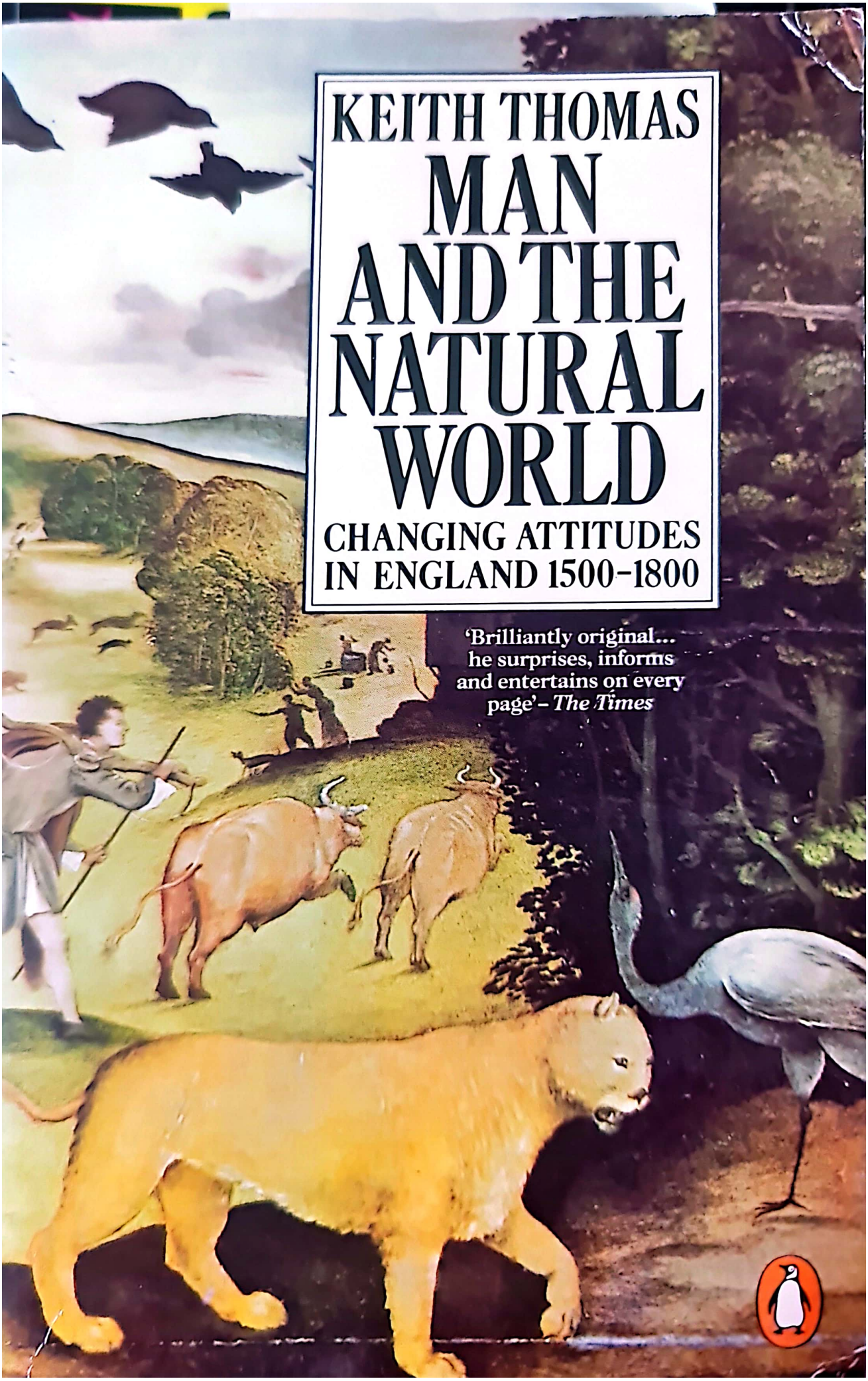
KEITH THOMAS
MAN AND THE NATURAL WORLD
CHANGING ATTITUDES IN ENGLAND 1500–1800
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IV

COMPASSION FOR THE BRUTE CREATION

Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly
For the Last Judgment draweth nigh.

William Blake,
'Auguries of Innocence'

i. CRUELTY

When English travellers went abroad in the late eighteenth century they were frequently shocked to see how foreigners treated animals. The Spanish bull-fight had long been notorious for what the first Earl of Clarendon called its 'rudeness and barbarity'. English tourists always went to see it, but usually only once. 'Fifteen or sixteen wretched bulls were massacred,' wrote the fastidious William Beckford after a Portuguese fight in 1787, adding on another occasion, 'I was highly disgusted with the spectacle. It set my nerves on edge and I seemed to feel cuts and slashes the rest of the evening.' It was 'a damnable sport', agreed Robert Southey.[1]

Continental methods of hunting were equally distasteful. When Sir Richard Colt Hoare went after wild boar with the King of Naples in 1786, he was appalled to discover that the boar, so far from being wild, came when whistled for, and that the hunters stuck it with spears when it was held fast by dogs. 'I was ... thoroughly disgusted with this scene of slaughter and butchery ... yet the King and his court seem[ed] to receive great pleasure from the acts of cruelty and to vie with each other in the expertness of doing them.'[2]

The treatment of domestic animals was also lamented. Tobias Smollett felt compassion for the wretched mules and donkeys in the south of France; Beau Brummell in exile was much upset by the way the Normans treated their horses; while Mrs Hervey, wife of the future Earl of Bristol *cum* Bishop of Derry, expressed the feelings of many subsequent Englishwomen when her coach stuck on a journey to Monte Cassino in 1766: 'What hurt me most was their barbarous treatment of the poor mules, whom they beat most unmercifully with their fists, feet, sticks and even stones. I walked about and begged them to be more gentle to them; they laughed at me.'[3]

These reactions reflect that growing concern about the treatment of animals which was one of the most distinctive features of late-eighteenth-century English middle-class culture. They also show the emergence of a belief which by Victorian times had become an entrenched conviction: that the unhappiest animals were those of the Latin countries of southern Europe, because it was there that the old Catholic doctrine that animals had no souls was still maintained.[4]

Yet previously it had been the English themselves who had been notorious among travellers for their cruelty to brutes. The staging of contests between animals was one of their most common forms of recreation. Bulls and bears were 'baited' by being tethered to a stake and then attacked by dogs, usually in succession, but sometimes all together. The dog would make for the bull's nose, often tearing off its ears or skin, while the bull would endeavour to toss the dog into the spectators. If the tethered animal broke loose, scenes of considerable violence ensued. Baiting of this kind was customarily regarded as an appropriate entertainment for royalty or foreign ambassadors. It also took place at country wakes and fairs and in the yards of ale-houses, where local dogs would be invited to challenge an itinerant bull or bear travelling round the country with its keeper. At Stamford and Tutbury there occurred an annual 'bull-running', when the animal, with its ears cropped, tail cut to a stump, body smeared with soap and nose blown full of pepper, was turned loose to see who could catch him in a general free-for-all. Badgers, apes, mules, and even horses might all be baited in similar fashion. Bull-baiting, wrote John Houghton in 1694, 'is a sport the English much delight in; and not only the baser sort, but the greatest ladies'.[5]

Cock-fighting had been equally popular since at least the twelfth century.[6] In the Stuart age it was a normal feature of fairs and race-meetings. The cock was brought up on a carefully chosen diet and specially trained for the fight. Its wings were clipped, its wattle and comb shorn off and its feet equipped with artificial spurs. Cock-fights were usually 'mains', that is contests between two rival teams paired off into a succession of individual combats, as in modern golf matches; a rougher version was the so-called 'Welsh main', which was a knockout competition. Most spectacular of all was the 'battle royal', when a large number of cocks were put into the same pit together, as at Lincoln in 1617, when James I was made 'very merry' by the spectacle.[7] The contests usually expressed regional rivalries, with different teams of cocks representing different villages or the 'gentlemen' of different counties. Meetings often lasted several days and were accompanied by heavy betting, with fresh

wagers being laid at every stage of the fight. They involved the mingling of all social ranks, though only of men, for it was emphatically not a woman's sport. The refined Tudor humanist Roger Ascham was a passionate devotee; and when Pepys went to a cockpit in 1663 he saw everyone from 'parliament men' down to 'the poorest prentices, bakers, brewers, butchers, draymen and what not ... all fellows one with another in swearing, cursing and betting'. The cocks themselves had a short life, even the best being unlikely to survive more than a dozen contests.[8]

