Chien-hui Li


ABSTRACT

This paper offers an historical perspective to the discussion of the relationship between Christianity and nonhuman-human animal relationships by examining the animal protection movement in English society as it first took root in the nineteenth century. The paper argues that the Christian beliefs of many in the movement, especially the evangelical outlook of their faith, in a considerable way affected the character as well as the aims and scope of the emergent British animal welfare movement - although the church authorities did not take an active part in the discussion and betterment of the conditions of animals. An explicitly Christian discourse, important in creating and sustaining the important philanthropic tradition in Britain, mobilized the movement. The paper also traces the gradual decrease of the centrality of the movement's Christian elements later in the century when evolutionary ideas as well as other developments in society shed alternative light on the relationship between human and nonhuman animals and brought about different trends in the movement. This paper sees Christianity not as a static and defining source of influence but as a rich tradition containing diverse elements that people drew upon and used to create meanings for them. The paper implicitly suggests that both a religion's doctrines in theory and the outcome of a complex interaction with the changing society in which the religion is practiced determine its potential to influence animal-human relationships.
At the turn of the nineteenth century, a crusade for the prevention of cruelty to animals began in England; through collective efforts on a scale never seen before, legislative changes were sought, societies were formed, and campaigns were carried out. After several failed proposals, in 1822, the first legislative act for the prevention of ill treatment of cattle was written into the statute books. In 1824, a society for the exclusive purpose of preventing cruelty to animals, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA; after 1840, RSPCA) was launched. Soon, other societies such as the Association for Promoting Rational Humanity towards the Animal Creation (APRHAC; 1830) joined in, or split off from the SPCA, such as the Animals' Friend Society (AFS; 1832). These societies together carried out a wide range of propagandist, educational, legislative, petitioning, investigative, and prosecutorial work. In the first few decades, the chief issues on their working agenda included the mistreatment of draught animals, cruelties in the Smithfield Market and the Knackers' Yard, and working-class recreations such as bull-baiting, cock-fighting, and dog-fighting. Although from time to time, vivisection was condemned, and upper-class sports were criticized by the more radical AFS, these practices did not become targets for systematic campaigning. Through their cooperation as well as disagreements with each other, the societies became the main driving force for the prevention of cruelty to animals in the early half of the nineteenth century and created a steadfast tradition in the animal protection movement.

**Infidelity, Immorality, and Cruelty to Animals**

The emergence of organized concerns for nonhuman animals has social as well as ideological and religious roots. The social context in which the early movement arose was not only one of rapid population growth, urbanization, and industrialization that might have affected people's perception of, and relations with, animals but also one of intense religious revival and national political tension that exerted substantial influence on the movement's character and social outlook. Evangelicalism, revived in the eighteenth century within the Anglican Church, by the early nineteenth century had already spread to other denominations and begun to permeate Victorian society in general. Characterized by emphasis on personal salvation, reliance on scriptural authority, and by a fervent zeal to spread the gospel and to do good
work, this evangelical current had broad significance for people's personal and family lives as well as for the sphere of public morals. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the evangelicals first poured forth their energy in the movement for the national reformation of morals and manners that had originated a century earlier for enforcing morality and combating vices among the lower classes.8

The political situation following the events of the French Revolution also helped to raise the nation's concern about immorality and infidelity, which now bore a close connection with Jacobinism, and were seen to possess great potential for threatening the stability of the nation. Wars with Napoleonic France between 1793 and 1815 and threats of post-war popular radicalism also intensified loyalist sentiment and heightened pressure in the country to preserve Britain's social and political stability as symbolized by the integrity of both the Church and State. This ideological demand of the political situation, combined with the religious revival, gave rise to an aggressive crusade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century for the suppression of immoral vices and seditious infidelity such as Sabbathbreaking, gambling, disorderly behavior, and the publication of politically radical, anti-Christian, and obscene materials.

