comments that Christians were more concerned for animals than were Darwinians, and while it might be more accurate to say they were concerned about the dangers to society of allowing cruelty to animals to go unchecked, they turned out, nonetheless, to be the nineteenth-century laboratory animal’s best friends.<sup>10</sup>

## Christians and Anti-Vivisection in the Nineteenth Century

Most of the groups active in animal welfare, from the Society for the Suppression of Vice, with its emphasis on saving the working classes from being demoralized by alcoholic drink and cruel sports, through the SPCA and its drive to civilise manners, to the VSS with its ethos

of compassion, saw themselves as doing the Lord's work.<sup>11</sup> The SPCA, for example, declared that its programme was 'entirely based on the Christian faith', and they denounced vivisection as 'unchristian'.<sup>12</sup> Insofar as the practice of vivisection repudiated the Christian virtues of mercy and compassion, anti-cruelty campaigners saw it as 'evil', 'fiendish', 'blasphemous', and even 'Satanic'.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, unlike other cruelties such as hunting or meat eating, it was performed by an educated élite, and there was a risk this would lead those less principled to think it was acceptable to be 'cruel' and 'inhumane' out of expediency, so spreading throughout society a heartlessness that was fundamentally 'unchristian'.<sup>14</sup>

Lord Shaftesbury, arguing in 1879 for a total ban on vivisection, said that, for the sake of one's soul, it would be better to be the vivisected than the vivisector, an attitude that, like Shaftesbury himself, exemplified Christian compassion (the famous memorial to him in Piccadilly represents the Angel of Christian Charity).<sup>15</sup> Caring for animals out of Christian charity had the practical advantages that the intellectual or spiritual status of the animals (so long as they were sentient) was of little consequence, while as a motive for action it was readily comprehensible to most people. Defenders of vivisection might dismiss what they derisively termed a 'Brahminical' love for one's fellow creatures as un-British, sentimental, and heterodox, but it was difficult for them to say the same about mercy and compassion towards the weak.<sup>16</sup> The title of the VSS's journal the *Zoophilist* betokened a love of animals, but the Society declared that the main inspiration for its work was 'a conviction that the spread of mercy was the great cause of civilization'.<sup>17</sup>

Cardinal Henry Manning's (1808–1892) outspoken opposition to vivisection, conspicuous among a general Catholic indifference to animals, also appealed to the most basic of Christian virtues:

Vivisection is a detestable practice.... Nothing can justify, no claim of science, no conjectural result, no hope for discovery, such horrors as these. Also, it must be remembered that whereas these torments, refined and indescribable, are certain, the result is altogether conjectural—everything about the result is uncertain, but the certain infraction of the first laws of mercy and humanity.<sup>18</sup>

The RSPCA, failing to appreciate that Manning's views were not representative of Rome, tried unsuccessfully to get anti-vivisection adopted as official Catholic policy, but Pius IX supposedly rejected plans for an office for the Protection of Animals on the grounds that it would send a misleading message that animals had rights.<sup>19</sup> Anglicans were rather more sympathetic to the cause: the Archbishops of York and Dublin signed the 1875 'Memorial Against Vivisection', and though the Church of England remained officially non-committal, by the end of the century some four thousand of its clergy had declared their disapproval of it.<sup>20</sup>

Very few Christians justified their opposition to vivisection by appealing to the unconventional possibility that animals, like humans, had souls that survived death, though there were exceptions, such as Robert Hull, who remarked that '[t]he vivisectors cannot, of course, enter into the depths of that well-grounded suspicion, that there may be a future existence for the brute creation'. For Hull, who hoped that vivisectors would, in some future existence, meet with recompense from those they had tormented, no one who believed in animal afterlives could possibly experiment on them.<sup>21</sup> Robert Browning's (1812–1889) poem *Tray*, published in 1879, imagined the nightmarish possibility of vivisectors deliberately setting out to study the soul of a dog, but this was deliberate exaggeration to shock the reader (Browning was a vice-president of the VSS); no real-life vivisectionist mentioned animals' souls, and some felt vindicated by the conventional Christian teaching that animals had no existence beyond their earthly lives.