In the countryside the pursuit and killing of wild animals for sport had been practised since time immemorial. 'No nation,' remarked Fynes Moryson of hunting and hawking, 'so frequently useth these sports as the English.'[9] In Tudor times it was proverbial that 'he cannot be a gentleman which loveth not hawking and hunting';[10] and, though the spread of enclosures and the wider use of the gun would lead to the decline of hawking, the pursuit of wild birds and animals remained an obsessive preoccupation of the English aristocracy until modern times. In the early modern period the prey was hunted either because it could be eaten, like the red and fallow deer, or because it was a pest, like the fox, or because its speed and agility made it an entertaining object of pursuit, as with the hare. Henry VIII's manner of hunting did not differ very much from that of the eighteenth-century King of Naples: he had two or three hundred deer rounded up and then loosed his greyhounds upon them.[11] Frequently, however, the methods of pursuit, capture and kill were highly stylized, and contemporary literature celebrated the majesty of the hunters, the nobility of the hounds and the music of the chase. Hunting, thought Gervase Markham, was 'compounded ... of all the best parts of most refined pleasure'. No music, it was said, could be more 'ravishingly delightful' than the sound of a pack of dogs in full cry.[12*] At the Inner Temple on St Stephen's Day it was customary to bring a fox and a cat into the hall and set hounds upon them. At Sheffield Park in the 1620s the Earl of Shrewsbury allowed his tenants to keep any buck they could kill, provided they used only their bare hands. At

* There was a Jacobean story of a gentleman who was so delighted by the sound of his hounds in full pursuit that he cried out, 'Oh, what a heavenly noise is this!' 'Whereat one gull of the company, who, as it should seem, never heard any dog but a mastiff, holding up his ear as it were towards the sky to hear some noise from the heavens, broke out into these words: "Oh Lord, where is this heavenly noise?" "Why, hark (quoth the gentleman), list awhile, dost thou not hear?" "No (quoth the gull); the curs keep such a bawling I can hear nothing for them."' See *Pasquils Jests* (1604), in *Shakespeare Jest-Books*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (1864), iii(2). 83–4.

Smyrna in the late seventeenth century English merchants procured hounds and conducted a hunt, with the dogs following the hare by the scent, which the Turks regarded as 'a prodigious mystery'.[13] At Aleppo in 1716 they went in pursuit of antelopes with hawks, while later in the eighteenth century the Duke of Grafton planned to go to France with his horses and hounds to hunt wolves.[14] In all cases the climax of the hunt was the death of the hunted animal, for, as Montaigne observed, to hunt without killing was like having sexual intercourse without orgasm. 'When he is caught,' wrote the eighteenth-century huntsman Peter Beckford of the fox, 'I like to see hounds eat him eagerly.' In 1788 the poet Cowper witnessed the end of a fox-hunt, when the huntsman threw the fox's body to the pack of hounds, 'screaming like a fiend, "Tear him to pieces!" '[15]

Equally popular was the pursuit of wild birds, either with hawks or, increasingly, with guns. It was a splendid sight, thought a visitor to the fen country in 1635,

> to see a fleet of a hundred or two hundred sail of shell boats and ... punts sailing ... in the pursuit of a rout of fowl, driving them like sheep to their nets ... sometimes they take a pretty feathered army prisoners, two or three thousand at one draught and give no quarter.[16]

Those who engaged in these sports were seldom inhibited by concern for the possible feelings of the animals themselves. Fishing involved the use of live bait, not just small fish, but also frogs.[17] Hawks were nourished on pigeons, hens and other birds. 'I once saw a gentleman,' recalled William Hinde in 1641, 'being about to feed his hawk, pull a live pigeon out of his falconer's bag, and taking her first by both wings, rent them with great violence from her body, and then taking hold of both legs, plucked them asunder in like manner, the body of the poor creature trembling in his hand, while his hawk was tiring upon the other parts, to his great contentment and delight upon his fist.' The *Gentleman's Recreation* (1674) recommended catching a hart in nets, cutting off one of his feet and letting him go to be pursued by young bloodhounds.[18]

The absence of any apparent moral consideration for the hunted animal is well revealed in the famous description of the entertainment provided for Queen Elizabeth when she visited Kenilworth in 1575. First she hunted the hart until it was killed by the hounds after it had taken to water. This, wrote a contemporary, Robert Laneham, was 'pastime delectable in so high a degree as for any person to take pleasure by most senses at once in mine opinion there can be none any way comparable

to this'. A few days later a collection of mastiffs was let loose on to a group of thirteen bears. It was 'a sport very pleasant,' says Laneham, 'to see the bear ... shake his ears twice or thrice with the blood; and the slaver about his physiognomy was a matter of a goodly relief.'[19] Later in the reign, when the Queen was older and less energetic, she had to content herself with shooting captive animals; as at Cowdray in 1591, when

> her Highness took a horse with all her train and rode into the park where was a delicate bower prepared, under which were her Highness's musicians placed, and a crossbow by a nymph with a sweet song delivered to her hands to shoot at the deer (about some thirty in number) put into a paddock; of which number she killed three or four and the Countess of Kildare one.[20]

In addition to these stylized and highly formal methods of tormenting animals, there was an infinity of informal ones. Small boys were notorious for amusing themselves in the pursuit and torture of living creatures. In the grammar schools cock-throwing was a widely observed calendar ritual. On Shrove Tuesday the bird was tethered to a stake or buried in the ground up to its neck, while the pupils let fly at it until it was dead. ''Tis the bravest game,' wrote a seventeenth-century poet.[21] Outside school, children robbed birds' nests, hunted squirrels 'with drums, shouts and noises',[22] caught birds and put their eyes out, tied bottles or tin cans to the tails of dogs, killed toads by putting them on one end of a lever and hurling them into the air by striking the other end, dropped cats from great heights to see whether they would land on their feet, cut off pigs' tails as trophies and inflated the bodies of live frogs by blowing into them with a straw.[23] It was 'a familiar experiment among boys,' reported Thomas Willis in 1664, 'to thrust a needle through the head of a hen' to see how long it would survive the experience.[24] The pious agricultural projector John Beale told Robert Boyle that when he was a child he would skin live frogs 'in sport to see what shift they would make when flayed'. When a boy at Eton, he 'threw many frogs into the Thames to see how far they could swim'.[25] There is a wealth of inference to be drawn from the laconic report of a news-writer in 1697 that an eight-year-old boy had accidentally hit and killed another small child with a carelessly aimed brickbat, when they were both 'casting stones at a dog that was to be drowned in a ditch near my house'.[26] No wonder that traditional nursery rhymes portray blind mice having their tails cut off with a carving-knife, blackbirds in a pie and pussy in the well. 'How full of mischief and cruelty are the sports of boys!' lamented

the eighteenth-century Evangelical John Fletcher; and the refrain was echoed by scores of observers.[27]

Yet children merely reflected the standards of the adult world. The seventeenth century was an age when country gentlemen would entertain their visitors by putting their dogs to chase tame ducks or by throwing a goose or chicken into a pike-infested pond to watch its struggles.[28] At country fairs there were contests at biting off the heads of live chickens or sparrows.[29] Even a highly cultivated figure like the economist Dudley North could casually remark that, when he and other young gentlemen were with the English traders at Smyrna, they, for diversion's sake, 'tied a dog they had no great respect for to a bush; and fell on him with their scimitars till they had hewed him to pieces to show what heroes they could be upon occasion'.[30] It is not surprising that when Gulliver found himself among the giants of Brobdingnag his fear was that they would 'dash me against the ground, as we usually do any hateful little animal that we have a mind to destroy'. As the historian W. E. H. Lecky remarks, there were two kinds of cruelty: the cruelty which comes from carelessness or indifference; and the cruelty which comes from vindictiveness.[31] In the case of animals what was normally displayed in the early modern period was the cruelty of indifference. For most persons, the beasts were outside the terms of moral reference. Contemporaries resembled those 'primitive' peoples of whom a modern anthropologist writes that they neither seek to inflict pain on animals nor to avoid doing so: 'pain in human beings outside the social circle or in animals tends to be a matter of minimal interest.'[32] It was a world in which much of what would later be regarded as 'cruelty' had not yet been defined as such. A good example of how people were inured to the taking of animal life is provided by the diary kept by the schoolboy Thomas Isham, who grew up in Northamptonshire in the early 1670s. His little journal records much killing of cocks, slaughtering of oxen, drowning of puppies. It tells of coursing for hares, catching martens in traps, killing sparrows with stones and castrating bulls. None of these events evokes any special comment, and it is clear that the child was left emotionally unruffled.[33]

