Abstract
This paper demonstrates how British Quakers, between 1870 and 1914, attempted to understand and debate the issue of vivisection through the lens of the Quaker peace testimony. Drawing on primary source materials, the article argues that these Friends were able to agitate for radical legislative and social change using virtue ethics as their framework. The paper further suggests that the moral parameters of the Quaker testimony for peace expanded briefly in this period to include interspecies as well as intraspecies engagement. Friends accomplished this by arguing that humans could not engage in vivisection—a “moral disease” just like slavery and war—without risking individual and social virtue. Friends were able to call for radical change in society without arguing for ethical egalitarianism. Hierarchy was implicit in their virtue ethic, but this did not hinder their creation of a forward-thinking stance on human-animal relations.

Keywords
hierarchy, pacifism, Quakerism, slavery, virtue ethics, vivisection

Introduction
In an article for The Friends’ Quarterly Examiner (1886), Friend Alfred W. Brown made an unusual connection between two forms of violence: he argued that an individual morally opposed to animal cruelty must also be morally opposed to war because of the suffering it caused to humans and nonhumans. In his words, “Those who attempt to reconcile war with the precepts of Christianity are accustomed to employ very plausible arguments, which pass unquestioned in the popular mind, but no amount of reasoning can obscure the fact that war is incompatible with kindliness to animals, and is therefore opposed to the spirit of Christ” (Brown, 1886, p. 406). Regarding vivisection, specifically, Thomas Beaven Clark, secretary of the Friends’ Anti-Vivisection Association (FAVA), also made the equation in 1891, arguing that Quakers...
opposed war as an immoral system even though some specific aspects of war (such as military demonstrations) were not harmful or bloody, and possibly produced a beneficial result. Using this line of argument, Friends were obligated to oppose vivisection as an immoral system even though some experiments were not painful, bloody, or explicitly cruel, and were potentially important to the healing of humans and animals (Clark, 1891). In 1900, Joseph Storrs Fry (president of FAVA) blamed the “growing spirit of materialism” for the increase in militarism and vivisection (Anonymous, 1900). Brown, Clark, and Fry offer three ways in which the practice of vivisection, or experimenting upon live animals, was connected with war: 1) both war and vivisection were “opposed to the spirit of Christ,” which was inherently benevolent, 2) both were immoral systems, and 3) both were outgrowths of materialism—a view that promoted the material over the spiritual, matter over morality.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, became concerned with vivisection in the late 19th century. Indeed, it was during this period that the moral debate surrounding this practice reached its height in England and America (Rupke, 1987). Connected to and affected by the intellectual and political culture of their time, British Friends engaged vociferously with the issue and employed both the vocabulary and arguments of other Victorian Christians who opposed vivisection. Yet Friends brought a unique perspective to the table: their traditional and characteristic concern for pacifism and nonviolence, referred to broadly as the peace testimony. Through the prism of vivisection debates, these Quakers began to question the moral boundaries of pacifism: who or what did it include? Who or what should be protected from violence? As Thomas Beaven Clark believed, pacifist principles should not be applied selectively, but universally (Clark, 1891). Therefore, while many of their arguments overlapped with other Christian antivivisectionists, Friends were fueled by a distinctly Quaker motive, that of the peace testimony.

Further, though members of the Religious Society of Friends were concerned primarily with virtue ethics, they were able to reach a radical conclusion from this moral standpoint. Their focus on individual and collective virtue allowed them to sidestep the question of whether or not humans and animals were morally equal while, at the same time, motivating them to take action (legislative and social) against the practice they opposed. This paper illustrates one innovative approach to animal ethics that does not rely on the equality of humans and animals, or even on consensus, as a starting point. Late Victorian British Quakers who opposed vivisection exemplify the radical potential of virtue ethics as an avenue for social change and moral progress.
The foundations of this ethical approach were solidified during Friends’ internal debates surrounding slavery. Quakers managed to oppose the enslavement of Africans without reaching consensus on the moral status of ex-slaves within their own religious community (Jordan, 2007). Their experiences with antislavery protest gave them a vocabulary to employ when speaking out against vivisection. In this way, a hierarchical ethic opposing violence and suffering evolved over time. This ethic did not require animals to be the moral equals of humans in order to receive benevolent treatment and to be protected from “unnecessary” cruelty. These moral and sociopolitical nuances come into relief by contextualizing late 19th-century British perspectives on slavery, virtue, and pacifism, and by analyzing British Friends’ debates surrounding the practice of vivisection. Primary source material for this article is drawn from the evangelically-oriented *The Friend* (London), the more conservative *The British Friend* (London), *The Friend* (Philadelphia), *The Journal of Zoophily* (Philadelphia), publications of the Friends’ Anti-Vivisection Association, and miscellaneous writings of Quakers and non-Quakers reflecting on the issue.