The prevention of cruelty to animals fell squarely on the agenda of this wave of national reformation. To the moral reformers of the time, cruelty to animals not only had a demoralizing effect on the character of humans but also was conducive to other moral and social evils such as rowdiness, drunkenness, and public disorder, often found to accompany animal baiting and fighting or the lower classes' mistreatment of draught animals. For example, the Society for the Suppression of Vice - the first voluntary society engaged in prosecuting people for their cruelties towards animals - when reporting on a case of bear-baiting, criticized the abuse of the power given to man over irrational creatures and also stated that the occasion would bring together "great numbers of idle and disorderly persons, promoting drunkenness and quarrelling, and tending to public danger and disturbance."9

There was indeed only a blurred boundary between the concern for the morals and manners of the lower classes and the sufferings of animals. The early societies' concentration on such areas as mistreatment of draught animals, bull baiting, cockfighting, and the Smithfield Market reflected their mixed
objectives. The one-sidedness and punitive character of the national reformation - with the upper classes setting the standards of morals and going about censoring the conduct of the lower classes - also were inevitably reflected in the crusade against cruelty to animals. Those who formed the anti-cruelty societies were either from the upper class or largely respectable gentlemen from the middle-class. To these people, "cruelty to dumb animals" could hardly be associated with "the better classes." The cabmen and drovers with iron goads and wooden bludgeons in their hands, the lowly people who bellowed and booed around the fighting-pits and baiting-grounds were the worrying elements in society; thus, the "respectable" section of society had to assume the responsibility accorded its station in life - spreading its civilizing influence over "inferiors," if not by good example, by admonishment or punishment.

"True Patriots" and "Good Soldiers of Christ"

Apart from the moralistic character of the evangelicals and their general acceptance of the existing social order, the religious and political allegiance of the early movement gave it a distinct national dimension that was both conservative and patriotic. Proclamations seeking "to purify the country from foul and disgraceful abominations" or "to promote the welfare of BRITAIN, and to maintain the honour of the CHRISTIAN name" were hailed in meetings or written into reports of the early anti-cruelty societies. This readiness of the societies to uphold the Christian religion and defend the order of the state was prominent as late as the early 1830s when English Jacobinism and irreligiosity were still considered prime dangers threatening the state. The APRHAC, under the strong influence of several Anglican clergymen, was especially unequivocal in its defense of Christianity and the British nation and also in its repudiation of all elements that threatened the social establishment. In a sermon titled, "On national cruelty," the Rev. Thomas Greenwood from Trinity College, Cambridge, a leading figure of the Association, emphatically connected the patriotic, political mission with the animal cause. He first ascribed the "awful calamity which has befallen nominal Christian France" to the twin demons of effeminacy and cruelty in the French national character, a "compound of the monkey and the tiger." In Britain, during the years after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic
effeminacy was a prevalent prejudicial characterization of France, and if the country was to avoid a national calamity such as had befallen France - the addition of a tigerish brutality to the effeminate French character seemed an apt device for generating an urgency in Britain to stop cruelty to animals. Finally, after having fully established the relation of the anti-cruelty cause with the political threats facing Britain, Greenwood tapped the abundant patriotic spirit of the postwar period. He called on the “true patriots” of the country to “spread the sacred shield of mercy over the brute creation” and also urged the “good soldiers of Christ” to rally “loyally and devotedly round his standard,” especially when other nations had deserted it.

The inclusion of national politics and the mobilization of patriotic sentiment - strategies employed by the more broadly-based anti-slavery movement going on at the same time in Britain - might have helped to keep the cause of animals in the forefront of national life and public attention. However, this also invariably created a spirit of intolerance to different ideological elements within the movement itself. During the high tide of this intolerance, all radical and unChristian ideas were chastised as harmful to the anti-cruelty movement, just as they were harmful to the state. The first major split within the movement in the early 1830s arose partly from this strong commitment to both political and religious orthodoxy. Lewis Gompertz, honorary secretary of the SPCA and a vegetarian Jew, was forced to leave the Society after members from both the SPCA and the APRHAC protested about the “Pythagorean principles” suspected in his book, *Moral Inquiries*. In this purifying operation within the movement, not only was Gompertz criticized for his adopting the diet propagated by Porphyry, “the unpitying foe of Christianity,” but also John Oswald, a member of the Jacobin club and author of a book promoting vegetarianism based on Hinduism, was condemned for causing the horrors and bloodshed of the French Revolution. Dissatisfied with this exclusive Christian base of the SPCA as well as with its other problems, such as inefficiency, Gompertz and his followers formed the non-sectarian AFS and for some years carried out work with a wider scope than the SPCA. Nonetheless, ironically, in 1844 another dissatisfied group inspired by Christian ideals again seceded from the AFS, this time with Gompertz’s view of the immortality of animals as part of their complaint.
**Uniting Christianity, Philanthropy and Humanity to Animals**

However, the question of the relationship between the Christian religion and the movement presents a more complex picture. The social outlook and character of the movement were only one manifestation of its interaction with the political context, on the one hand, and evangelical Christianity, on the other. Not only did the Christian religion inspire and justify people's concern about animals, channeling their concern into philanthropic charities, but also many used a Christian discourse composed of different elements from the general tradition to mobilize consciously for the acceptance of the cause in Victorian society.