The same indifference is reflected at a more sophisticated level in a simile used by the poet Edmund Waller:

> As a broad bream, to please some curious taste,
> While yet alive, in boiling water cast,
> Vex'd with unwonted heat, he flings about
> The scorching brass, and hurls the liquor out;

The image is purely visual and there is no interest in the feelings of the fish. In the same way Matthew Prior compares the versifiers of his day to a pet squirrel making futile efforts to escape from his captivity:

> didst thou never see
> ('Tis but by way of simile)
> A squirrel spend his little rage,
> In jumping round a rowling cage,
> The cage, as either side turn'd up,
> Striking a ring of bells a'top –?
> Mov'd in the Orb; pleas'd with the chimes,
> The foolish creature thinks he climbs:
> But here or there, turn wood or wire,
> He never gets two inches higher.[34]

What is revealing about this passage is that it is the squirrel, not Prior, who gets into a rage.

Yet, a hundred years later, William Blake's Robin Redbreast[35] would evoke a very different reaction, for by that time the feelings of animals had become a matter of very great concern indeed. Throughout the eighteenth century, and particularly from the 1740s onwards, there was a growing stream of writing on the subject: philosophical essays on the moral treatment of the lower creatures, protests about particular forms of animal cruelty and (from the 1780s) edifying tracts designed to excite in children 'a benevolent conduct to the brute creation'.[36] There were scores of books and innumerable contributions to periodicals and newspapers. There was also a great deal of poetry. This was one of the periods in English history when poets, Shelley's 'unacknowledged legislators', had a powerful influence on educated opinion. The poets were regularly cited by the pamphleteers and quoted by speakers in Parliament; and it is impossible to understand the vehemence of the movement unless one takes into account the works of Pope, Thomson, Gay, Cowper, Smart, Dodsley, Blake, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Southey, Crabbe and Clare, to name no more.[37] In the early nineteenth century the agitation culminated in the foundation in 1824 of the Society (later the Royal Society) for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the passing (after unsuccessful bills from 1800 onwards) of a series of Acts of Parliament: against cruelty to horses and cattle (1822), against cruelty to dogs (1839 and 1854) and against baiting and cock-fighting (1835 and 1849).[38] In her Jubilee address of 1887 Queen Victoria would comment that 'among other marks of the spread of enlightenment amongst my subjects' she had noticed in particular, 'with

real pleasure, the growth of more humane feelings towards the lower animals'.[39]

How did this change come about? As early as 1795, a writer could attribute it to 'the superior humanity of the present over any former period'; and in the mid nineteenth century the historian Lecky declared that the change had been effected 'not by any increase in knowledge or by any process of definite reasoning, but simply by the gradual elevation of the moral standard'.[40] Yet contemporaries were surely wrong to think of people as being more or less humane at one period in history than at another. What had changed was not the sentiment of humanity as such, but the definition of the area within which it was allowed to operate. The historian's task is to explain why the boundary encircling the area of moral concern should have been enlarged so as to embrace other species along with mankind.

ii. NEW ARGUMENTS

There was, of course, nothing new about the idea that unnecessary cruelty to animals was a bad thing. Such a view had been held by many classical moralists; it was put forward by the medieval scholastics; and it was repeatedly urged in the early modern period. But this view did not originally reflect any particular concern for animals; on the contrary, moralists normally condemned the ill-treatment of beasts because they thought it had a brutalizing effect on human character and made men cruel to each other. The ancient Athenians were said to have condemned a child who blinded crows because they thought that one day he would be cruel to men.[1] In the same spirit, William Hogarth's *Four Stages of*

Cruelty (1750–51) suggested that those who began by torturing cats and dogs would end by murdering their fellows. 'If cruelty be allowable ... towards brutes,' wrote John Lawrence in 1798, 'it also involves human creatures; the gradation is much easier than may be imagined, and the example is contagious.'[2] Samuel Richardson's fictional rake Lovelace had been cruel to animals from infancy; and in the nineteenth century it did not go unnoticed that William Palmer, the poisoner of Rugeley (executed 1856), had been notorious as a boy for his cruel experiments on animals.[3] This kind of argument was extensively employed throughout the period. Indeed when Lord Erskine introduced a bill against animal cruelty in 1809, he too urged that cruelty to animals would lead to cruelty to man; the bill, said one contemporary, was really meant to prevent the murder of humans.[4]

It was from this strictly man-centred point of view that the many Old Testament injunctions against cruelty had been conventionally interpreted. 'If any passage in holy scripture seems to forbid us to be cruel to brute animals,' explained Aquinas, 'that is either ... lest through being cruel to animals one becomes cruel to human beings or because injury to an animal leads to the temporal hurt of man.'[5] The Bible contained passages about helping the ass of one's enemy when it lay under its burden (Exodus xxiii. 5; Deuteronomy xxii. 4); allowing animals to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus xxiii. 12); not muzzling the ox when it trod out the corn (Deuteronomy xxv. 4); and urging that 'a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast' (Proverbs xii. 10).[6] Some Tudor and early Stuart commentators ignored these passages altogether. Others treated them allegorically, suggesting, for example, that the muzzled ox stood for inadequately-paid clergy.[7] But many explained them the way Aquinas had done, saying that God restrained the Jews from cruelty to animals 'lest they might learn to practise it upon man' or lest they damage the property of others.[8] Animals had been permitted to rest on the Sabbath so as to release men from the burden of looking after them on that day.[9] These rules about oxen were not made 'for the sakes of these creatures in themselves,' said one, 'God's laws are not aimed to them.'[10] '[God] is mindful of beasts indeed,' said another, 'but it is for our sakes that he is so mindful of them.'[11] As St Paul had explained, God did not take care for oxen.*

Where, then, do we look for the origins of the much more radical view according to which cruelty to animals is wrong regardless of whether or not it has any human consequences?

* Cf. above, p. 24.

The few scholars who have considered this subject recognize that several classical authors, Plutarch and Porphyry in particular, had shown great concern for animals, sometimes even urging vegetarianism.[12] But they tend to regard the period between them and the eighteenth century as very nearly a total blank. The scarce and half-forgotten book by Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals and How it Developed in Great Britain* (1928), is still the best compilation on the subject, but even its author tells us that 'the evidence of sympathetic interest in animals before 1700' is 'very slight'. Professor Peter Singer in his recent work on *Animal Liberation* declares that no one between Porphyry in the third century and Montaigne in the sixteenth ever condemned cruelty to animals in itself; while another notable recent authority, Professor John Passmore, referring to a fourteenth-century Japanese essayist who opposed the caging of wild birds, remarks that such sensibility 'could certainly not be matched in European writers of the same period'.[13]

Yet in fact it was in the same fourteenth century that Chaucer wrote that, however well a cage-bird was looked after, he would

> Leifer in a forest, that is rude and cold
> Go eat worms and such wretchedness

and there are some striking poems of the same period which express keen sympathy with hunted hares and ill-treated beasts.[14] The truth is that such supposedly 'modern' sensibilities were far from unknown in medieval England. It is possible to set aside as unrepresentative the numerous lives of Celtic saints which show them living on terms of equality and affection with wild creatures.[15] But it is harder to disregard all those legends of medieval holy men who, like St Neot, saved stags and hares from the hunters or, like the twelfth-century Northumbrian saint, Godric of Finchale, went out barefoot to rescue shivering creatures from the cold and release birds from snares.[16] King Henry VI could not bear to see animals slaughtered by hunters; and whenever the fifteenth-century mystic Margery Kempe saw a man strike a horse she had a vision of Christ being beaten.[17]