Friends were drawn into the late 19th-century vivisection debates through their connections with members of scientific and political institutions, and because of their concern for the moral well-being of society. Yet they were also invited guests in the ethical arguments that raged between the 1870s and the First World War. In 1889 Irish suffragist, social reformer, and de facto leader of the British antivivisection movement, Frances Power Cobbe, wrote a letter to members of the Religious Society of Friends in London, urging them to take up the cause of animals. Later published in the London-based Quaker periodical *The Friend*, an excerpt of Cobbe’s letter reads:

> A controversy such as [vivisection], of which the future decision must exercise a vast influence for good or evil on the sentiments of the whole community towards all weak and dependent beings—human as well as brute—cannot, I think, be alien to the interest and business of a great religious body such as your Society of Friends. (Clark, 1889, p. 89)

More than a decade earlier, the wealthy and highly influential philanthropist Lady Angela Burdett-Coutts had similarly praised the head organizational body of British Friends, London Yearly Meeting. In an 1876 letter to *The Friend* (London), she asserted that the problem of vivisection should receive the “full attention” and “prayerful deliberation” of Quakers. Perhaps using flattery to obtain her wish, she went on to say that “no Society, save that of the large community of Friends, could influence so many wide-spread and influ-
ential bodies of men and women, united for common social objects, or for culture and science” (Burdett-Coutts, 1876, pp. 180, 181). The Religious Society of Friends did not officially “consider” the problem of vivisection until 1889, thirteen years after Burdett-Coutts’ request.

These two women were drawn to the British Quaker community for specific reasons: they viewed this religious body as leaders of a pacifist, anti-violence moral stance (due in large part to Friends’ roles in antislavery campaigning), and they knew that Friends were well-connected both socially and politically because of their reputation for prosperity, benevolence, and honesty in commerce (Isichei, 1970). A small but disproportionately wealthy group of Christians, the Religious Society of Friends had many Friends and friends in high places. Cobbe and Burdett-Coutts hoped to exploit these sociopolitical connections when requesting that Quakers become active against the practice of vivisection. In response, Quakers founded the Friends’ Anti-Vivisection Association in 1890, and a highly coordinated and impassioned debate (that had begun nearly twenty years earlier) within the Society raged on concerning the moral status of humans and animals, and the meaning of “violence” as applied to nonhuman animals.

Broadly speaking, the concern over vivisection in the Victorian period was “at bottom religious” (Stevenson, 1956, p. 178). Catholic and Anglican leaders such as Cardinal Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892) were pivotal figures in this legislative and moral crusade, and Christians gathered together in opposition of vivisection in groups such as the Church Anti-Vivisection League (Woodward, 1896). This article, however, traces the trajectory of thinking on the value of “others” and the problem of suffering as they related to the peace testimony among Victorian British Quakers.

**Whales and Woolman, Friends and Animals**

A brief historical detour is necessary in order to contextualize Victorian Quaker positions on vivisection. In his pioneering essay entitled “Quakers and Animals” (1960), Quaker historian Howard H. Brinton claims that “friendly relations between Friends and animals have so often existed that they have not usually been considered worthy of mention” (p. 199). Brinton may have exaggerated the compassionate relationship that existed between Quakers and nonhuman animals, given, for instance, the Quaker-dominated whaling industry in the late 17th, 18th, and, early 19th centuries (Leach & Gow, 1997). As pacifists, Nantucket Quakers were sanctioned during the American War of Independence because of their unwillingness to fight on behalf of the
colonies. Yet they were happy to sell whale oil to both the British and Americans because the profit from this brutal and bloody industry was, in their opinion, an “economic necessity” (Allen, 2010, p. 7). Why did the transatlantic Quaker community not condemn such a violent industry that caused immense suffering (to humans and whales) solely for monetary profit? In short, the “animal question” had not yet entered the moral consciousness of Friends (or of other Christians, for that matter) in any significant way.

Among a small group of influential Friends in America and England, however, a spark was ignited. Of greatest significance was the work of a New Jersey Friend, John Woolman (1720-1772). His classic *Journals* were published in 1774 and again in 1871 by the famous Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier. They focused on the ideas of Christian love and justice, identifying similar moral themes and hypocrisies in African slavery and the treatment of nonhumans. As a Quaker living in 18th-century America, John Woolman was not alone in his sympathetic attitude toward animals. Other prominent members of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting such as Anthony Benezet (1713-1784; a “converted” or converted Quaker), John Churchman (1705-1775), along with Woolman himself, shared a common commitment to “the value and mystery of all living things,” including a requisite love for animals and a reverence for “all life sheltered in essential unity in the hands of a loving God” (Kelley, 1982, p. 87). Historian Kerry S. Walters (1989) describes this as the “‘benevolence towards brute creation’ attitude” (p. 159) that selectively characterized 18th-century American Quakerism.