The physiologist James Blundell, for example, defended his use of animals in research by claiming that, since an animal's death was an eternal sleep, it was less grave to kill an animal than a human.<sup>22</sup> His reasoning is not entirely clear, but seems to have been based on the presumption that killing becomes murder only if the victim has a soul: in the Old Testament the blood of humans, not animals, cries to heaven for vengeance, as do the souls of martyrs in the Book of Revelation.<sup>23</sup> Others, however, saw the lack of a future life for animals as all the more reason to be compassionate towards them in this one; according to James Lawson Drummond: '[the brute] has no heaven to look to, no bright anticipation of a period when misery shall cease.... Its life is

its little all', an allusion to these lines by the humanitarian poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825):

Or, if this transient gleam of day  
 Be *all* of life we share,  
 Let pity plead within thy breast,  
 That little *all* to spare.<sup>24</sup>

## Animal Afterlives

The question of whether animals had souls was in one sense trivial: an animal, as the name implied, possessed what is known in the Aristotelian tradition as a vital soul (*anima*). The Cartesian notion of animals as automata had little currency outside philosophy schools, and no British vivisector ever adopted this position: they sometimes argued that animals did not feel pain in the context of a particular experiment, but none claimed they were incapable of feeling at all.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it would have been difficult for a physiologist to make such a claim, because the validity of experiments on animals depended on their anatomy and physiology being similar to our own: nervous systems organized and functioning like ours could scarcely be found in animals incapable of feeling the pain they so evidently reacted to.<sup>26</sup> The real question was not whether animals had souls, but how closely comparable they were to the souls of humans. Were they rational? Did they experience emotions? And did they, as the poets fancied, share the promise of immortality?

The Christian doctrine of the immortality of the human soul had its roots in the thirteenth century, when Thomas Aquinas had modified Aristotle's position that human beings were a composite of 'form' (*i.e.* soul) and 'matter' by adding that the human soul was incorruptible and persisted after bodily death.<sup>27</sup> Aquinas thus brought Aristotle into line with the Christian promise of eternal life, though at the cost of leaving disembodied souls, unable to act or experience, in a kind of intellectual limbo until the resurrection.<sup>28</sup> These incorruptible souls were unique to

humans: other animals possessed 'sensitive' souls but not rational ones, and were blessed with neither reason nor immortality.<sup>29</sup>

In Britain, the Thomist position that the souls of animals perish at death went largely unchallenged by the reformed churches, though the less contentious issue of their rationality was up for debate. In the seventeenth century, Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale (1609–1676), an advocate of responsible treatment of animals based on a model of stewardship rather than dominion, attributed to them the faculties of memory, reason and imagination (which he called 'phantasies'), but still denied them immortality—the souls of even 'perfect brutes' would die with them.<sup>30</sup> In the eighteenth century, the never easily defensible position that only humans could reason was assailed from both sides: pigs, horses and dogs could apparently be taught to perform calculations and use language, while feral children, brought up without human society, seemed to lack these capabilities.<sup>31</sup> By the nineteenth century, animals' ability to reason was widely accepted, and it was commonplace for magazines and periodicals to entertain their readers with remarkable accounts of animal sagacity.

Although no major Christian church expressed an official view, many individual clergy were happy to admit that animals had rational souls: according to the evangelical missionary Daniel Tyerman (1773–1828), '[t]o deny that brute animals have souls, is virtually to allow that matter can think; and to put an argument into the mouths of materialists that it will not be easy to rescue from them'.<sup>32</sup> For the Catholic Church, Fr John Worthy, a priest in Liverpool, wrote that the rationality of animals was evident from their actions: even bees, Fr Worthy claimed, were intelligent and acted on reason as well as instinct, and many other species appeared from their actions to be 'highly gifted'. Worthy collected numerous accounts from the press in which animals seemed to display social traits such as kindness, gratitude, and affection, or to use imagination and language. However, despite his obvious admiration for these animals' abilities, and his credulity with regard to some rather far-fetched tales, Worthy apologised to any of his readers who thought he had 'lowered the dignity of man's soul and reason, by representing the souls and reason of animals as having any degree whatever of similitude with man...' There was, he concluded, an absolute difference between

the souls of animals and humans, namely that only the latter survived death.<sup>33</sup>

Most protestants concurred, taking the Biblical reference to mankind having been made ‘in the image of God’ to mean that the human soul was uniquely able to exist apart from the body. The majority of British divines accepted this position, though there were, as Preece has shown, not a few distinguished exceptions, including the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–1687), the Quaker George Fox (1624–1691), the Civil War pamphleteer Richard Overton and the founder of Methodism John Wesley (1703–1791), all of whom entertained the idea that animals’ souls persisted after bodily death.<sup>34</sup> A few Anglican theologians such as Bishop Joseph Butler (1692–1752) can be added to this list, but animal immortality remained largely a nonconformist position.<sup>35</sup>

In the secular literature, however, there was free speculation that companion animals would have a share in the afterlife. Poets who put forward the idea found a ready audience: indeed, so many toyed with it that the anthologist J. Earl Clauson could devote the whole concluding section of his *Dog’s Book of Verse* to ‘The Dog’s Hereafter’.<sup>36</sup> Of course, this poetical vogue for animal immortality was rooted in sentiment rather than solid theological opinions—one might indeed dismiss it as whimsical, a common critical verdict on poems about animals—but it does suggest there was a mood of popular dissent from the ‘official’ doctrine of an exclusively human afterlife.