Of course, these individuals were eccentrically tender-minded by the standards of the age, and sometimes the stories about them are meant to be understood allegorically. But what about the decisive case of *Dives and Pauper*? This important, though much neglected, moral treatise on the ten commandments, written not later than 1410 and probably Franciscan in origin, explains that the fifth commandment (against murder) does not forbid the slaughter of animals 'when it is profitable ... for meat or for clothing', or necessary 'to avoid nuisance of the

beasts which be noxious to man'. But it does prohibit killing animals for cruelty's sake or out of vanity, and God will take vengeance on those who misuse his creatures. 'And therefore men,' it continues, 'should have ruth of beasts and birds and not harm them without cause ... and therefore they that for cruelty and vanity ... torment beasts or fowl more than ... is speedful [i.e. expedient] to man's living, they sin ... full grievously.'[18]

This is a notable passage and a very embarrassing one to anybody trying to trace some development in English thinking about animal cruelty. For here at the very beginning of the fifteenth century we have a clear statement of a position which differs in no respect whatsoever from that of most eighteenth-century writers on the subject. It says about animals precisely what William Cowper was to write in 1784:

> The sum is this: if man's convenience, health,
> Or safety interfere, *his* rights and claims
> Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs.
> Else they are all – the meanest things that are –
> As free to live and enjoy that life,
> As God was free to form them at the first.[19]

The truth is that one single, coherent and remarkably constant attitude underlay the great bulk of the preaching and pamphleteering against animal cruelty between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. This attitude can be easily summarized. Man, it was said, was fully entitled to domesticate animals and to kill them for food and clothing. But he was not to tyrannize or to cause unnecessary suffering. Domestic animals should be allowed food and rest and their deaths should be as painless as possible. Wild animals could be killed if they were needed for food or thought to be harmful. But, although game could be shot and vermin hunted, it was wrong to kill for mere pleasure. It followed that throwing sticks at tethered cocks on Shrove Tuesday or tormenting animals for entertainment's sake was completely unacceptable. So was the staging of contests between animals. On the other hand, bull-baiting was permissible, because it was required by the civil authorities in order to improve the quality of the meat. It was in keeping with this attitude that the great Elizabethan Puritan William Perkins allowed bull-baiting, but strongly condemned cock-fighting and bear-baiting.[20]

Of course, this position left a good deal of room for argument on the question of what cruelty was 'necessary' and what avoidable, as the later debate on the ethics of vivisection would show. But in its essentials it was shared by all the main groups of those who worried about the treat-

ment of animals, whether the strong Protestants or Puritans of the Elizabethan and early Stuart period, the Quakers, Dissenters and Latitudinarians of the later seventeenth century, or the Evangelicals, Methodists, sentimentalists and humanitarians of the eighteenth. So far as their main arguments were concerned there was a notable lack of historical development.

Yet, though the position was constant, the particular preoccupations of these successive agitators changed a good deal. Before the Civil War the attack was concentrated on bear-baiting, cock-fighting and the ill-treatment of domestic animals. Then, in the later seventeenth century, it widened out to embrace hare-hunting, vivisection, the caging of wild birds, brutal methods of slaughter, and the cruelties involved in gastronomic refinements. The type of argument used also changed. The Puritans conducted their agitation in theological terms, as a debate about how God intended men to behave towards the lower creatures. But from the later seventeenth century the tone would become increasingly secular and other considerations would be advanced.

Initially, however, the opponents of animal cruelty drew primarily on the doctrine, which they found to be latent in the Old Testament, of man's stewardship over creation. According to this view, brute creatures had been created to serve man, but they were to be treated with respect and used only for the purposes which the creator had envisaged. God 'will not have us abuse the beasts beyond measure,' wrote John Calvin, 'but to nourish them and to have care of them.' 'If a man spare neither his horse nor his ox nor his ass, therein he betrayeth the wickedness of his nature. And if he say, "Tush, I care not, for it is but a brute beast," I answer again, "Yea, but it is a creature of God."' Animals, like men, were part of God's creation and, within the limits set by human needs, were entitled to life and happiness. Calvin's views were firmly anthropocentric ('True it is that God hath given us the birds for our food, as we know he hath made the whole world for us'). But he nevertheless drew the line at what he called 'extreme' or 'barbarous' cruelty: when God placed the beasts 'in subjection unto us,' he explained, 'he did it with the condition that we should handle them gently.'[21] It was in the same spirit that Sir Philip Sidney urged mankind not to abuse its trust:

> But yet, O man, rage not beyond thy need:
> Deeme it no glory to swell in tyranny.
> Thou art of bloud, joy not to make things bleed;

> Thou fearest death; thinke they are loath to die
> ...
> And you, poor beasts, in patience bide your hell.[22]

Man's rule, said a mid-seventeenth-century divine, was 'subordinate and stewardly, not absolutely to do what he list to do with God's creatures'. Cruelty to beasts, agreed Sir Matthew Hale, was 'tyranny', 'breach of trust' and 'injustice'.[23] It was true that man was 'viceroy of creation', wrote Thomas Tryon. But this rule was

> not absolute or tyrannical, but qualified so as it may most conduce, in the first place to the glory of God; secondly to the real use and benefit of man himself, and not to gratify his fierce and wrathful, or foolish and wanton humour; and thirdly as it best tends to the helping, aiding and assisting those beasts to the obtaining of all the advantages their natures are by the great, beautiful and always beneficent creator made capable of.[24]

This view of man's relationship to animals would have a long life. 'We seem to be in the place of God to them,' reflected the philosopher David Hartley in 1748, 'and we are obliged by the same tenure to be their guardians and benefactors.' God, warned the pamphleteer Humphry Primatt in 1776, would require a strict account from man of the creatures entrusted to his care. It was upon this religious position that he based his *Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*.[25]

Of course, Elizabethan and Jacobean commentators often qualified their views by conceding that men's duties to animals were not as great as their duties to each other. 'If we must have care of beasts,' Calvin had written, 'much more must we have it of human creatures.' The meaning of Proverbs, xii. 10, explained Thomas Wilcox in 1589, was that a good man should be merciful 'to beasts, much more to men ... He is so gentle and courteous that he neglecteth not his own cattle, but giveth them their meat, attendance, and all other things necessary in due time. How much more then doth he care for his household and needy persons!' Three years later Wilcox's interpretation was reiterated by Peter Muffett: 'A just man will not over-toil the poor dumb creature, nor suffer it to want food or looking to. But if he be so pitiful to his beast, much more is he merciful to his servants, his children and his wife.'[26]

Subject to this qualification, many early Stuart commentators

repeated the injunction of the Old Testament that a good man should be merciful to his beast, explicitly repudiating the apparent callousness of St Paul. To the Apostle's question, 'Doth God take care for oxen?' said a preacher at Northampton in 1607, 'We may answer affirmatively: "Yes, sure; even for oxen, and for sheep".'[27] The good husbandman, therefore, would ensure that his animals were well fed and watered and that they were allowed to rest on Sunday. He would also be careful not to lose his temper with them or strike them in anger if they failed to perform according to his expectations.[28] Animals, indeed, were to be treated in much the same way as other labourers. Farmers who did not observe the Sabbath in harvest time were dealing 'injuriously with their servants and cattle', thought Edward Elton; 'mercy and compassion is to be extended to the dumb creature that it may sometimes be spared and have some rest from labour.' The Sunday rest, agreed Bishop Babington, had been ordained 'for the relief of servants and brute beasts, which by pitiless worldlings might else be abused'. It was 'barbarous cruelty,' thought John Dod and Robert Cleaver, 'for one to ride his horse hard all the day, and at night to tie him up to the bare rack, without meat to repair and sustain his strength.'[29]

Considerate treatment of animals thus became a religious obligation: 'Love God, love his creatures.'[30] Cruelty, later writers would urge, was an insult to God, a kind of blasphemy against his creation.[31] Man's responsibility was expressed by George Wither in a poem about his horse:

> And though I know this creature lent
> As well for pleasure as for need;
> That I the wrong thereof prevent,
> Let me still carefully take heed.
> For he that wilfully shall dare
> That creature to oppress or grieve,
> Which God to serve him doth prepare
> Himself of mercy doth deprive.
> And he, or his, unless in time
> They do repent of that abuse,
> Shall one day suffer for his crime;
> And want such creatures for their use.[32]

The paradox, therefore, was that it was out of the very contradictions of the old anthropocentric tradition that a new attitude would emerge. That, after all, is how most new ideas appear. Just as modern atheism is probably best understood as a conviction growing out of Christianity,

rather than something encroaching upon it from an external source, so consideration for other species has its intellectual roots within the old man-centred doctrine itself. For theologians had always taught that the defects of animals were the direct consequence of Man's fall. Since the beasts were merely innocent victims of Adam's sin, it followed that men should be merciful and forgiving to them. 'Let us in no wise ... misuse any of the poor creatures,' wrote Thomas Draxe in 1613, 'knowing that if there be any defect or untowardness in their nature or any want of duty or observance in them towards us, our sin hath been and is the cause and occasion of it.' 'Seeing all creatures partake with us in our punishment,' agreed Thomas Wilson in the following year, 'it should cause us to be merciful unto them.'[33]

Similarly, because the mutual ferocity of wild animals was a response to Man's sin, all animals having been tame until the Fall, it followed that it was wrong for men to take pleasure from watching fights between them. The Protestant attack on cruel recreations goes back to at least 1550, when Robert Crowley denounced bear-baiting as 'a full ugly sight'.[34] It has been much misunderstood. Macaulay declared in a famous gibe that the Puritans disliked bear-baiting not because of the pain it gave the bear, but because of the pleasure it gave the spectators.[35] There is a fragment of truth in that remark, but not in the way it is usually understood. Puritans lamented the readiness of dogs to fight with bears because they saw it as the result of the Fall and therefore a reminder of Man's sin. 'The antipathy and cruelty which one beast showeth to another is the fruit of our rebellion against God,' wrote William Perkins, 'and should rather move us to mourn than to rejoice.' It was in this spirit that John Spencer, an early-seventeenth-century gentleman, reproached his brother Nicholas for his inordinate delight in cock-fighting: 'You make that a cause of your jollity and merriment which should be a cause of your grief and godly sorrow, for you take delight in the enmity and cruelty of the creatures, which was laid upon them for the sin of man.'

But the Puritans also felt for the animals. 'What Christian heart can take pleasure to see one poor beast to rent, tear and kill another?' asked Philip Stubbes, for 'although they be bloody beasts to mankind and seek his destruction, yet we are not to abuse them for his sake who made them and whose creatures they are. For notwithstanding that they be evil to us and thirst after our blood, yet are they are good creatures in their own nature and kind, and made to set forth the glory and magnificence of the great God ... and therefore for his sake not to be abused.' Bear-baiting, therefore, was 'a filthy, stinking and loathsome game'. 'I think

it utterly unlawful,' declared William Hinde, 'for any man to take pleasure in the pain and torture of any creature, or delight himself in the tyranny which the creatures exercise, one over another, or to make a re-creation of their brutish cruelty which they practice one upon another.' The same sentiments were expressed by Henry Bedel, John Dod, Robert Cleaver, Thomas Beard, Edward Elton and many other strict Protestant clergy.[36]

It is true that the Puritans disliked animal sports because of their association with noise, gambling and disorder; and it was on those grounds that cock-fighting and cock-throwing were prohibited in the Protectorate ordinance of 1654.[37] But they also expressed strong sympathy with animal sufferings and thought it barbarous to take pleasure in them. It was sinful to 'take delight in the cruel tormenting of a dumb creature,' urged Robert Bolton, or to revel in 'the bleeding miseries of that poor harmless thing which in its kind is much more and far better serviceable to the Creator than thyself'.[38] In the mid seventeenth century the attack was extended to include horse-racing, which was condemned by the Quakers and others because it was 'destructive to the creatures' and involved 'overstraining ... and over-forcing creatures ... beyond their strength'.[39] In the 1650s an anonymous opponent of animal sports urged that 'there ought to be a law to restrain such barbarous cruelty and to preserve the poor, innocent, sensitive creatures which Almighty God hath made and given for better use'.[40] In fact, some municipalities had already begun to act. Maidstone banned cock-throwing in 1653 as 'cruel and un-Christianlike', while Chester had prohibited bear-baiting on similar grounds as early as 1596. Other local authorities followed suit.[41]

Yet the opinion of the all-decisive gentry was slower to change. The Protectorate government succeeded in closing only the public contests. Colonel Pride put an end to bear-baiting at the Hope Garden in London by shooting the bears, but private bear-baiting continued; and with the Restoration both it and cock-fighting and cock-throwing came out into the open once more.[42] When in 1660 the future non-juror, Edmund Ellis, republished the opinions of various Puritan divines on cock-fighting, a friend commented that he could not expect sympathy from what he called 'the generality of gentlemen'; and Ellis himself admitted that in attacking the sport as a recreation unfit for Christians he would be 'accounted a foolhardy and impudent fellow'.[43] Animal sports retained their popularity in the modish world for the rest of the century; just as horse-racing sustained its position as the sport of kings. As late as 1699 the supporters of the old East India Company lost a crucial

parliamentary division by ten votes, many M.P.s being absent, 'going to see a tiger baited with dogs'.[44] Nevertheless, the Puritan opposition to cruel sports was sustained after the Restoration by many Quakers and Dissenters and gained fresh support in the eighteenth century from the Methodists and Evangelicals.

But it was not only those brought up in the Puritan tradition who had begun to turn against these 'filthy sports', as Sir John Davies called them in the 1590s.[45] Many shared the view expressed by Montaigne (whose *Essais* were twice translated into English during the seventeenth century) that there was 'a kind of respect and a general duty of humanity which tieth us ... unto brute beasts that have life and sense ... Unto men we owe justice, and to all other creatures that are capable of it, grace and benignity.' For Pepys the animal sports provided 'a very rude and nasty pleasure' and for Evelyn 'butcherly sports or rather barbarous cruelties'. Bull-running, thought Richard Butcher, the mid-seventeenth-century historian of Stamford, could afford entertainment only 'to such as take a pleasure in beastliness and mischief'.[46] By the eighteenth century this outlook had become the orthodoxy of the educated middle classes and all those who, like Steele and Addison, upheld an ideal of cultivated refinement.[47]

A combination of religious piety and bourgeois sensibility thus led to a new and effective campaign against these time-honoured recreations. Cock-throwing was widely attacked in the early Hanoverian provincial press.[48] It was a predominantly plebeian pastime and it seemed exceptionally unsporting. 'What noble entertainment is it for a rational soul,' asked a schoolmaster in 1739, 'to fasten an innocent, weak, defenceless animal to the ground and then dash his bones to pieces with a club?'[49] From 1720 onwards the ritual was prohibited in an increasing number of schools and towns; it was well in decline by the 1750s, though it lingered on in some rural areas into the nineteenth century.[50] Bull-baiting was prohibited at Birmingham in 1773 and was in retreat elsewhere before the century was over. The first attempt (in 1800) to prohibit it by statute was vehemently opposed, but in 1822 it was made illegal on the public highway and in 1835 it was banned altogether. Badger-baiting, dog-fighting, and similar animal contests were suppressed at the same time.[51]

Cock-fighting proved more resilient because it could be defended as the spontaneous expression of the birds' natural instincts; even the cock's artificial spurs could be justified as ensuring a speedier death for the unsuccessful combatant.[52] When James Boswell went to the London cockpit in 1762, he, like Samuel Pepys, John Dunton and many others

before him, felt 'sorry for the poor cocks'. But when 'he looked around to see if any of the spectators pitied them when mangled and torn in a most cruel manner,' he 'could not observe the smallest relenting sign in any countenance'. Nevertheless, an increasing number of people condemned the sport for its 'barbarity'; and in the eighteenth century it gradually disappeared from the grammar schools.[53] In the mid seventeenth century the poet Robert Wild had treated cocking in a facetious, mock-heroic fashion in his *A notable, true, tragicall relation of a duel betwixt a Norfolk cock and a Wisbich cock.*[54] But by 1807 George Crabbe's tone was very different:

> Here his poor bird th'inhuman Cocker brings,
> Arms his hard heel and clips his golden wings;
> With spicy food th'impatient spirit feeds
> And shouts and curses as the battle bleeds.
> Struck through the brain, deprived of both his eyes,
> The vanquish'd bird must combat till he dies;
> Must faintly peck at his victorious foe,
> And reel and stagger at each feeble blow:
> When fallen, the savage grasps his dappled plumes,
> His blood-stain'd arms, for other deaths assumes,
> And damns the craven fowl that lost his stake,
> And only bled and perish'd for his sake.[55]

Cockpits became illegal in London in 1833 and in the whole country in 1835. Cock-fighting as such was finally prohibited in 1849, though like the other animal sports it survived in a clandestine way.[56]

Hunting, on the other hand, presented a much trickier issue. The medieval church had deemed it a carnal diversion, unsuitable for clergymen, and had (rather ineffectually) forbidden it to those in holy orders; the issue gained a new topicality in 1621, when the unfortunate Archbishop Abbot was unlucky enough to miss the stag and kill the gamekeeper.[57] The Puritans, like other moralists, thought that hunting wasted a great deal of time and money, as well as being destructive to poor farmers' crops.[58] In 1604 Archbishop Hutton told Robert Cecil that he would like to see 'less wasting of the treasure of the realm and more moderation in the lawful exercise of hunting, both that poor men's corn may be less spoiled and other of his majesty's subjects more spared' (a wistful hope with that obsessive huntsman, James I, just settled on the English throne).[59] But the archbishop was careful to describe hunting as a lawful exercise. So long as it could be

represented as a necessary means of securing food or keeping down pests it was hard to attack it directly. If hunting was controversial, it was more because of the attempt to confine it to those above a certain social level than because of any doubts about man's right as such to pursue and kill the lower animals. Most Puritan casuists allowed it in moderation. In 1641 William Hinde published a lengthy discussion of the ethics of hunting. But he avoided coming down firmly against it. The most that he could say was that it was wrong to take pleasure in the pains of the hunted animal or to protract them unnecessarily and that consideration should be shown to the horses. Later on in the century a Yorkshire clergyman noted in his diary that, though some of his contemporaries questioned the lawfulness of hunting and coursing, he himself was satisfied that, even if Adam had not sinned, 'there would yet have been some creatures for food which man must have been forced to pursue with others as he doth'.[60]

From John Foxe to Edmund Ludlow, there was no shortage of godly figures who were passionately addicted to hunting and appear to have felt no pangs of conscience. In the seventeenth century the Puritan gentleman Nicholas Assheton chased happily after foxes, stags, otters, hares and every other kind of huntable wild life. Bulstrode Whitelocke had some doubts, but he soon allayed them with the reflection that God would never have given hounds their sharp noses and their speed if he had not intended them to be used for hunting; as for the hunted animals, they were 'creatures which by nature are continually in fear and dread, and that when they are not hunted, as well as when they are'. Hunting, he thought, did nothing to make hares or deer unhappier than they would have been anyway.[61]

Yet there had long been uneasiness on the matter. In the twelfth century John of Salisbury had thought that hunting had a brutalizing effect upon the character; and in the early Tudor period Sir Thomas More's Utopians took no pleasure in hunting, but felt pity for the innocent hare: hunting was 'the lowest, the vilest, and most abject part of butchery'. For More, as for John Foxe a few decades later, the Christian repudiation of the Jewish blood sacrifice was proof that God abhorred unnecessary bloodshed.[62] Archbishops Warham and Parker never went hunting. Neither did Bishop Jewel. What pleasure, he asked the hare-hunters, could be derived from pursuing with fierce dogs a timid animal that attacked no one and was put to flight by the slightest noise? Hunting for sport alone, thought Philip Stubbes, was wholly unlawful. There would be no hawking or hunting in heaven, a preacher told his congregation at St Paul's in 1603.[63] It was in response to such teaching

that the godly Jacobean layman John Bruen was prevailed upon to lay aside his hounds, hawks and dogs and to dispark his game reserves.[64] There was a risk, warned a sporting writer,

> lest we be transported with this pastime, and so ourselves grow wild, haunting the woods till we resemble the beasts which are citizens of them, and by continual conversation with dogs, become altogether addicted to slaughter and carnage, which is wholly dishonourable.

Addiction to hunting, agreed Thomas Tryon, made men 'fierce, cruel and great devourers'.[65]

Yet only occasionally did a bold spirit directly challenge what was, after all, the chief recreation of the clergy's noble patrons. One such spirit was Thomas Bywater, who in 1605 presented his employer, Lord Sheffield, with a book reproving him for his sins, particularly 'hunting and hawking too much'. 'He would maintain to my face,' reported the indignant peer, 'that both hawks and hounds, which I did then and do now moderately delight in, were not ordained by God for man's recreation, but for adorning the world.' Bywater was a tutor in Lord Sheffield's household; it is not surprising that he failed to gain tenure.[66]

In the later seventeenth century many Dissenters grew worried about hare-coursing. To kill edible creatures was 'no doubt lawful,' thought Edward Bury in 1677, 'but to sport ourselves in their death seems cruel and bloody'. And, in a spirit anticipatory of much subsequent writing on the subject, he continued, 'suppose thou heardst such a poor creature giving up the ghost to speak after this manner (for it is no absurdity to feign such a speech), "Oh man, what have I done to thee? ... I am thy fellow creature".'[67]

The truth was that the doctrine of man's stewardship, strictly interpreted, was now making it impossible to condone killing animals for mere sport. One could take life for the sake of food or self-defence, but not for pleasure. 'It is lawful for man in his own defence and for his own safety to destroy serpents, hurtful beasts and noisome creatures,' ruled George Walker in 1641, 'yet to do it with cruelty and with pleasure, delight and rejoicing in their destruction, and without a sense of our own sins and remorse for them, is a kind of scorn and contempt of the workmanship of God.' Hunting as such was not unlawful, thought Sir Matthew Hale, but he could never approve of pursuing 'the harmless hare for no other end than sport'.[68] The Quakers would forbid hunting for sport altogether, while the *Tatler* in 1710 pronounced against hunting 'innocent animals which we are not obliged to slaughter for our safety, convenience or nourishment'.[69]

But it was hard to see that hares and deer were hunted for any other purpose than the pleasure of pursuit, despite the occasional half-hearted attempt to justify stag-hunting as a necessary form of self-protection. In William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613) a swain asks,

> Is it not lawful we should chase the deer
> That breaking our enclosures every morn
> Are found at feed upon our crop of corn?[70]

But since deer survived only in protected deer parks the argument was patently disingenuous; and it had disappeared altogether by the 1780s, when the Royal Buckhounds at the stipulation of George III's second son, Frederick, Bishop of Osnaburg, abandoned the practice of killing the quarry and released the deer so that it could be hunted again.[71] In the eighteenth century it had become increasingly difficult to argue that either hare-coursing or stag-hunting served any necessary purpose; and moralists passionately denounced them accordingly. To some men, noted an observer in 1788, 'the delight found in pursuing a poor harmless hare, with a parcel of ugly roaring hounds ... may appear on consideration [as] inhuman and barbarous as bull-baiting'.[72] The shooting of harmless birds also began to be condemned.*

The fox, however, was a different matter. For he, as the poets put it, was a 'subtle, pilfering foe', a 'conscious villain' and the highly-organized sport of fox-hunting could be seen as 'just vengeance on the midnight thief'. The otter was also 'this midnight pillager'. The pursuit of such pests was accordingly represented as half battle, half morality-play.

> For these nocturnal thieves, huntsman, prepare
> Thy sharpest vengeance. Oh! how glorious 'tis
> To right th'oppress'd and bring the felon vile
> To just disgrace![73]

In 1776 Francis Mundy denounced hare-hunters:

> the murderous crew
> In harmless blood their hands imbrue ...

But hunting the fox, he thought, was a different matter:

> Talk not of pity to such foes!
> Stern justice claims the life he owes.[74]

* See below, p. 280.