Unique in his sustained reflection on the connection between human exploitation, economic greed, and animal exploitation, Woolman began a lasting thread in Quaker thinking by tying animal suffering to human suffering, going so far as to refer to draught animals (horses and oxen) as “oppressed” (Moulton, 1971, p. 238). In particular, his self-conscious reflections on the Quaker peace testimony as it applied to the minutiae of everyday life set him apart within this Quaker tradition of benevolent thinking toward animals. While traveling to England by sea, Woolman reflected that God intended a “sweetness of life” (p. 179) for His creation. It was the duty of humanity, entrusted to us by God, to ensure that this “sweet” quality of life was maintained, as these nonhumans lived “under our government” (p. 179). The path to salvation was directly tied to human-animal relations (Moulton, 1971), as indicated by a cotraveler’s notes stating that Woolman was “fully persuaded that as the Life of Christ comes to reign in the Earth all abuse and unnecessary oppression, both of the human and brute creation, will come to an end” (Plank, 2007, pp. 571-572, 585.) Cultivating virtue was a means of perfecting
and exhibiting the love of God, and a virtuous disposition in one’s everyday life must extend to one’s interactions with nonhuman animals.

The idea of God as an essentially loving being, a humanitarian like those kindly individuals in England and America instigating moral and social reforms, permeated Victorian society as Woolman’s writings came into fashion among Friends in the 1870s (Slaughter, 2008; Stevenson, 1956). As Stevenson (1956) argues, this “new dispensation of love” (p. 141) easily led to the growth of zoophilia. The Quaker Forster family, of which Anna Buxton Forster (1784-1855) was the matriarch, promoted this zoophilic passion in England throughout the 19th century. Forster’s brother, Thomas Fowell Buxton, was chair of the first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in London and was a member of the Metropolitan Cattle Trough and Drinking Fountain Association. Her son, William Edward Forster, eventually took up his mother’s interest in animals as a Member of Parliament, focusing his efforts on the antivivisection cause.4

Other issues against which 19th-century British Friends spoke at various times included killing songbirds, “cruel sports” or “field sports” (i.e., hunting), wearing feathers as fashion, generalized cruelty to farm animals and household pets, and inhumane slaughter. Vegetarianism came up briefly in the pages of The Friend (London) in 1852, but the mounting debate was quickly dismissed by the editors because they worried that non-Quaker readers of their periodical would infer “that Friends thought of little else but meat, and drink, and clothing” (Anonymous, p. 128). Though readers of these Quaker periodicals raised the question of moral consistency, the primary animal-related struggle with which late Victorian Friends engaged was that of vivisection—in relative isolation from other pressing animal issues.

**Victorian Quaker Rhetoric on Hierarchies and Violence**

John Woolman and Anthony Benezet began a discussion that linked slavery with animal ethics, in that both slaves and nonhuman animals were oppressed beings.5 To understand the intellectual and ethical context of Friends’ debates concerning the morality of vivisection, it is useful to discuss typical Victorian Quaker rhetoric concerning subjugation and violence, hierarchies and slavery. In arguing against the practice of vivisection, Quakers drew self-conscious parallels to other systems that they deemed oppressive, such as slavery and war. Writing to the editors of The Friend (London) in July of 1889, Quaker physician S. E. Clark clearly recognized the moral and sociopolitical continuum
of these systems, highlighting the “essential identity of this battle [against vivisection] with all the preceding ones…” (p. 194). With each of these “battles,” this transatlantic religious community tried (both successfully and unsuccessfully) to dismantle the false rationales that society produced in support of these immoral systems.

In the case of slavery, some American and British Quakers argued that slaves, though fundamentally inferior, were deserving of specific, limited rights because they were human. In essence, these Friends believed that some sense of moral responsibility was present within moral hierarchies. This claim was not accepted uniformly by Friends, and it contributed to the “radicalization of many anti-slavery Quakers” (Jordan, 2007, p. 7). For example, the “Negro pew” was a divisive issue among Northern American Quakers, some of whom worked to eliminate all remnants of racial prejudice and others of whom preferred separate seating or even separate meetings for white and African-American Friends (Jordan, 2007, p. 68). This open discrimination in the face of an antislavery—though not necessarily egalitarian—testimony among Friends caused the famous abolitionist Angelina Grimke to complain that Quakers’ actions “betrayed a belief that those being assisted were ‘unfortunate inferiors, not…suffering equals’” (Hersh, 1978, p. 127).