## Transmigration

One non-Christian path that the souls of animals might follow after death was familiar to anyone versed in the classics. Usually attributed to Pythagoras and his school, the theory of transmigration of souls, or metempsychosis, postulated that the soul or mind was able to survive periods of incorporeal existence between successive incarnations in humans and animals. Though British classicists had ‘flirted’ with Pythagoreanism since the 1600s, it did not come to general notice until the mid-eighteenth century, when the surgeon and Orientalist John Zephaniah Holwell (1711–1798) published some notes on the subject



along with his sensational best-selling account of the Black Hole of Calcutta, of which he was a survivor.<sup>37</sup>

Transmigration seems first to have been used in print as an argument against cruelty to animals in Barbauld's *The Mouse's Petition*:

If mind, as ancient sages taught,  
 A never dying flame,  
 Still shifts thro' matter's varying forms,  
 In every form the same,  
 Beware, lest in the worm you crush  
 A brother's soul you find;  
 And tremble lest thy luckless hand  
 Dislodge a kindred mind.<sup>38</sup>

Twenty years later, transmigration featured prominently in Thomas Taylor's seminal but idiosyncratic *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, published anonymously in 1792. Despite being one of the earliest contributions to animal rights theory, Taylor's pamphlet is now seldom quoted, in part because his claim that 'brutes' had rights was deliberately hyperbolic, but mostly because the principal object of his writing, as the title suggests, was to satirise Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759–1797) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by showing that a parallel argument could be made for the rights of animals.<sup>39</sup> Taylor found Wollstonecraft's proto-feminism ridiculous: he did not acknowledge the rights of men, women, or animals, though he firmly believed that animals were capable of reason and intelligence, which he thought was obvious from their behaviour, and in particular from their capacity to communicate intelligently with one other. From their ability to reason, Taylor concluded that animals had feelings, rejecting Jeremy Bentham's (1748–1832) argument that reason and feeling were distinct, and asserting that 'sense cannot at all operate without intelligence'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite his obvious appreciation of the intellectual abilities of animals, Taylor insisted that compassionate treatment was not their right but a voluntary expression of human virtue, though his work may have inspired subsequent calls for animals to be granted legal rights. When the Lord Chancellor, Lord Erskine (1750–1823) unsuccessfully

introduced a Cruelty to Animals bill in the House of Lords in 1809, he complained that: 'Animals are considered as property only: to destroy or to abuse them, from malice to the proprietor, or with an intention injurious to his interest in them, is criminal; but the animals themselves are without protection; the law regards them not substantively; they have no rights!'<sup>41</sup>

Taylor's pseudo argument for the rights of brutes drew not only on their intellectual capacities but also on various traditions concerning the transmigration of souls. A distinguished translator of Plato and Aristotle, Taylor supplemented his classical sources with examples of transmigration collected from non-European traditions, including those of ancient Egypt, Persia and India. Though his writings give the impression he was more attuned to Hellenistic philosophy than Christianity, he did not profess transmigration as a personal belief, but treated the traditions as '[f]ables [which] indicate that brute animals accord with mankind in the nature of the soul'. In other words, the fact that learned people from so many different cultures accepted transmigration revealed a widespread belief that humans and animals were animated by souls of a similar kind.

Pythagoreanism proved to be an inspiration for two influential nineteenth-century anti-cruelty campaigners: Lewis Gompertz and Thomas Forster (1789–1860). Gompertz, who we encountered in the previous chapter, had been secretary of the SPCA until forced to resign in 1833, probably because, as a Jew and a Pythagorean, he did not fit in with the committee's Christian ethos. After a period running the rival, more radical, Animals' Friend Society, he was readmitted after protesting his 'innocence' of Pythagoreanism, but any change of heart in this regard must have been temporary, since in 1852 he wrote in *Fragments in Defence of Animals* that the souls of animals continued to exist after death in a state of limbo, without thought or feeling, until they were united with a new body. Thus, it was possible to be reincarnated, perhaps as a different species, without having any memory of one's previous lives.<sup>42</sup>