During the controversy over Gompertz’s unChristian ideas, the SPCA found it necessary to state “in the broadest, most distinct, and unequivocal manner,” that “the proceedings of this Society are entirely based, on the Christian Faith, and on Christian Principles.” The APRHAC also stated:

> Your Committee were always convinced that there could be no true humanity which was not based on CHRISTIAN principle. They saw that, however assiduous they might be to erect their superstructure, yet if the foundations were not laid deep in religious sentiment, the winds of heaven would soon scatter their building, and cover the foolish architects with confusion and dismay.

The position of the two main societies in relation to the Christian religion, if it had not been put so formally before, had, in fact, always been the unconcealed attitude of the animal societies and remained so in the early half of the nineteenth century.

This exclusive devotion to the Christian religion can be explained in terms of the overtly religious nature of early nineteenth century society and, more specifically, the evangelical connections of the majority of philanthropic efforts. Like most other charitable societies of the period, the early pages of the anti-cruelty movement were dotted with the names of famous evangelical philanthropists such as William Wilberforce, T. F. Buxton and Samuel Gurney, along with a greater number of lesser-known workers infused with the same religious impulse of the age. To these devoted evangelicals, the sole basis of their action, as well as their prime commitment, was, of course, the Christian religion.

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In the annual meetings of the SPCA in the early half of the nineteenth century, we see enthusiastic members frequently reiterating that they “meet here as Christians, speak as Christians,” and “exert themselves as Christians.”

Even when passing a resolution of thanks for the support given to the society, it was commented that, “we gladly receive the support of all - but receive it on principles of Christianity; and if not so maintained, I care not how soon the Society perishes. (Cheers.)”

However, these workers were not merely Christians in the ordinary sense but Christians reborn with an evangelical spirit. Humanity, philanthropy, and Christianity, to them, were united and could not be separated. As one committee member of the SPCA declared in a meeting:

If any one charity, among the many admirable abounding in this great Metropolis, may lay claim to true Christian benevolence, springing from the inculcation of mercy, leading to general philanthropy, and based upon the purest disinterestedness, surely this may.

The remarks of another committee member of the Society bore the same three-fold imprint:

I cannot think that man a Christian, who will neglect or disdain that first and great principle enjoined by our Redeemer, “to go about doing good.” We are, by inculcating humanity towards the brute creation, obeying one of the precepts of that religion which we all profess in common.

Optimism most characteristic of the evangelical missionary spirit also infected the early movement. This was revealed most clearly through the usually hopeful and high-spirited closing remarks of the societies’ meetings. One chairman at an SPCA annual meeting closed the meeting by predicting a most promising future for the cause:

If missionaries, when the banner of England is unfurled in the cause of Christianity on distant shores, will inculcate these doctrines of mercy to the brute creation which we labour to diffuse here, then will humanity flourish, not only at home, but abroad, and the branches of a glorious tree will so extend, that animals who cannot describe their woes, will find shelter, and sleep under its shade.
This missionary rhetoric of the magnificence of the British oak spreading its benevolent shade over the whole empire for those deserving mercy was certainly not uncommon among the evangelicals or among the early workers for the animals. In time, this hope of a universal acceptance of Christianity and mercy toward animals was to evolve into the familiar British pride about its civilization, as well as its humanity to animals.

Be Merciful After Thy Power

Despite their later success, the beginnings of the animal societies were full of uncertainties and struggles. The SPCA, when finally founded in 1824, soon faced serious pecuniary difficulties. Its first Secretary, the Rev. Arthur Broome, was thrown into prison for the debts of the society, and the chief function of the society was suspended from 1826 to 1828. Again, by 1830 financial strain forced the society to limit its prosecutions and propagandistic work.33 The financial prospects of other societies existing at this time also were not cheerful.