Though slavery was abolished by England and the United States in the 19th century, these discussions of hierarchy and power remained in the transatlantic Quaker moral consciousness. The problem of vivisection reawakened the debate concerning “inferiors” and “superiors” in Britain but did so with the question of species rather than skin color in mind. Abolitionism had given Friends and other Christians a vocabulary with which they could oppose vivisection. Central to this vocabulary were concepts of power, control, hierarchy, and questions of lived equality. In a letter written to The Friend (London) in 1882, prominent British Friend Mary Priestman evoked the biblical concept of “dominion” to illustrate the “moral limits to man’s power over the inferior animals” (p. 103). Humans had God-given duties regarding animal creation, and individuals must ultimately answer to God for their interspecies indiscretions. In her words, “We treat [animals] as slaves indeed, but as slaves under a steward who has also a Master to whom he must answer for the creatures under his care” (p. 103). Just as some American Friends felt the need to care for (or supervise) “inferior” ex-slaves through educational programs, for example, British Friends also felt this call to care for “inferior” nonhuman animals by opposing vivisection (Jordan, 2007, p. 71).

As Priestman illustrates, Quakers’ understandings of specific theological concepts, namely “dominion” (Genesis, 1:28, RSV) and the “peaceable kingdom” (Isaiah, 11:1-9, 65, RSV) were central to their views on moral and social
hierarchy. With regard to slavery, radical antislavery Quakers sought to “end worldly hierarchies that impeded the realization of God’s kingdom in this world” (Jordan, p. 67). Racial prejudice was one of these worldly hierarchies. Quakers also used the concept of God’s kingdom to attack the practice of vivisection, though they shied away from the possible interspecies egalitarian message of Isaiah:

> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.…They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah, 11:6-9, RSV)

Instead, they interpreted this passage in light of the hierarchical but duty-laden vision of Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” In other words, the “peaceable kingdom” that Quakers cited and strove for contained equality between humans (which is why slavery was immoral) and harmony between humans and animals, yet it did not value humans and nonhumans equally.

Though the relationship in Quaker thought between these two passages deserves more attention than can be given here, it is important to notice that caring for animals was a divine command. Nonhuman animals were the inferiors that Quakers, and all Christians, must protect from undue harm (Stevenson, 1956). These biblical passages clearly indicated that humans were superior to nonhumans, and therefore the question for antivivisectionist Friends became how the strong should care for the weak, not whether the “weak” were in fact weak at all. It was the expression and practice of this care and interspecies harmony that Quakers had difficulty agreeing upon—and not only with regard to vivisection, as their discussions of African-Americans indicate.

The Moral Wrongs of Vivisection

The moral implications of Genesis and Isaiah figured heavily into Friends’ debates on vivisection and their religious identity as Quakers. First and foremost, Friends worried about the effect that this relentless pursuit of scientific knowledge (expressed in its worst form through the cruel practice of vivisection) would have on their beliefs, practices, and goals as Quakers charged with bringing about Isaiah’s harmonious vision—the Kingdom of God on earth.
The Peaceable Kingdom as a Measure of Virtue

Antivivisectionist Friends argued that Quakerism taught individuals to be compassionate, merciful, and loving toward all of Creation. Science, on the other hand, taught “medical men” (many of whom were Quakers) a form of materialism that pushed onward without paying heed to the possible restrictions of morality. Materialism as a philosophical position stressed that matter was the only true reality—leaving the mind, spirit, and all other nonmaterial considerations to the wayside. Friends feared that this scientific reeducation, taught in medical schools, hospitals, and research institutes, would turn members of the Society away from the religious realm—the Inner Light—toward an exclusive focus on the profane material realm. A defining theological feature of Victorian Quakerism, the Inner Light had profound implications for nonviolence:

The Quaker opposition to oppression was primarily based on feeling, an intuition of right and wrong, a sensitive conscience though which shone the Inward Light, the ultimate source of moral and religious insight. This was sometimes supplemented by appeals to reason and to the Scriptures. Since the Inward Light was believed to be in all men, every man should be treated in a way that permits an “answering” of the Light in him to the Light in others. This reasoning excludes violence. (Brinton, 1960, pp. 188-189)

The consequences of this shift away from the Inner Light toward materialism could have dire consequences for human-animal relations, causing Quaker medical students to view animals “as mere living machines without acute sensibilities to pain, [and materialism] will deaden the sense of accountability for our mode of treating God’s dumb creatures, which is their best safeguard against torture and abuse” (Kitching, 1876, p. 81).

Because virtue was acquired over time, the perceived danger was that the foundational ethic that Quakerism (and Christianity more broadly) had instilled in humans could be eroded by alternative, competing ways of viewing the world. In particular, the brutality of vivisection was at issue when discussing vivisection in relation to pacifist visions. Many Friends asserted that a God characterized by love, mercy, and compassion would never desire knowledge to be attained in such a violent manner. Even if the hunger for knowledge was God-given, it must always be accompanied by “holy-love”—which is “as much a seeking after conformity to the Divine likeness as is the ‘thirst after righteousness’” (Rutter, n.d., p. 6). Letters written to The Friend (London) and The British Friend often asked whether or not Friends could picture Christ vivisecting an animal.6 They also questioned whether or not God would allow
or desire such a practice in his perfect kingdom. Exclusively pursuing materialistic science caused individuals to compromise their focus on the Inner Light and weaken their cultivation of key virtues, because acts directly affected virtue for good or for ill. Active mercy and compassion were required to move toward a state of inner harmony, which preceded the establishment of the peaceable kingdom.

