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Of Cats, Mice, and Men: Catharine Macaulay on Animals and Moral Education

ABSTRACT: *This article explores the place of non-human animals in Catharine Macaulay's understanding of moral education. Other Early Modern writers instructed parents and governors to discourage children from mistreating animals in order to prevent the development of cruelty or callousness, but said little else. Macaulay's views run deeper. Focusing on her* Letters on Education *(1790), I show that Macaulay centers her view on the development of the natural capacity for sympathy, through which we discover the principle of equity, and thereby cultivate the crucial virtue of benevolence. I then show that Macaulay repeatedly connects sympathy and benevolence to the early associations formed through one's relations to sentient creatures, revealing how her associationistic psychology grounds her views on morality and moral education.*

KEYWORDS: Catharine Macaulay, Animals, Education, Sympathy, Benevolence

1. Introduction

While not often the focus of philosophical attention, it is not uncommon to find eighteenth-century works on education that discuss the place of non-human animals in the upbringing of a child.[1] Most often, the concern is to discourage children from harming or mistreating animals in an effort to prevent the development of callousness or a tendency toward cruelty. For example, in his influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), John Locke remarks that he has "frequently observed" that children "torment and treat very roughly young birds, butterflies, and such other poor animals, which fall into their hands, and that with a seeming kind of pleasure." He cautions that this tendency "should be watched in them," for "the custom of tormenting and killing of beasts will, by degrees, harden their minds even towards men" and deaden any inclination towards compassion (1996: 90–91). Jean-Jacques Rousseau's similarly influential *Emile, or On Education* (1762) urged vegetarianism and found an important place for animals in Emile's moral education (1979: 153–55; 222 ff.). When the tutor finally begins to develop Emile's capacity for pity, the sights and sounds of dying animals will "cause him an ineffable distress," and be an early, crucial step on his way to becoming

[1] The most obvious venue for discussions of animals in the period is that of political philosophy. While Macaulay's writings on animals could be fruitfully situated in the discourses around property, natural law, and natural right, my focus is on a different set of issues. For an excellent treatment of the moral, political, and legal discussions of animals (focusing on Francis Hutcheson) see Garrett (2007). Garrett notes that it is in Hutcheson's pedagogical writings that he first addresses animal rights (2007: 256).

"sensitive and pitying" (1979: 222). Emile will learn to place himself in the position of the suffering creature, identifying with that creature, thereby animating his imagination and sensibility, and "excit[ing] in him goodness, humanity, commiseration, beneficence" (1979: 223).

In the decades following Rousseau's brief but philosophically rich account of the importance of compassionate encounters with animals, public discussion of the treatment of animals proliferated. As Mary Ellen Bellanca writes, "Opposition to injurious uses of nonhuman creatures, such as hunting, blood sports, and scientific experiments, increased in the 1770s …" (2003: 48), and as John Passmore adds, this "new attitude to animals" was prepared for by the sentimentalist writers of the mid- to late-eighteenth century (1975: 209). Opposition to such cruelty made its way into educational literature and children's literature as well. Sarah Trimmer's popular *Fabulous Histories* (1786), telling the story of a virtuous family of robins who live beside and provide lessons for a family of humans, provides a useful example. In her advertisement of the work, Trimmer states that "Christian Benevolence" requires "compassion to the Animal Creation," but that through "an erroneous education, or bad example, many children contract habits of tormenting inferior creatures, before they are conscious of giving them pain; or fall into the contrary fault of immoderate tenderness to them" (1786: vii–viii). Trimmer's story is designed to provide to children the correct education and good examples that will "regulate the actions of human beings, towards those, over whom, the Supreme Governor has given them dominion" (1786: Trimmer: viii).