As the Jacobean preacher John Rawlinson had long ago explained, the beasts to which the Old Testament intended the righteous man to be merciful were the 'cattle or helpful beasts'; foxes, by contrast, were 'not helpful, but hurtful ... and therefore no pity [is] to be had of them'. The poet James Thomson could plead for the hare and the stag, but he too felt no sympathy for the fox, 'the nightly robber of the fold'.[75]

Indeed it was only in 1869, when the historian E. A. Freeman wrote a famous article attacking fox-hunting, that the modern agitation against the sport as cruel to the fox really got under way.[76] It is odd that it did not start much earlier, since most people had long known that hunters, far from trying to keep down foxes, which was the overt objective, were in fact carefully preserving them. Fox-hunting, although originally regarded as a socially inferior activity to deer-hunting, had gained steadily in popularity with the gentry during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly when deer grew scarcer and hare-coursing was impeded by enclosures. William Harrison observed in 1577 that foxes would have been 'utterly destroyed ... many years agone' if gentlemen had not protected them to 'hunt and have pastime withal'; and Robert Reyce commented in 1618 that in Suffolk the fox would have been extinct if it had not been protected by the gentry for the sake of necessary warlike exercise 'against the time of a foreign invasion'. Indeed, as early as 1539 Robert Pye had informed Thomas Cromwell that foxes could easily be wiped out, if only the gentry would allow it; foxhounds, he added, did more harm to farmers' sheep and chickens than did foxes.[77] It was still possible in 1669 for John Worlidge to urge that, if foxes were hunted at breeding-time, they could be eliminated altogether; and regular payments were made by parish authorities to those who produced the carcasses of such vermin.[78] But by the beginning of the eighteenth century it had become common to preserve fox cubs, to import foxes from adjacent counties, to plant coverts for their shelter and even to chase 'bagged' foxes (that is, those brought along in a sack to be hunted).[79] Landlords preferred to pay compensation to farmers for the losses to their lambs and chickens, rather than give up the sport. In due course vulpicide (the secret killing of the fox) became one of the greatest moral offences a country gentleman could commit.[80] The owners of pheasant preserves waged a private war on foxes, but it was only an accredited huntsman who would dare openly claim payment from the parish for foxes' heads.[81]

This artificial preservation of foxes by fox-hunters did not stop the judges of King's Bench under Lord Mansfield in 1786 from reiterating the traditional doctrine that no action for trespass lay against fox-

hunters who followed their quarry onto someone else's land, because the fox, unlike the hare, was a noxious beast which all men were at liberty to pursue and kill wherever they could; hunters could therefore chase across the country at large, regardless of who owned it.[82] But non-lawyers found it increasingly difficult to think of fox-hunting as the conscientious discharge of the painful duty of pest control; and by the later eighteenth century a small group of critics had begun to attack it on the grounds of its cruelty.[83]

iii. THE DETHRONEMENT OF MAN

Even within a fundamentally man-centred mode of thought, therefore, it was possible to condemn many of the ways in which animals had been customarily treated. The beasts had been created for Man's sake, but that was no reason for ill-treating them unnecessarily.

By the later seventeenth century the anthropocentric tradition itself was being eroded. The explicit acceptance of the view that the world does not exist for man alone can be fairly regarded as one of the great revolutions in modern Western thought, though it is one to which historians have scarcely done justice. Of course, there had been many ancient thinkers, Cynics, sceptics and Epicureans, who denied that men were the centre of the universe or that mankind was an object of special concern to the gods. In the Christian era a periodic challenge to anthropocentric complacency had been presented by sceptical thinkers like Celsus, who in the second century A.D. had attacked both Stoics and Christians by urging that nature existed as much for animals and plants as for man.[1] It was absurd to think that pigs were specially made to be eaten by men, said Porphyry a century later; one might as well believe that men were specially made to be eaten by crocodiles.[2] Moreover, the Old Testament contained many texts consistent with the view that God had created the inferior creatures for his sake and theirs, rather than for that of man alone. Some theologians accordingly taught that living creatures existed to reflect divine glory as well as to cater to human needs.

What is new about the early modern period is that, when Montaigne in the sixteenth century and the French *libertins* in the seventeenth revived the old attack of the classical sceptics upon man's 'imaginary sovereignty' over other creatures,[3] they found that now for the first time there were writers in the Christian tradition prepared to agree with them. In the mid sixteenth century the Marian martyr John Bradford explicitly challenged the scholastic doctrine that animals were made solely for human sustenance.[4] In the seventeenth century it became increasingly common to maintain that nature existed for God's glory and that he cared as much for the welfare of plants and animals as for man. And during the Civil War there were sectaries who took this view to its logical conclusion. 'God loves the creatures that creep on the ground as well as the best saints,' said one, 'and there is no difference between the flesh of a man and the flesh of a toad.'[5]

Although most contemporaries would have regarded this as an overstatement, it was quite usual in the later seventeenth century for relatively orthodox clergymen to urge that God was as concerned for beasts as for man. The Dissenter Samuel Slater even described it as a 'heathen' doctrine to say that God did not 'attend to the meaner and inferior creatures ... but only superintended the affairs and concernments of mankind'. Early Christian fathers like Jerome, he said, were quite wrong to think God indifferent to the welfare of, say, flies and gnats. Creatures were made 'to enjoy themselves' as well as to serve

man, agreed Henry More, and it was 'pride', 'ignorance' or 'haughty presumption' to think otherwise.[6] The general shift in perspective during these years was well expressed by John Ray in 1691. 'It is a generally received opinion,' he wrote, 'that all this visible world was created for Man; [and] that Man is the end of the Creation, as if there were no other end of any creature but some way or other to be serviceable to man ... But though this be vulgarly received, yet wise men nowadays think otherwise.'[7]

It was above all the vast expansion in the size of the known world which was causing wise men to think differently. As the astronomers revealed not only that the earth was not the centre of the universe, but that there was an infinity of worlds, each perhaps inhabited by some unknown species, it became increasingly hard to maintain that creation existed for the exclusive benefit of the human denizens of one small planet. The old sublunary world was only a tiny fraction of the vast celestial universe now known to exist. 'The vulgar opinion of the unity of the world' was now 'exploded', wrote Henry Oldenburg in 1659; it was 'absurd' to think 'the heavenly hosts, which are so many times bigger than our earth, to be made only to enlighten and to quicken us'. There was no reason to think that either the earth or the human race was a particularly central part of the universe.[8] John Ray believed that 'in all likelihood' there were creatures living on the moon; and the possibility that not only it but other planets also might be inhabited was widely canvassed.[9] The great philosophers Galileo, Descartes, Gassendi and Leibniz all rejected the idea that the natural world was created for man alone.[10] Pondering his calculation that some stars were over twenty thousand times as large as the sun, William Gilbert reflected in 1636 on human insignificance. Poor man was a mere ant upon the face of the earth, who, by comparing himself only with those beneath him, had foolishly swollen 'into a conceit of being somebody'. The full extent of human ignorance was revealed, thought John Locke, 'when we consider the vast distance of the known and visible parts of the world, and the reasons we have to think that what lies within our ken is but a small part of the universe'.[11]

Even on the earth itself, the microscope had by the end of the seventeenth century begun to reveal millions of animated beings, protozoa and bacteria, pursuing their existence in utter indifference to human concerns, occupying a world of beauty and intricacy on which no men had ever previously set eyes. The Dutchman Anton van Leeuwenhoek found 8,280,000 living creatures in a drop of water and declared in 1683 that there were more animals in his own mouth than there were people

in the United Provinces.[12] At the same time, explorers were daily stumbling upon uninhabited tracts of the earth's surface, forests and deserts created for no apparent human purpose, swarming with hitherto unknown forms of life for which there was no obvious human use. By the time of Linnaeus the number of known plants was ten times that which had been recorded in classical antiquity and the range of known animal life had been similarly extended.[13] Many things, observed Descartes, existed or formerly existed and had ceased to be; yet they had never been seen or known by man and were never of use to humans. We should therefore 'beware of presuming too highly ourselves' so as to think 'that all things were created by God for us only'. Or, as the poet Gray put it more succinctly a century later,

> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.[14]