Here we see the Quaker understanding of the peace testimony begin to expand as the question of violence toward animals (in the form of vivisection) came up against, and was theologically connected with, the Quaker duty to bring about the peaceable kingdom on earth. As “A Friend” asked in 1887, “If the idea of the infliction of suffering on innocent victims is utterly at variance with our conception of that [future] state where all is brought into harmony with the Divine Will, can we believe that such infliction can be according to His Will in the present state of existence?” (p. 82). The peaceable kingdom was a place free from war and violence between species, yet the world that late Victorian Quakers lived in was filled with these connected sins. How, then, did Friends reconcile their inability to bring about such an idyllic state of being? What was it that drew Friends away from ushering in the peaceable kingdom, or from a rigorous pacifist ethic that included nonhuman animals? As the previous discussion indicates, Friends believed that materialism as a philosophical and practical stance led virtuous Quakers down a path of vice. By 1900, having witnessed the horrors of both the Crimean and the First Anglo-Boer War, the President of the Friends’ Anti-Vivisection Association (Joseph Storrs Fry) and an FAVA member made their stance on materialism and pacifism clear. Notes taken from their annual meeting and printed in The British Friend are telling:

Joseph Storrs Fry presided, and … [drew] attention to the fact that it was more needful than ever to combat the growing spirit of materialism which seems so prevalent just now. He instanced the increase of militarism so plainly visible, and thought it was the same spirit which encouraged the practice of vivisection, a tendency to depend on physical and external forces instead of on the forces lying behind them, and on the strength of God…. John Bellows thought a great duty lay with us all to bear our testimony against the practice [of vivisection] as well as against war [italics added]. (Anonymous, 1900, p. 225)

Human dependence on worldly goods, expressed in militarism and materialism, not only damaged the virtue of individuals, but so too led them away from God toward these false idols. By supporting the antivivisection cause, Fry and Bellows argued, one supported a movement toward Godlike pacifism.
Individual Virtue

With regard to the moral harm created by practicing vivisection, a minority camp of Friends believed that virtuous people could participate in vivisection without it being a sign of weakened morals or vice. For example, in one letter to the editors of *The Friend* (London), T. P. Newman (1882) defended the practice of vivisection, believing that it had produced beneficial scientific results and that sufficient laws were in place to protect animals from undue harm. He asked, “Is it possible that any one can believe that experiment is desired by medical men except from a high motive: the high motive of obtaining knowledge which will enable them to alleviate the sufferings, not only of mankind, but of animals themselves? I say fearlessly that medical men are of all the most humane; risking their very lives for the sake of alleviating suffering and conquering disease” (p. 80). Though it is unclear as to whether Newman was Quaker, the outcry by Friends against his letter suggests that his viewpoint was far from popular. The most vocal majority believed that a truly virtuous individual could not and would not even consider engaging in vivisection because of its violent and cruel nature. This first position was expressed clearly by Joseph Beck (1876) in a letter written to the editors of *The Friend* (London). In it, he claimed that “[c]ruelty rests with the motive. The same experiment might be cruel if wantonly performed, and right and justifiable if resorted to under a right sense of the responsibility attaching to it.” Yet Beck concludes by arguing that “cruelty inflicted by one class makes it in no way allowable in another, and that a most highly educated one” (p. 111). For example, a farmer castrating a bull differed morally from a doctor vivisecting a dog because violence in these respective cases was inflicted for entirely different reasons: castrating was “necessary” for the continued health of the herd and the economic stability of the local farmer, while vivisection was performed (gratuitously, Friends believed) by those medical men who should be the exemplars of virtuousness.

“A Constant Reader” echoes Beck’s argument in an article written six years later, in 1882. This writer clearly states that “[i]t is . . . an admitted truth, that it is those only who have attained to a high moral standpoint who can perform certain acts, or witness certain scenes, without moral harm to themselves.” The author follows Beck’s argument by agreeing that the “moral injury arising from either the performing or witnessing things of doubtful tendency, entirely depends on the motive” (p. 60). However, the direction then shifts. The author goes on to write that a “man of exceptional nature” who felt it was his duty to practice vivisection “from the highest motive,” would and should—because of his highly virtuous nature—“shrink from the ordeal, as the pureminded shrink from the society of the drunken and the profligate” (p. 60).
According to “A Constant Reader,” even if this “man of exceptional nature” would not be morally harmed by committing these acts because of his pure motives, he would still refrain from doing so because the very acts themselves were cruel and consequently unattractive to a virtuous person.