Gompertz's interest in Pythagoreanism was shared by his correspondent and fellow member of the AFS, Thomas Forster. A medical practitioner and convert to Roman Catholicism, Forster's eclectic interests

included phrenology, vegetarianism, and ‘oriental’ philosophy, including ‘the holy doctrine of Pythagoras and the Indian school, which ascribes to every living creature an eternal existence’.<sup>43</sup> Transmigration was an important part of Forster’s idiosyncratic theodicy: ‘Metempsychosis implies the future life and everlasting happiness of all living creatures, we must observe that there is plenty of room in this wide universe for all of them... further, without admitting that Animals will live hereafter, we could not reconcile the universal suffering of the brute Creation with the Divine Goodness’. Forster’s mix of Catholic purgatory and Pythagorean rebirth allowed cruelty to be punished and suffering recompensed: those who ill-treated animals would find themselves reincarnated in animal bodies, where they would experience for themselves the sufferings they had once meted out, while the merciful would receive ‘some light purgatory in the body of some fortunate and beautiful bird or beast’.<sup>44</sup>

## Transcendentalism

Apart from evangelicals, who saw medicine as a Christian vocation, and some Anglican Tories among the profession’s leaders, medical practitioners had something of a reputation for scepticism and worldliness. Unlike the universities, medical schools did not require their students to profess the Christian faith in order to matriculate, and a lack of pastoral supervision, combined with the materialistic focus of their training, was thought to incline those whose faith was already weak towards atheism.<sup>45</sup> Medical students were certainly encouraged to examine the relationship between humans and animals with a critical eye: comparative anatomy was a key part of their studies, and the problem of why many species, including apes and humans, had similar body plans was, in pre-Darwinian times, accorded high importance. In the 1830s, students frustrated by Professor Granville Sharp Pattison’s (1791–1851) ‘*total ignorance of and disgusting indifference to new anatomical views and researches*’ forced him from his post at University College London.<sup>46</sup> The students were not, of course, motivated solely by their scientific curiosity: excited by the July Revolution in France, they wanted to hear

the radical new Continental ideas on species change and extinction, known as transcendental anatomy, which seemed to carry a particular resonance in those politically unsettling times.

Transcendentalism, also known as philosophical anatomy, was, in its biological sense, a holistic theory of the interconnectedness of all living things that had its roots in German *Naturphilosophie*, which was in turn based on Goethe's concept of nature as a 'vast musical symposium'. It was introduced into Britain by a small number of influential anatomy teachers, who included the surgeon Joseph Henry Green (1791–1863, a friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and the anatomists Robert Knox, Robert Grant (1793–1874) and Richard Owen (1804–1892). Transcendentalism's appeal to students lay in its potential to transform the rather obscure field of comparative anatomy by supplying a coherent, universal theory that would not only account for species change, but also provide a model in nature for abrupt social changes and political revolutions. This potential to upset the status quo gave transcendentalism a radical appeal that ensured its popularity with undergraduates.

Transcendentalism may be defined (not an easy task) as an attempt to discover, through observation and deduction, the fundamental laws and patterns that govern the dynamic, self-organising processes of nature. It thus resembles the Platonic theory of forms in that generalized patterns or archetypes may be deduced from the appearance of objects in the natural world.<sup>47</sup> For example, that most eloquent, and effusive, of transcendentalists, Robert Knox, wrote of the vertebra as: 'the type of all vertebrate animals, of the entire skeleton ... of the organic world .... It possesses the form of the primitive cell; of the sphere; of the universe'.<sup>48</sup>

Critics found this sort of thing vague and mystical, but to Knox, one of the finest comparative anatomists of his day, transcendentalism had the potential to revolutionize his discipline. Anatomists were no longer confined to *describing* morphology, but could speculate on its phylogenetic and even social significance. For example, from observing, measuring, and dissecting human bodies, a set of ideal proportions could be derived, which corresponded to those seen in classical Greek statues such as those of Apollo and Venus.<sup>49</sup> According to Knox, it was no coincidence that the ideal form discovered through modern anatomical studies was the same as that created by ancient Greek sculptors,

who had arrived at it intuitively through their refined appreciation of beauty. Transcendentalists thought it legitimate to employ the aesthetic sense in scientific study; for example, those individuals that most closely resembled the ideal type of a species would be considered by a practised observer to be the most beautiful. The transcendental method involved a combination of detailed observation and intuition: knowledge of the structure of different species could only come through careful dissection, but intuition was required to discern the unifying pattern of which each was a variation.