The destruction of the old anthropocentric illusion was thus begun by astronomers, botanists and zoologists. It was completed by the students of geology. As early as 1738 the observations made by the Cumbrian Quaker Thomas Story of the strata of the cliffs near Scarborough had convinced him that the earth was 'of much older date than the time assigned in the Holy Scriptures'.[15] In the later eighteenth century the accumulated work of similar observers had encouraged the French naturalist Buffon to abandon biblical chronology to the extent of allowing that the earth had existed for 'some seventy thousand years' before the appearance of man. By the 1820s the geologists were certain that the earth's prehistory was a matter not of thousands of years but of millions. Whole species of animals and plants had come into existence, lived, and been obliterated, long before humanity appeared. As Charles Lyell explained in 1830, man's arrival upon the planet was relatively recent: 'at periods extremely modern in the history of the globe, the ascendancy of man, if he existed at all, had scarcely been felt by the brutes'; earlier writers had erred by 'undervaluing greatly the quantity of past time'.[16] In the later seventeenth century most of John Ray's contemporaries had been unwilling to admit that any former species had been extinguished before the appearance of man. But even then Robert Hooke knew that there had; and in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the accumulating evidence of the fossils would prove irresistible.[17] The Fall of Man could no longer be held responsible for nature's physical characteristics; the earth and the species on it had not been created for the sake of humanity, but had a life and history independent of man. In 1780, accordingly, the atheistic geologist

G. H. Toulmin declared that man was merely a small part of nature and rejected anthropocentric religious myths as mere figments of human pride.[18]

Of course this was too much for most people; as the nineteenth-century debates on evolution would show, anthropocentrism was still the prevailing outlook. Darwin upset many by his polemical rejection of the argument from design and by his demonstration that the features of, say, the orchid derived from their advantages in the plant's struggle for existence, not from God's desire to provide man with an object of beauty and interest. One of Samuel Wilberforce's objections to Darwin was that 'the degrading notion' of human descent from the brutes was 'utterly irreconcilable' with 'man's derived supremacy over the earth'.[19] In the eighteenth century most of the writers who paid lip-service to the doctrine that the world was not made for man alone usually moved on quickly to demonstrating that, even so, it had been remarkably well designed to receive humanity. Nevertheless, it had become by early Hanoverian times a commonplace to concede that it was not only human purposes which the world was designed to serve. It was repugnant to reason 'to affirm that the world was made for the sake of man alone,' remarked the sceptical Bolingbroke, adding with sardonic pleasure, 'some modern divines have been candid enough to give up the point.'[20] Man was now but one link in Nature's mighty chain and no more indispensable than any other link. As Henry Baker put it in *The Universe* (1727), subtitled 'A Poem intended to Restrain the Pride of Man':

> Each hated toad, each crawling worm we see,
> Is needful to the whole as well as he.

It was comically vain on man's part to imagine that it was for him that the earth had been made.

> As well may the minutest emmet say
> That Caucasus was raised to pave his way.[21]

It was only the 'arrogance of humanity', observed Edward Bancroft in 1769, that had generated the delusion that the whole of animate nature had been created solely for its use. To regard the happiness of man as the only object of creation, agreed his fellow-naturalist George Gregory, was 'narrow-minded' and 'absurd'. Each part of the natural world was an end in itself.[22]

Some philosophers indeed had already begun to move from the mere denial that man was uppermost in nature's intentions to the more drastic assertion that nature had no intentions at all, or at least that

it was impossible to know what they were. Both Bacon and Descartes had regarded the appeal to final causes as inappropriate in the study of natural history, on the grounds that it was preposterous for man to claim to know God's ultimate intentions. Some of their contemporaries were said to be 'epicureans' or 'libertine' sceptics who denied the role of providence altogether, seeing the world as the product of the chance collision of atoms.[23] Such views came unambiguously into the open with Spinoza, for whom nature had no end and all final causes were human fictions. In his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1779) David Hume described 'a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children'. Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Teleological Judgement* (1790) professed himself unable to find 'any being capable of laying claim to the distinction of being the final end of creation'. Man was as much a means as an end: 'nature has no more exempted him from its destructive than from its productive forces, nor has it made the smallest exception to its subjection of everything to a mechanism of forces devoid of an end.' The emerging concept of an ecological system would make obsolete the old language of means and ends.[24]

It took a long time for these new currents of thought to reveal their full implications. But even in the seventeenth century the growing challenge to the old anthropocentrism had begun to affect contemporary thinking about the treatment of animals; for if the beasts were no longer to be thought of as created solely for the sake of man, then human conduct towards them appeared in a new and much less favourable light. Long before Hume and Kant there were individuals prepared to concede a parity to all parts of creation. 'The inferior creatures,' Thomas Tryon told his contemporaries in 1684, 'groan under your cruelties. You hunt them for your pleasure, and overwork them for your covetousness, and kill them for your gluttony, and set them to fight one with another till they die, and count it a sport and a pleasure to behold them worry one another.' Man, thought Margaret Cavendish, behaved as if

> all creatures for his sake alone
> Were made for him to tyrannize upon.

What right, she asked in her *Dialogue betwixt Birds* (1653), did human beings have to shoot sparrows for taking cherries and then eat the fruit themselves? And the question was repeated by Tryon in 1683 in his defence of wild birds: 'What right, I pray, has man to all the corn in the world?'[25]

The only answer to that question now was the one given in the mid seventeenth century by Thomas Hobbes. Man, like any other living being, was entitled by the right of nature to take those steps which he thought necessary for his preservation and subsistence. He could therefore kill other creatures 'for his safety and benefit'. Useful animals could be reduced to servitude and noxious ones destroyed, just as an individual in the state of nature was entitled to kill another human being if he felt he was a threat to his preservation. Human rule, therefore, reflected merely the naked self-interest of the human species. 'If we have dominion over sheep and oxen,' wrote Hobbes, 'we exercise it not as dominion, but as hostility; for we keep them only to labour, and to be killed and devoured by us; so that lions and bears would be as good masters to them as we are.' Man's rule over other creatures rested merely on his superior power, stemming from his manual skills and his use of speech, not on divine law or a special grant from God. Hobbes mocked the old notion that the world was made for man, echoing the words of Porphyry fourteen hundred years earlier: 'I pray, when a lion eats a man and a man eats an ox, why is the ox more made for the man than the man for the lion?'[26] These sentiments were as revolutionary as anything Hobbes ever wrote about politics; and they evoked a corresponding warmth of protest. 'I am sorry,' wrote Bishop Bramhall, 'to hear a man of reason and parts ... compare the murdering of men with the slaughtering of brute beasts.' For Bramhall held to the older view in which men occupied a divinely-privileged position: their dominion over the animals rested on God's grant as set out in Genesis. A man who killed a dangerous lion had divine authority for doing so, whereas the lion had no such authority to eat the man. Hobbes's position, thought the bishop, was perverse: 'He acquitteth the beasts from the dominion of man and denieth that they owe him any subjection.' He had turned himself into an 'attorney-general for the brute beasts'.[27]

Even for more conventional thinkers than Hobbes mankind was no longer the sole object of creation. Animals were to be regarded as their fellow-creatures – 'under-graduated fellow-creatures' perhaps, as Thomas Tryon called them,[28] but still fellow-creatures; and they should be treated accordingly. As the Presbyterian minister John Flavell wrote of a tired horse in 1669,

> What hath this creature done that he should be
> Thus beaten, wounded and tired out by me?
> He is my fellow-creature.

We ought, urged Benjamin Parker in 1745, 'to have more regard and esteem for our fellow creatures than to imagine them made for no nobler ends than to become our vassals'. To Christopher Smart animals and birds were 'my fellow subjects of th'eternal King'.[29]

In late-eighteenth-century Romanticism this theme of universal brotherhood grew very insistent. Burns was

> truly sorry man's dominion
> Has broken nature's social union.

Blake asked the fly,

> Am not I
> A fly like thee
> Or art not thou
> A man like me?

And Coleridge, moved by revolutionary ideals of fraternity, addressed 'A Young Ass':

> I hail thee BROTHER.

Animals had thus moved from being mere 'brutes' or 'beasts' to being 'fellow beasts', 'fellow mortals' or 'fellow creatures' and finally to being 'companions', 'friends' and 'brothers'.[30]