Most significant was the concern expressed by Friends regarding the Inner Light and the conscience of individuals who live in a society that legally and morally condoned vivisection. For the women on the Bristol and Somerset Women’s Quarterly Meeting Committee on Vivisection (1890), leaving this profound question for doctors to decide upon was an inadequate solution. They believed

that to do this would be to ignore the responsibility of each individual conscience to judge of law and morals, as well as of religious faith, in light of God’s will, so far as it is revealed to each one of us by His Spirit. Neither do we think men specially interested in Vivisection, however eminent and honourable, are our safest guides in regard to it. (p. 74)

This is a distinctly Quaker argument and an epistemological claim. Those men who were “specially interested in Vivisection” were unsafe moral guides because they committed an evil act by vivisecting. Consequently, their knowledge of Truth was defective, for one must love Good in order to know Good. These women believed that those doctors interested in vivisection were already corrupted, their Inner Lights obscured; therefore, even though they were doctors by name, they could not be trusted to carry out the healing and caring aspects of their profession. A few months earlier, S. E. Clark had warned of a similar problem: “Ah! Let Friends who listen to the very big promises of physical benefit to mankind by this means [vivisection], think thoroughly out this side also. Let them realise what is meant by injury to the moral sense, obscuring of the inner light” (1889, p. 194). Here Clark argued that the damage caused by vivisection to the Inner Light was more morally significant and of more weight than the physical benefits this practice may have provided. No material gain on any scale could justify this spiritual loss. By listening to one’s Inner Light, which was God’s will revealed to each human, an imperative against vivisection would be discerned—an interesting claim, given the supposedly independent nature of each unique Inner Light.

Systemic/Social Virtue

Individual virtue was tarnished by individual acts of violence (or by witnessing such acts) because the beliefs and practices associated with vivisection were fully incompatible with the God-given virtues of kindness, mercy, compassion,
and love. Yet the creation of vice was not merely a problem for individuals. The cultivation and accumulation of such vice by larger clusters and generations of people would ensure that not only individuals, but entire groups, would “buy into” this system of violence. Vice would infect society more pervasively as vivisection increased in prevalence. Before long, those “ruined” by the practice would intermingle with the innocent, passing on immorality as one passes on a virus.

S. E. Clark, the Quaker physician, was outspoken on the issue of systemic vice, understanding vivisection to be the most recent incarnation of a repeating conflict on the “moral battlefield” of human history. The main point of comparison for Clark and other Friends was, not surprisingly, the cruelty of the African slave trade and the resulting oppressive system of slavery. Admittedly, Quakers did not immediately act against the “slavery question” as a Society, as “A Friend” wrote in April of 1887. Yet, over time, Quakers “awakened to the iniquity of the system” and publicly decried the institution as a religious body (“A Friend,” 1887, p. 82). As did many Quakers at this time, S. E. Clark immediately connected these moral issues, and two of his letters published in *The Friend* are worth examining in detail.

The first, written in May of 1876 (at the beginning of the antivivisection debate), used the “law of vicarious suffering,” by which Clark meant that “we all have, mutually, to suffer for the benefit of, or because of the offences of others, the innocent for the guilty” (p. 109), to illustrate the vice of vivisection. Innocent humans and fellow Britons suffered for the sins committed by other humans and Britons. Through the “great sin” of vivisection, all humans and Britons must suffer and—consequently—“all right has been forfeited for even the innocent remainder to profit” from the “much contested point that vivisection will result in the ultimate mitigation of physical pain [in humans].” In other words, if any “good” was to come from practicing vivisection, that “good” would be negated/consumed by the greater vice and suffering caused by the act of vivisecting. Even the “innocent remainder” was implicated. Clark reminded his readers that “we are members of one another,” and all are a party to sin if they did not actively try to “search out and prevent that sin” (p. 109).

He was critical of legislation as a means of restricting vivisection. Rather, he preferred that the system be abolished in its entirety. In his words,

Now even if our right hand, or right eye, things so useful to us as that, bring our whole body into danger of hell-fire, we are to cut it off, or pluck it out, so to save our whole body from being cast into hell. We are not to be content with merely washing the offending member, or cutting its nails, because of its usefulness to us. . . . For Heaven’s sake do not let us, who call ourselves religious, be measuring the finger aches we may escape at the risk of contagion from a spiritual leprosy! (p. 109)
Arguments that slaves were treated well did not suffice to make the system of slavery morally acceptable, argued Clark. Rather, as Friend Hannah Maria Wigham wrote (n.d.), the oppressive and immoral system of human enslavement was eventually abolished, “root and branch” (p. 8).