While Trimmer's message of Christian benevolence towards lower creatures maintains a ranked order of nature, other writers like Laurence Sterne and Anna Laetitia Barbauld used the image of the caged bird, the abused donkey, or the captive mouse in their novels and poetry to advocate for the liberty and rights of groups currently denied them, including animals. Barbauld's poem, "The Mouse's Petition" (1773), written reportedly to stop the use of the mouse in an experiment by Joseph Priestly the next day, first establishes that a "free-born mouse" has been detained unjustly. The "petition" then works by calling on the common condition of life and suffering: "The well-taught philosophic mind / To all compassion gives; / Casts round the world an equal eye, / And feels for all that lives. / … So when unseen destruction lurks, / Which mice like men may share, / May some kind angel clear thy path, / And break the hidden snare".[2] Here, "mice like men" may suffer injustice and oppression as well as unexpected misfortune, so we are exhorted to remember and to see with "equal eye" what draws us together as living creatures.

Catharine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790) is situated within these larger conversations and debates about the place of animals in moral education. Like Rousseau, she sees human relations with animals as a crucial part of the cultivation of sympathy and benevolence; like Trimmer, her arguments depend on

[2] Barbauld, "The Mouse's Petition". Bellanca notes, "Possibly by way of Burns's 'To a Mouse,' variations on the phrase 'men, like mice' have become shorthand, an equation representing humans' and other animals' shared vulnerability to the vicissitudes of an uncertain world" (2003: 61). Mitzi Myers notes further that Georgian women writers seem especially drawn to cats and mice in their moral educational writings (1995: 275), as will be seen with Macaulay below. See also Ellis (1996) and Spencer (2012).

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her axiomatic belief in God's benevolence; like Barbauld and other radical writers, she urges real reform, both legislative and social, on the basis of principles of equity.[3] But where the comments by earlier philosophers like Locke and Rousseau tend to be brief and suggestive, and the comments of moralists and literary authors like Trimmer and Barbauld tend to be heavy-handed and detached from any larger philosophical framework, Macaulay's views on animals are elaborately worked out, well-defended, and deeply integrated with her theology, moral philosophy, and moral psychology. Moreover, on Macaulay's view, proper and sustained interactions with non-human animals seems to be *necessary* for the development of sympathy, for the acquisition of abstract notions of moral good and evil, and for the cultivation of true benevolence. Showing this is the goal of this article.

I trace Macaulay's views on animals through three areas of her philosophy, beginning with her opening discussion of theology and animals, and then turning to her moral philosophy and psychology. I first examine her theological argument for an animal afterlife, which itself serves as the basis for her moral philosophy and reveals important tenets in her moral psychology. I then discuss her moral philosophy, which is centered on universal benevolence, the most "comprehensive" virtue, containing "the principle of every moral duty" (I.12, 112).[4] Universal benevolence itself requires the idea of equity, which Macaulay believes is discovered through the development of the natural capacity for sympathy. In examining Macaulay's moral psychology, I show that she holds a strongly empiricist understanding of learning and development, placing special emphasis on early associations and habits, and making specific recommendations about managing early education.

2. Part 1: Macaulay's Theology

As Sarah Hutton notes, when Macaulay decided to write about education in the style of a series of letters, she placed herself "firmly within the domain of Enlightenment moral advice literature for women" (2005: 541; see also Titone 2004: 85–90). While this was an established genre with set forms, topics, and goals, Macaulay's work has unusual features. For one, after a brief and unsurprising Preface, announcing the importance of works on education, and then a detailed Table of Contents, the first letter of Macaulay's *Letters on Education* disorientingly opens in the middle of a discussion about whether there is a "future existence" for animals (I.1, 1). While this topic was not an unusual one at the time (see Perkins 2003: 27–30), to find it at the opening of a series of letters on education is jarring. Why does Macaulay begin her series of letters on education in this way? In this part, I will show how Macaulay's opening letter and her argument for an afterlife for animals indicates her theological

[3] Among other things, she advocates for social reforms in the industry of butchery (II.9), changes to gourmet cookery to reduce the waste of animal meat (II.10), and a more accurate consideration of how we should treat wild animals that pose no threat to humans (I.13).