Using transcendental methods, Knox developed a complex theory of evolution, according to which new species arose through differential development (what we might now call mutations) of a common embryo. According to this, pre-Darwinian, proposal, the pattern of every potential species, including humans, was inherent in the multipotent embryo, from which new forms ('hopeful monsters') were constantly being generated, though they would flourish only if external conditions happened to be favourable.<sup>50</sup> As one of the French founders of the movement, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772–1844) put it, 'philosophically speaking', there was 'but a single animal', or, in the words of the literary transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), 'Each creature is only a modification of the other; the likeness in them is more than the difference, and their radical law is one and the same'.<sup>51</sup>

The effect of British transcendentalism on biological thinking was complex and has yet to be fully explored by historians of science. From the perspective of vivisection, however, it proved a deterrent. Firstly, the transcendental method was essentially observational: careful dissection of animal and human bodies was preferred to vivisection of the living; Knox refused to allow any vivisection in his anatomy schools, a pragmatic as well as a humane attitude because students reluctant to dissect living animals would be attracted to transcendentalism as 'a substitute for vivisection'.<sup>52</sup> Secondly, transcendentalism called for a subjective response to nature: an appreciation of beauty helped students to discern the ideal types that lay behind the imperfect forms they encountered, so they needed to cultivate their feelings rather than suppressing them. Thirdly, the transcendental teachings that all species, animal and

human, were derived from a common embryo, that all were equally well suited for the environment in which they lived, and that all might become extinct if conditions changed, underlined the essential unity, and transience, of all creatures. Humans were not lords of creation but part of an interdependent, self-sustaining biological system whose life force could be conceptualised as a collective soul, *anima mundi*.<sup>53</sup>

Much of transcendentalism's wider appeal was due to its being not only descriptive of how nature was organised but also prescriptive of the proper way to live. If nature sanctioned abrupt changes (which was how transcendentalists thought new species evolved), then human revolutions might be part of the natural order, and if that order was, as Goethe had expressed it, part of a vast symphony of nature, then humans ought, as far as possible, to live in harmony with it. Transcendental notions of the harmonies of nature were conducive to a philosophy of 'nature mysticism' or pantheism, the followers of which, as Lloyd G. Stevenson (1918–1988) observed, tended to be 'on the side of the animals'.<sup>54</sup>

Though there was never a prominent transcendentalist movement in Britain like that which flourished in New England around Harvard and the Unitarians, the themes of living in 'harmony with nature' and of animals as our 'brothers' did began to appear in British letters from the late 1830s, the most celebrated writers to show a transcendental influence being Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and William Wordsworth (1770–1850). Its appeal was particularly strong for romantics, who sought an escape from the cruelties of metropolitan living in an idealized pastoralism in which animals were helpers, friends and companions.<sup>55</sup>

Transcendentalism in Britain effectively ended as a scientific movement with the publication of *The Origin of Species*, as Darwin's elegantly simple proposal of natural selection made transcendentalism's complex, esoteric explanations of why so many different creatures showed such striking anatomical parallels seem redundant. In contrast to revolutionary transcendentalism, Darwin's modest proposal that change could only occur by gradual small steps was considerably more congenial to the Victorian political establishment.<sup>56</sup> There remained, however, an undercurrent of transcendentalism in biological thought, difficult to

trace and sometimes surfacing in unexpected places: the concept of natural harmonies, for example, may have been the inspiration for what are now known as ecosystems. Encounters with transcendentalism during medical training may also have motivated some young British doctors to look more closely into the spiritual aspects of biological phenomena, and to become more open to accepting intuition and emotions as evidence, an approach that would find expression in the *fin-de-siècle* spiritual revival. The theosophists, occultists, new age thinkers and others, within and outside medicine, who became involved in this idealistic movement to unite science and spirituality, some of whom we will encounter in subsequent chapters, might be seen as continuing what was begun by the transcendental anatomists.