When Gompertz and his supporters formed the AFS in 1832, they became the fourth society of the kind to share, or literally, to fight over, the very limited resources available to the cause.34 Limited indeed, for the new society immediately observed that, for the public, “to give their good money merely for suffering animals, appears to them as so much thrown away.” Gompertz also observed: “To talk of humanity towards beasts appeared to Englishmen as insanity.”35

Faced with such an unsympathetic public attitude, the emergent movement - to mobilize sufficient support for its work - first had to acquaint the general public with the plight of nonhuman animals as well as to make sense of, or justify, the concern for nonhuman animals. Christianity, being the basis both of morality in Christian society in general and the conviction and commitment of these early workers, naturally became the prime source of justification for their cause. Before the movement came into being, several works from the Christian faith that advocated a human’s duty to the animal creation already existed.37 In his examination of the emergence of modern European ideas toward nonhuman animals from 1500-1800, Thomas (1984, p. 181) argued that all the arguments for humanity toward animals were present by 1700.
However, the movement, through its mobilization efforts, was still to accomplish the immense task of further formulation, consolidation, articulation, and diffusion of a Christian discourse for the animal cause.

The distinct discourse gradually developed by the Christian workers for animals, in short, was that God had entrusted human dominion over all living creatures on earth and it therefore was humans’ duty to be kind and merciful to the animal creation just as God was to human beings. Under this theological frame, the superiority of the human over the brute creation and humans’ almost godlike status were accentuated in order to underscore the great trust imposed upon men by the divine design. As Humphry Primatt, Doctor of Divinity, said in The Duty of Mercy, a work that was regarded as “the foundation-stone” (Fairholme and Pain, 1924, p. 10) of the SPCA:

Man is the most noble, the most excellent, the most perfect of all terrestrial beings. But what then?... Every excellence in a man is surcharged with a duty, from which the superiority of his station cannot exempt him.48

That God regarded the life of all his creations as precious and beheld and provided for them all replaced previous thinking that God’s divine benevolence had been bestowed only upon humans. Within this discourse, the extension of God’s benevolence and mercy to animals also became the most glorified central tenet of the religion. As William Drummond said in his essay submitted to the SPCA: “Christianity is throughout a religion of mercy - of mercy not limited to any tribe or nation, nor to the sphere of rationality itself, but extending to the extreme of life and sense.”39 Scriptural texts such as “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” and “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful” were frequently quoted or inscribed as mottoes in leaflets, journals, and vignettes of books of the several societies.40

When addressing people accountable for their treatment of animals, however, references to the Day of Judgment and prospects of retribution in hell were added. Leaflets that were circulated to workmen or to the owners of animals were often paternalistic and severely admonitory in tone. Besides repetitive short warnings such as “I must repeat, Christ expects all his subjects to be merciful”; “He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy (James ii. 13.)”;41 an integral discourse went like this:

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Oh, consider how it will appear against you when you are summoned before the awful tribunal of that GOD who created both us and the creatures committed to our care, and who has declared compassion and kindness to be in his estimation the greatest of virtues. Be assured an hour will come when you will bitterly lament the tears and sufferings you have wantonly and cruelly caused to them, though they cannot express what they feel.42

The reliance on the Scriptures that was characteristic of the evangelicals also distinguished the early societies. “Call on us then - we are ready with our Bibles in our hands to follow in aid of the good work,”43 said one committee member and was cheered by all in a meeting of the SPCA. There also seemed to be no difficulty for the Christian activists in finding relevance in scriptural texts and in using them to justify their claims and actions. As Greenwood once said of the Bible: “There is no other book in the world that breathes so affectionate a spirit towards these dumb members of God’s great family below, or that gives so remarkable a prominence to subjects connected with their welfare.”44

However, considering that a much greater section of the Christian public remained unconverted to the animal cause, these early workers had a much more difficult task spreading their convictions and discourse, and their tone often bore the mark of undignified desperation that sometimes characterizes pioneers of most reforms. As one of the Rev. Styles’ forceful speeches went:

I should repudiate Christianity if it circumscribed our sympathy. But far different is that spirit of mercy, which “wipes all tears from all faces,” and enjoins us to turn out of the path lest we “needlessly set foot upon a worm.” Go and learn from Holy Writ the meaning of these precious words, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” Christianity is no indifferent spectator of animal suffering, but the stern avenger of the wrongs of that defenceless race which cannot defend themselves.45

As this interpretation of Christianity provided both justification and inspiration to the workers for animals, securing the support of the clergymen had always been a priority for anti-cruelty societies. For the SPCA, “the periodical delivery of discourses from the pulpit”46 had been one of its objects since its foundation. In 1830, after resolving that it was “highly expedient to obtain sermons from Clergymen of various denominations to diffuse moral and reli-
gious impressions towards the brute creation," it further formed a sub-committee to carry out the task more effectively. Other societies, including the AFS - which was not based on the Christian religion - also engaged in securing the delivery of sermons and then further circulating them by printing them in journals or issuing them as separate tracts.