Clark’s second letter, in November of 1886, is a clear example of one Quaker’s attempt to dismantle the false rationales used to support inequality and oppression generally. He warned Friends of the wasted time spent on rehashing recurring moral debates. Friends must recognize the “essential identity of this battle [against vivisection] with all the preceding ones” (p. 194)—each of which pitted the material welfare or satisfaction of humans against the welfare of an “inferior” group, such as African slaves. He was astute, even foresighted, in his understanding of systemic inequality. The “solidarity” of these battles lay in the “contagious spreading of defended cruelty from any one class of victims to others” (Clark, 1886, p. 287). For Clark, the “moral battlefield” was filled with repeated wars in which vices were given precedence over God-given virtues. At the center of each battle was the same sin: Britons committed idolatry by worshipping false gods—the gods of Science, of Progress, of Humanity. This was the “reverse order of aims” (1886, p. 287), in that rather than striving for righteousness and strong moral character, humans were striving for material comforts and worldly pleasures. In so doing, they continued to fight endlessly with a “common enemy,” without realizing the true sin behind, or solution to, the moral conflict.7

A Testimony against Vivisection and War

Early in the Quaker vivisection debate, the editors of The Friend (London) congratulated those of The Spectator (a popular 19th-century British periodical) for encouraging the “humane treatment” of “dumb animals” (1876, p. 73). Yet beneath this compliment lay an accusation of hypocrisy. In April of 1876, soon after the Crimean War (1837-1854) and just prior to the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881), the editors of The Friend argued that one year of war caused more human and animal suffering than many years of “unchecked” vivisection in all the laboratories of Europe (p. 73). In other words, if the editors of The Spectator were going to protest vivisection because of the suffering it caused to animals, then they must also protest war, for it caused more suffering than the practice they were condemning.

A brief recollection taken from a biography of Claude Bernard (1813-1878), one of the most vilified French vivisectionists in Europe during the Victorian era, introduces the struggle for moral consistency that Friends faced in equating vivisection with war. While Claude Bernard became a significant figure in the history of vivisection through the publication of his influential, controversial,
and classic *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (1865), Bern
ard’s mentor, François Magendie (1783-1855), was infamous in his own right. A professor of physiology and medicine in Paris, Magendie vivisected primarily during the 1830s—fifty years before Britain passed any laws regulat
ing the practice. Magendie’s experiments were considered particularly heinous because they were conducted repeatedly, all without the use of anesthesia (which was not in use until the late 1840s and onward) (Kean, 1998).

The story quoted below describes a meeting that would have taken place in the 1830s or 1840s, when Magendie was performing his experiments. This indicates that certain Friends were opposed to the practice—so much so that they were willing to travel to Magendie’s French laboratories—forty or fifty years before the height of antivivisection protest in England:

One of [Bernard’s] favorite anecdotes was about a Quaker who visited Magendie at the laboratory, wearing the characteristic dress of his sect, a very wide-brimmed hat, a coat with upturned collar, and knee breeches. “I have heard thee spoken of,” said the Quaker . . . “and I see I have not been misinformed; for I have been told thee does experiments on living animals. I have come to see thee to ask thee by what right thee does so, and to tell thee that thee must stop experiments of this kind because thee has no right to cause the death of animals or to make them suffer, and because thee sets a bad example and accustoms thy fellows to cruelty. Bernard said that Magendie had ordered the experimental animal upon which they had been working to be taken away, and then had pointed out that experiments involving vivisection of animals aim at the benefit of humanity, that war is cruel but may be necessary, that hunting inflicts on animals more suffering than does physiology. The Quaker replied that he was opposed to war and hunting also. Neither could convince the other, but Bernard observed that Magendie had treated the Quaker with the consideration due to his sincerity. (Olmsted, 1952, p. 31)

This story is significant for three reasons. First, it highlights the determination and involvement of the Religious Society of Friends in the nascent antivivisection movement. Second, it clearly states the reasons why these Quakers became involved in the issue of vivisection. In the words of Magendie’s Quaker, “thee must stop experiments of this kind because thee has no right to cause the death of animals or to make them suffer, and because thee sets a bad example and accustoms thy fellows to cruelty.” In other words, social and individual virtue were threatened and weakened by vivisection.

The third dimension deserves more attention. This quote captures one Friend’s declaration of the connection between various forms of violence—namely vivisection, war, and hunting. Perhaps as early as the 1830s, this Friend believed that harming animals and harming humans were both morally problematic and related. Decades later, in the late Victorian period, British Quakers began to resuscitate this connection between war and vivisection.
Alfred W. Brown’s 1886 article, entitled “Cruelty to Animals in Time of War,” written for the *Friends’ Quarterly Examiner*, illustrates the reasoning of this argument. In this extended piece, Brown argued that supporters of the RSPCA would most likely agree that war was necessary at times, and that “attended by deplorable evils though the system [of war] may be, it is nevertheless one which it is our duty to uphold” (p. 405). He goes to say, however, that war could not be conducted without “the infliction of exquisite torture upon hundreds and thousands of noble animals…Asses, mules, camels, elephants, but, above all, horses—the most noble and obedient of the beasts of the field—are the principal sufferers in the general carnage” (pp. 405, 406). Therefore, if one was against animal cruelty then one must also be against war, because they were both “incompatible with kindliness to animals, and [are] therefore opposed to the spirit of Christ” (p. 406). This is a distinctly Quaker argument, as other Christian sects in Britain and the United Stated did not take such a strong antiwar stance. Pacifism was a defining characteristic of the transatlantic Quaker community, and therefore it is not surprising that this central element of the Quaker moral landscape would be integrated into debates surrounding violence toward animals. Brown’s quote brings the peace testimony up to the standard of care for animals.