## **Animals' Souls and Anti-Vivisection in the Nineteenth Century and After**

The waning of the influence of Christianity on the anti-cruelty movement in the twentieth century coincided with a greater focus on animals themselves. Despite accepting, and even admiring, animals' rationality and learning, the mainstream Christian denominations never bridged the gulf between animals and humans: only the latter were made in God's image and could expect a place in the hereafter. By the late-nineteenth century, however, the British people had already granted them one. Those middle class (for the most part) late Victorians who looked forward to being reunited with their companion animals in the world to come, and mourned their passing in this, probably felt neither hopeless nor heathen. They developed rituals, resembling human funeral practices, to mark the passing of their animal companions: post-mortem photographs, a popular means of preserving memories of deceased family members by posing them for the last time within the family group, were taken of animals and those who mourned them, and there were animal funeral services, cemeteries, gravestones, elegies, and mourning cards.<sup>57</sup> To some, this seemed an excessive indulgence in sentimentality, and to others, anthropomorphism, but it was also the expression of a popular, inclusive theology of animals that, in defiance of orthodoxy,

granted them souls that survived death, and opened to them the gates of heaven. Paradoxically, perhaps, it was easier to mourn lives when there was some prospect of reunion, and to lay flowers on the grave of a favourite dog in anticipation of a shared life to come:

Not hopeless, round this calm sepulchral spot,  
A wreath presaging life we twine;  
If God be love, what sleeps below was not  
Without a spark divine.<sup>58</sup>

Vivisectionists, of course, took a different view, and while they did not often discuss such matters, it seems that no-one who believed that animals had souls made a practice of vivisectioning them. Perhaps some who vivisected did not believe in souls at all, for the conflict between vivisection and anti-vivisection was beginning to align itself with that of materialism versus anti-materialism (or spiritualism, if you prefer). Many of the most controversial and well publicised animal experiments involved the brain, an organ that vivisectionists treated as a mechanism, but whose subtle workings anti-vivisectionists such as Cobbe did not feel could ever be revealed by the physiologist's knife:

The common passion for science in general and for physiology in particular, and the prevalent materialistic belief that the secrets of the Mind can be best explored in matter, undoubtedly account in no small matter for the vehemence of the new pursuit of original physiological investigations.<sup>59</sup>

At the turn of the century it remained a matter of great controversy whether evolution could have been responsible for the emergence of the most complex cognitive faculties, including the human capacity for love, imagination, and feeling, or whether there were some transcendent aspects of thought and consciousness that could never be explained in biological terms.<sup>60</sup> The two great founders of evolutionary theory disagreed: Darwin thought that evolution could account for these mental phenomena, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) that it could not.

For Christians who felt their humanity threatened by talk of the evolution of rationality, one solution was to emphasise the spiritual



uniqueness of humankind, allowing that animals were rational and capable of feeling and suffering, but according humans alone the 'spark divine' of an immortal soul. It was presumably a conviction that humans were in some spiritual way ontologically different from animals that led many Christian clergy in early-twentieth century Britain to sign up for the pro-vivisection Research Defence Society (on which, see Chap. 6): they saw human lives as of intrinsically greater value to God than those of brute creation, because God had imparted something to us that mere biology could not. From a mundane perspective, most Churches had no wish to deny the theory of evolution, forcing the faithful to choose between religion and science, so they pragmatically confined the divine likeness in humankind to the immaterial part, leaving animals as mere matter, physically kin to humans, but spiritually inconsequential.

## Conclusion

We have seen that, in nineteenth-century Britain, the Christian view of animals as rational but unspiritual was challenged by claims that they were either ensouled individually or were part of a collective world soul, and thus were not, as mainstream churches taught, categorically distinct from humans in a spiritual or metaphysical sense. When a few advanced followers of Pythagorean and Eastern thought proposed that the souls of animals might subsist after death, and that transmigration of souls between animals and humans might occur, this introduced a concept of the soul that was fundamentally different from that of the Christian tradition: a life-force that was constantly changing, reforming and repeating, rather than an artefact eternally linked to the human body for which it had been created.

Transcendentalism inculcated a similar, non-Christian, perspective, according to which humans were only one expression of a universal creative force of nature—arising, developing, and becoming extinct like all living things. For transcendentalists, neither humans nor animals could expect an individual afterlife, but the dynamic system in which all participated could be said to be endowed with a common soul, and

death could be seen not as an end, but a return to the source that all life shared.<sup>61</sup> This holistic view of life on earth, the concept of mankind as transient, and the notion of a life-force common to humans and animals, were strong arguments against vivisection for those who accepted them. Though transcendentalists were sometimes condemned in the nineteenth century as atheists, their position was much closer to that of pantheism. Along with other non-Christian faiths, elements of their thinking influenced the development of the spiritual revival, and it is to this movement and its consequences for the welfare of animals in the twentieth century that we shall now turn.