**Challenging the Dominant Christian Attitude**

At this time, however, most clergymen deemed preaching on the subject of the welfare of animals unworthy; worse, some even considered it to be "a sort of desecration of the ministerial office, of the temple of God, and of his holy Sabbath." Faced with such circumstances, the early societies had no strategy other than to make frequent appeals:

> The MINISTERS OF RELIGION must regard this subject as well worthy of their attention, and not suppose it to be any desecration of the sacred desk, or of the holy day appointed for instruction in righteousness, to enforce humanity to the animal creation as a branch of moral duty.

To persuade the clergy and the largely Christian society, the evangelical prospect was also frequently stressed. A notice of appeal to the clergy from the RSPCA stated:

> To cultivate kindness of heart towards inferior creatures is to prepare for the more easy introduction of Christianity. A man carefully kind to animals will seldom be brutal to his fellows; he who turns with tenderness and affection to dumb creatures will hardly resist the love of the Gospel.

This was indeed behind the reasoning of those who were equally impassioned by the Gospel to mitigate the sufferings of animals. Catherine Smithies, founder of the first Band of Mercy, said on her deathbed... "the teaching of children to be kind and merciful to God's lower creatures is preparing the way for the gospel of Christ.” (Moss, 1961, p. 37)

What was hard for the animal workers to convey to both clergy and laity was not the benevolence and mercy of God but the contentious point that these virtues should be extended beyond the human species to the animal creation. The notion of the widening circle of compassion, argued from a
Christian viewpoint, therefore became a common device used by the Christian workers for the extension of human charity. A typical argument went like this:

From the time when the GREAT PHILANTHROPIST first cast the pebble of benevolence into the stagnant lake of human nature, the circles had been gradually extending and widening: man had first thought of his own comfort and happiness, he then sought to promote that of his family - then of his neighbours - afterwards of his country; circle after circle had been added, taking in men of other colours and of other climes - the oppressed negro slave - the poor climbing-sweep - the overworked factory child - the wretch, scarcely a man, who was ruining himself by intemperance - and now we saw a circle beyond all these, embracing the inferior animal creation. And why not the animal creation?52

The animal societies' aims in widening the circle of compassion were twofold: first, to place nonhuman animals conceptually within human concern and second, and most important, to place them squarely within the philanthropic tradition in English society. Since the early nineteenth century, English philanthropy, driven by evangelical fervor as well as the changing conditions of the dawning industrial society, had become ever more abundant and extensive. Workhouses and schools for the poor, homes and orphanages for children, funds for the sick, the aged and numerous institutions were all created to alleviate the increasing problems of the rapidly industrialized society. Seeing this burgeoning of charitable projects, but not a corresponding growth of charity to animals, the animal workers naturally strove for the inclusion of their cause into the Victorian world of bountiful charities. After a few decades of progress, the enlarged sense of benevolence promulgated by the animal societies gradually prevailed, and charity work for animals also gained its place as one important branch of nineteenth century philanthropy.

Consolidation and New Challenges

Christian rhetoric remained dominant in the movement up to the 1840s but then gradually lost its urgency. By this time, the fervor for national reformation in the country had already subsided as well. The Church of England had begun to lose its privileges and authority in society largely as a result of
Whig reforms, and Christianity was transforming in the public's mind as the so-called Victorian crisis of faith began to trouble the conscience of many. The animal protection movement also evolved with the changing society and adjusted its policies accordingly. One of its most significant adaptations was abandonment of an exclusive Christian basis. The first editorial of the RSPCA's journal, *The Animal World*, published in 1869, stated:

> Humanity is unsectarian. We shall introduce neither theology nor politics into our columns; and, while preserving a religious tone throughout our journal, we shall expunge from articles and letters sent to us for publication every allusion to controverted matters in religion. We, therefore, invite the cooperation of all persons on a platform large enough to comprehend every opinion of faith - Jew and Gentile, bond and free.35

However, just as Victorian society was still self-consciously religious, the animal defense movement remained the same. The prayers and singing of hymns at important occasions of the animal societies revealed the religious overtones in Victorian society. Within the movement, appeals were still constantly made to clergymen, sermons were still frequently printed in journals, Christian virtues were still preached to children, along with lessons on humanity to animals in the juvenile branch of RSPCA, the Band of Mercy. But now all were done without the previous devotion to Christian principles that earlier might have excluded other equally beneficial elements to the cause such as evolutionary science, philosophy, natural history, and literature.