As an ethical stance, the peace testimony was both malleable and fluid, allowing for multiple interpretations because of the ambiguity of the pacifist principles themselves. In the late Victorian era, this testimony was undoubtedly focused on war, but as Thomas C. Kennedy (2001) comments in his study of British Quakerism between 1860 and 1920, “there is, at times, some difficulty in pinning down exactly what [Victorian Friends’ convictions] really were with regard to the extent of their peace testimony” (p. 245). Kennedy argues that, because the British government had not imposed conscription, Victorian Friends in England were never forced to test the rigorousness of their convictions. Concerning war, in Kennedy’s words, “they lacked any consensus as to what constituted a positive peace testimony, except positively avoiding attempts to carefully define one” (p. 254). Victorian Friends *were* confronted, however, with very real and consequential acts of violence on British soil in the form of vivisection. Therefore, as I have argued, vivisection became a test of the rigorousness of their pacifist ethic.

**Conclusion**

One Friend’s search for moral consistency through nonviolence is particularly illuminating. In 1886 Alfred W. Brown, writing for the *Friends’ Quarterly Examiner*, argued that it was hypocritical of Friends to witness selectively
against particular expressions of violence: “There is surely something wrong here. To frown upon one species of cruelty, and at the same time to wink at other forms which are infinitely worse, is very much like straining at a gnat and swelling a camel. Such a position is not only illogical, it is strangely inconsistent and unsatisfactory” (Brown, 1886, p. 405). Antivivisection protest and the formation of the influential Friends’ Anti-Vivisection Association were both attempts at making the Quaker witness for peace more consistent by forcing Friends and fellow Christians to rethink the species boundaries of their testimony.

Late 19th-century Friends’ debates concerning cruelty to animals, the virtue of individuals and groups, and God’s will for human-animal relations are prisms through which the details of their peace testimony were painstakingly challenged. Their strong witnessing against vivisection—in the form of political protest, calls for legislative reform, pamphleting, and moral suasion through multiple avenues—extended the peace witness beyond the boundaries of human war and slavery, into the laboratories of English scientists and physicians. Their argument was not always internally consistent, but by tracing the evolution of a certain strand of moral thinking—from whaling and Woolman’s virtue, to the hierarchies of “highers” and “lowers” in African slavery, to the introduction of the “animal question” during the vivisection debates of the late 19th century, a transformation in one thread of ethical pacifism can be discerned. Their encounter with the moral wrong of slavery gave them a helpfully ambiguous framework through which they could evaluate vivisection. Further, the Quaker testimony for peace—in whatever form it took—brought a unique dimension to Christian antivivisection arguments. Emerging from this commitment to nonviolence, we find Friends equating vivisection with war in a number of varied ways. It is important to note that these Victorian British Friends did not emerge with a solution to the vivisection problem that depended on the equality of species. Rather, by focusing on virtue ethics, they could sidestep the question of whether or not nonhuman animals were moral persons. What mattered was the character of people and of society, and radical change concerning the ways humans treated animals was encouraged by debating within the framework of virtue ethics rather than ethical egalitarianism. This is not to say that Friends never questioned the moral status of animals; on the contrary, this was a common topic of debate. Yet a lack of consensus on that specific issue did not stop these Quakers from insisting on legal, social, and cultural changes aimed at ameliorating human-animal relationships.
Notes

1. Both The Friend and The British Friend were established in 1843—the former as an evangelical journal, the latter as a conservative periodical.
2. Yearly Meeting is the highest organizational structure of Quakerism. In England, London Yearly is considered the most authoritative body of Quakerism.
3. Of particular significance was English Friend John Bright. See Kennedy, 2001, pp. 243-244.
4. A commemorative fountain of Thomas Fowell Buxton stands outside the British Parliament buildings, acknowledging his work for the MCTDFA.
5. For a discussion of these linked oppressions, not from a Quaker standpoint, see Spiegel, 1996.
6. Christ and vivisection, though not necessarily Christ as a vivisector, were commonly paired in Victorian antivivisection literature. Animals were regularly described as “crucified” on the operating table, noting that their paws had been nailed in place to keep the animal from moving. For a brief discussion of this connection, see Stevenson, 1956, p. 125.
7. Clark was not alone in his fear of the ascension of science over religion. See Coleridge (1916) and (1918).
8. For further discussion of the impact of this book on methods of scientific inquiry, see French, 1975, pp. 18-19.

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