## Notes

1. Quoted in Rod Preece, 'Darwinism, Christianity, and the great vivisection debate', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64 (2003), 399–419 (Preece 2003).
2. H. Knight Horsfield, 'Old Rocket', in *The Dog in British Poetry*, ed. R.M. Leonard (London: D. Nutt, 1893), 197 (Horsfield 1893).
3. 'Have animals souls?' (editorial), *Leeds Times*, 17 May 1856, 6. (Have animals souls? 1856)
4. Preece, 'Darwinism, Christianity'; Chien-hui Li, 'An unnatural alliance? Political radicalism and the animal defence movement in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *EurAmerica*, 42 (2012), 1–43 (Li 2012).
5. Darwin himself took a nuanced position on vivisection, and never suggested that evolutionary theory could resolve the ethical problem.
6. Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 7 (Stepan 1982).
7. Susan Merrill Squier, *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 94; James Baycroft, 'Suspended animation', *Comic Annual* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842): 323–336 (Squier 2004; Baycroft 1842).
8. Li, 'An Unnatural Alliance?' (Li 2012).
9. Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog*, ix.
10. Preece, 'Darwinism, Christianity'. For the opposing view that Darwinism 'confirmed the kinship between man and animal' see Niven, *History of the Humane Movement*, 79, and French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science*.

11. Chien-hui Li, 'An Unnatural Alliance?'; Chien-hui Li, 'A union of Christianity, humanity and philanthropy: the Christian tradition and prevention of cruelty to animals in nineteenth-century England', *Society and Animals*, 8 (2000), 265–285 (Li 2000).
12. Minute book, 1832, RSPCA Archive, Southwater, CM/20, 40, 45–46, 53. (RSPCA Archive 1832)
13. Li, 'An Unnatural Alliance?' (Li 2000).
14. Drummond, *The Rights of Animals*, 15, 17; 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (editorial), *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 2 (1824): 357–358; Bates, 'Vivisection, virtue ethics'. (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 1824)
15. The charitable angel's arrow was aimed, appropriately, at Parliament.
16. 'The forthcoming ass show' (editorial), *Saturday Review*, 16 (1863), 213–215. (The forthcoming ass show 1863)
17. Craig Buettinger, 'Antivivisection and the charge of zoophil-psychosis in the early twentieth century', *Historian*, 55 (1993), 277–288 (Buettinger 1993).
18. Quoted in Rod Preece, *Animal Sensibility and Inclusive Justice in the Age of Bernard Shaw* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 121 (Preece 2011).
19. Brian Harrison, 'Animals and the state in nineteenth-century England', *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), 786–820 (Harrison 1973).
20. Li, 'An Unnatural Alliance?' It is probably no coincidence that the two English cardinals who were anti-vivisectionists, Manning and Newman, were both Anglican converts. Manning was much influenced by his wife, who died before he converted to Catholicism.
21. Robert Hull, 'On vivisection', *London Medical Gazette*, 33 (1843/1844), 219–220 (Hull 1843/1844).
22. 'Dr. Blundell's introductory physiological lecture' (editorial), *Lancet*, 9 (1825/6), 113–118; Stevenson, 'Religious elements'.
23. Revelation 6: 9–10.
24. James Lawson Drummond, 'On humanity to animals', *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal*, 12 (1831): 172–183 (Drummond 1831).
25. Anita Guerrini, 'The ethics of animal experimentation in seventeenth-century England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), 391–407 (Guerrini 1989).
26. Vyvyan, *In Pity*, 23–24.
27. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1037a6.
28. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, 68; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993), 126 (Kenny 1993).

29. Catholic doctrine as laid down by the Council of Vienne in 1312 was, however, that ‘... anyone who presumes henceforth to assert defend or hold stubbornly that the rational or intellectual soul is not the form of the human body of itself and essentially, is to be considered a heretic’, which appears to have excluded the possibility of a soul without a body, or a person without a soul. The heresy that the Council was trying to prevent was monopyschism: the view that all human beings shared a common intellect: Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae 1a* 75–89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 159–160 (Pasnau 2002).
30. Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Organization of Mankind, considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature* (London: William Godbid for William Shrowsbery, 1677), 304, 321 (Hale 1677).
31. G.E. Bentley, ‘The freaks of learning’, *Colby Library Quarterly*, 18 (1982): 87–104; Douglas K. Candland, *Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993) (Bentley 1982; Candland 1993).
32. Daniel Tyerman, *Essays on the Wisdom of God* (London: R. Clay, 1818), 266 (Tyerman 1818).
33. J. Worthy, ‘Souls and instincts of animals’, *Catholic Institute Magazine* (1856): 143–149, 175–180 (Worthy 1856).
34. Richard Graves, *On the Four Last Books of the Pentateuch* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850), 294 (Graves 1850).
35. Preece, ‘Darwinism, Christianity’ (Preece 2003).
36. J. Earl Clausen (ed.), *The Dog’s Book of Verse* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1916), 145–174 (Earl Clausen 1916).
37. Peter Harrison, ‘Animal souls, metempsychosis, and theodicy in seventeenth-century English thought’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 31 (1993): 519–544; J.Z. Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events Relevant to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan...* (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1767); see also Chi-Ming Yang, ‘Gross metempsychosis and Eastern soul’, in Frank Palmeri (ed.) *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture...* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), 13–30 (Harrison 1993; Holwell 1767; Yang 2006).
38. Anna Laetitia Aikin [Barbauld], ‘The Mouse’s Petition’, *Poems* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1773), 37–40 (Barbauld 1773).
39. Peder Anker, ‘A vindication of the rights of brutes’, *Philosophy and Geography*, 7 (2004), 259–264 (Anker 2004).