As later in the nineteenth century evangelicalism gradually took up the secular garment of respectability, philanthropy continued to thrive with no sign of abatement of the cult of respectability then permeating all levels of the Victorian world. When Victorian society entered into its mid-century prosperity, the animal protection movement, now with "Royal" prefixed to the name of its leading organization, also entered into a period of further consolidation and smooth extension of its practical charity work. The institutionalization of homes for dogs, cats, and horses; the wide network of drinking troughs on highways and streets; the parades, shows or exhibitions encouraging drivers of vans and wagons to treat their draught animals with care and kindness; the educational projects for instilling in children kindness to animals - all started one after another from the mid-century. The main line
of work of the RSPCA, the investigation and prosecution of cruelty to animals, also greatly expanded in the next half of the century and increased from a few hundreds of cases in its first few decades to an average of 5000 cases a year by the end of the nineteenth century.

Concurrently with this steady progress of philanthropic work for animals, there emerged in the movement some new attitudes toward the animal-human relationship and toward the aims and demands of the movement. The intellectual developments in science, such as geological discoveries and evolutionary ideas that had earlier challenged the authority of Christianity in society, subsequently influenced new generations of people concerned about animals and fostered a new spirit in the animal defense movement. The changing perception of a narrowing gap between humans and other animals rendered the Christian notion of the superiority of humans outmoded and problematic; the old language such as “brute creation,” “inferior animals,” and “our dumb dependents” became unacceptable to people who now perceived a new kinship emerging between them and nonhuman animals.

The many strands of late-nineteenth century radicalism, especially their common reaction against philanthropy as a solution to the prevalent social problems, also made possible a more radical look at the animal question. For example, Henry Salt, guiding spirit of the Humanitarian League - a loosely constructed circle of socialists, secularists, and other progressive reformers - criticized the old school of humanitarianism as a somewhat conservative, orthodox, and pietistic form of benevolence that regarded the objects of its compassion, whether “the lower orders” or “the lower animals,” with a merciful and charitable eye, but from a rather superior standpoint of irreproachable respectability.

... It did not even consider the vast ethical vistas opened out by the new phase into which the animal question, no less than the human social question, has been carried by the new democratic ideal and the discoveries of evolutionary science. The “Justice” rather than “mercy”, “rights” rather than “duty of kindness” to animals, an end to all cruelties to animals rather than only those inflicted by the working-classes, were what the League members and many others aimed at under the new political and social circumstances at the end of the nineteenth century.
Nevertheless, rather than replacing the old way, these newly emerged forms of thinking and expression offered alternative ways forward. By the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the tone and character of the mainstream animal protection movement, which had been shaped to a large extent by the Christian religion, was already firmly established and not to be easily challenged. In short, during the pivotal consolidating period of the movement, Christianity justified the cause and placed it on the firm ground of British philanthropic tradition. Just as important, the particular evangelical characteristic of activists' Christian faith provided the movement with the enthusiasm that was essential for its practical charitable work. In the second half of the nineteenth century, mercy and kindness, though gradually losing their religious resonance, remained the watchwords as well as the guiding spirits of the movement. Additionally, the continuously broadening charitable work toward animals remained the prominent form through which the merciful spirits inspired by Christianity most often expressed themselves.

**Conclusion**

William Drummond, a Unitarian priest as well as a poet and controversialist of broad sympathy and great humor, loved to tell the following story.57

Many years ago a Presbyterian minister in the North of Ireland, desirous of putting a stop to cock-fighting, a barbarous custom to which the people of his parish were addicted, particularly at the season of Easter, requested their attendance to hear a discourse on a particularly interesting subject. The congregation, of course, was crowded. He chose for his text that passage of Matthew or Luke, which describes Peter as weeping bitterly when he heard the cock crow; and discoursed upon it with such eloquence and pathos, and made so judicious an application of the subject, that his hearers from that day forth abandoned the cruel practice.58