40. Thomas Taylor, *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, ed. R. Urban St Cir (Sequim, WA: Holmes, 2009), 8 (Taylor 2009).
41. House of Lords debate, *Hansard*, 15 May 1809, 14, c554.
42. Lewis Gompertz, *Fragments in Defence of Animals, and Essays on Morals, Soul, and Future State* (London: W. Hornell, 1852), 191–206; Lucien Wolf, ‘Gompertz, Lewis’ (rev. Ben Marsden) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), viewed 4 August 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10934>, (Gompertz 1852; Wolf and Lewis 2004).
43. Forster visited India, and was impressed by the animal hospitals he saw there: Thomas Forster, *Philozoa, or Moral Reflections on the Actual Condition of the Animal Kingdom* (Brussels: Deltombe and Co., 1839), viii–ix, 28, 63 (Forster 1839).
44. Thomas Forster, *An Apology for the Doctrine of Pythagoras as Compatible with that of Christianity with an Account of a New Sect of Christians* (Boulogne sur Mer: Charles Aigre 1812), 4, 7. The ‘sect’ was the short-lived New Christian Society of Metempsychosians (Forster 1812).
45. ‘Aesculapius’, *The Hospital Pupil’s Guide: being Oracular Communications Addressed to Students of the Medical Profession* (London: E. Cox and Sons, 1818), 39 (Aesculapius 1818).
46. *Lancet*, 1 (1829/30), 749–753.
47. For an introduction to transcendental philosophy see Philip F. Rehbock, *The Philosophical Naturalists: Themes in Early-Nineteenth Century British Biology* (Wisconsin: University of Madison Press, 1983), 15–30 (Rehbock 1983).
48. Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: a Fragment* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1850), 426 (Knox 1850).
49. Robert Knox, *A Manual of Artistic Anatomy, for the use of Sculptors, Painters and Amateurs* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1852) (Knox 1852).
50. Bates, *Robert Knox*, 113, 132–135.
51. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Other Essays* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2009 [1836]), 18 (Emerson 2009).
52. Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 183 (Desmond 1989).
53. Michael Hagner, ‘The soul and the brain between anatomy and Naturphilosophie in the early-nineteenth century’, *Medical History*, 36 (1992), 1–33 (Hagner 1992).

54. Bates, Robert Knox, 21, 146; Evelleen Richards, ‘The “moral anatomy” of Robert Knox: the interplay between biological and social thought in Victorian scientific naturalism’, *Journal of the History of Biology*, 22 (1989): 373–436; Stevenson, ‘Religious elements’ (Richards 1989).
55. David Mushet, *Wrongs of the Animal World* (London: Hatcher and Son, 1839), 79. Shelley thought the Ancient Greeks experienced beauty through living ‘in harmony with nature’: Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad...* (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), 2 vols. 2, 190 (Mushet 1839); (Shelley 1840).
56. See, for example, Gerard M. Verschuuren, *Darwin’s Philosophical Legacy: the Good and the Not-So-Good* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 93–100 (Verschuuren 2012).
57. Teresa Mangum, ‘Animal angst: Victorians memorialize their pets’, in Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (eds), *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15–34 (Mangum 2007).
58. Francis Doyle, ‘Epitaph on a Favourite Dog’, in *The Return of the Guards, and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 264 (Doyle 1883).
59. Frances Power Cobbe, *The moral aspects of vivisection* (London: VSS, 1875), 288 (Cobbe 1875).
60. Finn and Stark, ‘Medical science’.
61. Knox, *Artistic Anatomy*, 5.

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