This is a curious example in which an unexpected element in the Christian tradition was effectively used to stop a particularly cruel practice to animals in a specific, well-defined historical setting. Drummond, of course, told his amusing story not for historical interest but with a high hope for the potentiality of Christianity, which he believed to be a religion of mercy throughout. The story points fittingly, however, to an interesting direction in historical
inquiry: namely, inquiries into how religious believers - clergy or lay who in their own historical contexts were capable of affecting, and being affected by, religious values - have drawn on their religious traditions to promote changes in their and other humans’ relationships with other animals.59

Notes

1 Correspondence should be sent to Chien-hui Li, 880 King’s College, Cambridge, CB2 1ST, UK. The author wishes to thank Dr. Alastair Reid, David Craig, and Emma Griffin for their comments and suggestions about this article and Chris Reed, Librarian/Archivist of the RSPCA for his kind assistance during my archival research. The works of Professor Andrew Linzey and others on Christian theology and nonhuman animals also have given much inspiration to my thinking about the relationship between Christianity and nonhuman animals. However, the usual disclaimer applies.

2 The first society of the kind traceable, the Liverpool Society for Preventing Wanton Cruelty to Brute Animals in 1809, did not seem to have lasted long. The first Honorary Secretary of the SPCA, Rev. Broome, also failed in 1822 in founding a society similar to the SPCA.

3 The APRHAC published a quarterly journal, The Voice of Humanity, between 1830 and 1832 and had at least four local branches in the latter year.

4 The AFS published a journal, The Animals’ Friend, or the Progress of Humanity (the latter name is used in this article to avoid confusion with another journal called The Animals’ Friend published since 1894) between 1833 and 1841 and had at least ten local branches in 1841. In 1841 the AFS was in financial difficulties and seemed to become less active. Its splinter group, the National Animals’ Friend Society, claimed that the AFS was no longer in existence in 1844. However, there was still evidence of AFS’s work after this time.

5 A knacker’s yard was a place for slaughtering old and worn-out horses.

6 The contribution of other societies to the movement during the decades before the SPCA attained its “Royal” prefix was great, though often ignored. This might have been due to the fact that the RSPCA was the only society to have survived from the movement’s conception to the present day and thus could present a coherent account of its own history. In Brian Harrison’s early work on the nineteenth-century animal protection movement, the institutional history of the RSPCA seems to be taken as representative of the movement in general in the nineteenth century (1973; 1982). The contribution of other societies to the animal cause was also ignored in the histories of the RSPCA (Fairholme & Pain, 1924; Moss, 1961) and in more recent historical works on the animal defence movement.


Ann Address to the Public from the Society for the Suppression of Vice, Part the Second (London, 1803), pp. 87-91, see especially p. 91. Cruelty to animals, however, constituted only a small part of the Society’s prosecution work. Amongst the 678 convictions that the Society procured in its first year, over 600 were for Sabbath-breaking, and only four were for cruelty to animals. For more on the Society for the Suppression of Vice, see M. J. D. Roberts, “The Society for the Suppression of Vice and its early critics, 1802-1818,” *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), pp. 159-76.

Apart from the miseries that animals were subjected to at the over-crowded Smithfield livestock market, the overall environment of the market alarmed the anti-cruelty societies, because they viewed the situation as both immoral and degrading, as evidenced in the following descriptions: “the very nursery of all crime, from drunkenness and robbery, to ruffianism and murder”, and (Bartholomew Fair) “the centre of attraction to all the thieves, pickpockets, and prostitutes of the Metropolis” (see, respectively, *Herald of Humanity*, Mar. 1844, p. 2; and “Bartholomew Fair,” *Voice of Humanity*, 1 (1830), pp. 53-5).

Among the 22 members of the first two working committees of the SPCA, five of them were MPs, three were Reverends and two titled. It was also common for the early societies to open meetings by congratulating the “highly respectable” persons assembled on the occasions.

The evangelicals were often criticized for being hypocritical in their character and in their social reform work. However, as Owen said, “to condemn the evangelical position as hypocrisy is simply to misinterpret evangelical values” (pp. 94-5); religion rather than temporal welfare was their primary commitment, thus the conspicuous religious and moral elements in their reform or charitable work. The early anti-cruelty movement with its close association with evangelicalism should also be understood under this light to avoid passing a similar judgment.


Five of the ten committee members of the APRHAC in 1832 were clergymen; see *Annual Meeting of the APRHAC*, p. 17. Of the Cambridge Branch of the APRHAC formed in 1831, five of its nine committee members were also clergymen and...
among the five, at least four of them were Anglicans; see Voice of Humanity, 2 (1831), p. 167.


16 For this characterization of France, and for Britain’s patriotism in this period, see L. Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven, 1992).


19 See “Appendix to the prospectus of the Animals’ Friend Society,” Progress of Humanity, no. 1, 1833, pp. 20-1; Progress of Humanity, no. 1, 1833, pp. 7-9.


21 For example, while the work of the SPCA was still largely confined to the Metropolis, the AFS already had ten branches in 1841 spreading as far as Dover, Canterbury, Gravesend, Birmingham, Walsall, Bristol, Yarmouth, Brighton, Norwich and Manchester. The AFS was also more consistent in condemning cruelties of all classes in the society.

22 See The Herald of Humanity, Mar. 31, 1844, pp. 1-2; 16. This is the publication of the newly seceded group, the National Animals’ Friend Society. It accused both the AFS and the RSPCA of mismanagement and inefficiency, and especially criticized the RSPCA’s indifferent attitude towards the cruelties that took place in the Knackers’ Yard.

23 RSPCA Annual Report, 1832, p. 5.

24 Annual Meeting of the APRHAC, p. 8.

25 With the exception of Gompertz’s AFS, which admitted persons of all sects and denominations. The other societies were interdenominational and involved many Quakers, as well as Unitarians, such as the Unitarian minister Dr. W. H. Drummond.


27 See RSPCA Annual Reports.


29 In an APRHAC meeting, its chairman commented that he ”fully concurred in the opinion of a rev. gentleman who had preceded him, that humanity, philanthropy, and religion, were united.” See Annual Meeting of the APRHAC, p. 16.
30 RSPCA Annual Report, 1835, p. 41.
32 RSPCA Annual Report, 1833, p. 39.
34 Gompertz, while still secretary of the SPCA, sued Mr. Fenner of the APRHAC for misappropriating donations that had been intended for the SPCA to the APRHAC. See Remarks of the Proceedings of the Voice of Humanity and the Association for Promoting Rational Humanity to the Animal Creation (London, undated, tract circulated by the AFS), pp. 2-5.
35 Progress of Humanity, no. 1, 1833, p. 6.
39 W. H. Drummond, The Rights of Animals, and Man's Obligation to Treat Them with Humanity (London, 1838), p. 15. This is a book originally written for the SPCA's prize for the best essay on "Man's obligation as respects the brute creation," but sent in too late for the competition.
40 The RSPCA's medal, designed in 1883, for wearing at the Band of Mercy conference was also inscribed "Be Merciful After Thy Power", see Band of Mercy, May 1883, p. 35.
41 Leaflets circulated by the SPCA, "On the folly of supposing dumb animals to have no feeling," RSPCA Annual Report 1837, pp. 104-5.
42 Leaflets, "An address to the drivers of omnibuses and other public carriages," RSPCA Annual Report 1837, pp. 113-4, see especially p. 114.
43 RSPCA Annual Report 1838, p. 55.
45 RSPCA Annual Report, 1835, p.39. Rev. Styles was a committee member of the SPCA.
47 RSPCA First Minute Book, 1924-1832, p. 113.
Greenwood, "The state of the inferior creatures," p. 149.
50 "Notice to the Clergy," RSPCA Annual Report, 1864, p. 15.
51 For more on Mrs. Smithies' evangelical faith, see "The Band of Mercy movement," The Band of Mercy Advocate, 4 (1882), pp. 6-7.
52 Annual Meeting of the APRHAC, p. 20. See also RSPCA Annual Report, 1834, pp. 13; 25-7.
54 It should be noted that there were mixed reactions towards Darwinian evolutionary ideas in the animal protection movement. The ethical bearings of the notion of the kinship of humans with other animals on humans' treatment of animals involved conscious mobilizing efforts in the movement.
56 The author is currently working on a PhD dissertation focusing on Henry Salt and the animal defence movement in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries.
57 Drummond mentioned this story in his sermon on humanity to animals, and also wrote it into a poem; see W. H. Drummond, Humanity to Animals the Christian's Duty; A Discourse (London, 1830); W. H. Drummond, The Pleasures of Benevolence; A Poem (London, 1835), pp. 43-4.
59 It is regrettable that Christianity has had more of a bad name than a good one in regard to its contribution towards the development of a humane tradition towards nonhuman animals, a judgment due in no small part to the dissatisfaction that the animal defence movement has had towards the indifference of the church establishments from the movement's inception till this day.

References