[4] References to Macaulay are to the Cambridge facsimile edition of the original 1790 text, citing part and letter number, and page number. Macaulay's own standard terms for non-human animals are "brute" or "creature"; I adopt the term "animal" throughout, occasionally using "creature".

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commitments, specifically, the attribution of infinite benevolence and perfect equity to God. As I will show later, Macaulay's theology in turn supports her moral philosophy, understood to encompass her moral psychology and her view of moral education.

In the opening lines of the first letter, we are led to infer that the author's correspondent, Hortensia, agrees with an off-stage and preceding argument for "the future existence of brute animals," but is concerned that this elevates animals above humans. The concern is this: If humans possess a faculty of reason that is often incapable of preventing them from following wayward impulses, while animals are driven by well-calibrated instinct, leading them to pursue their interests without deviation, and if, further, animals and humans are each allowed the possibility of future happiness in an afterlife, then it looks like animals get the far better lot. Animals are better set up for happiness on earth, with faculties that allow them to pursue what is good for them without conflict or deviation; they are thereby given a likely chance at a happy afterlife, assuming their well-calibrated instincts leave them deserving reward, not punishment. Humans are given conflicting faculties, are prone to error and deviation from the good; they are thereby likely to experience earthly misery as well as an unhappy afterlife, assuming their wayward faculties and bad actions leave them deserving *punishment*, not reward. Hortensia's concern seems apt —it looks like Macaulay's argument for the existence of an afterlife for animals implies that the lot of animals is better than that of humans.

Macaulay stresses that the wrong response would be to deny a future existence to animals and insist on a strong dividing line between animals and humans. This is the wrong response because it renders "the god of all perfection" *inconsistent* in his benevolence, "dealing out a severe and short mortality to the various tribes of [man's] fellow animals, and assigning to [man] an eternity of happiness" (I.1, 2). Macaulay announces her conception of God in the Preface, repeating several times that she accepts a view of "the perfect equity and goodness of God," and that the religion based on this conception of the deity, characterized by "purity and benevolence" has been her "sole guide" in the text (Preface, iii). Macaulay's conception of God is that of a "deity whose power is only equalled by his benevolence," not "that cold, inexorable being, whose very perfections destroy the hope of the worshipper" (I.1, 5). Macaulay's reasons for this view can be pieced together from other places in her corpus including her *A Treatise on the Immutability of Moral Truth* (1783), repackaged as "Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects," which comprises the third part of the *Letters*. Here, she engages at length with the opposing view of William King, as laid out in his *An Essay on the Origin of Evil* (the 1731 translation of King's original, *De origine male*, published in 1702). In King's theology, God's omnipotence is stressed, and Macaulay argues that such a view renders God capricious, undercutting divine wisdom as well as justice. Macaulay echoes this point as well in her 1770 *Observations* on Edmund Burke's *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770). Hutton comments on Macaulay's *Observations*, showing that her unwillingness to privilege God's power over his wisdom and benevolence is "alluding to contrasting schools of theology: those who argue that the omnipotent deity exercises his will in accordance with the divine attributes of justice, goodness and wisdom, and the voluntarist view according

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to which the divine will is free and unfettered, unconstrained by considerations of justice, goodness or wisdom" (2005: 544). Macaulay herself notes in the *Letters* that "some censure must fall on those principles of religion, and those modes of faith, which represent him as partial in the distribution of reward and punishment," that is, on those who take God to privilege humans above other creatures (Preface, iv). But Macaulay's God is primarily characterized by perfect, universal benevolence: "a deity whom we are told regards us with the tenderness of an earthly parent, and who will not suffer one sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice" (I.1, 5). Such a deity would not arbitrarily or uncaringly give a future existence to only one species of his creation.

Similarly, such a deity would not leave humans without some recourse. Macaulay acknowledges that her position is open to Hortensia's criticism: "If the benevolence of God equally extends to all his creatures, why is instinct sufficiently strong in the brute to prevent his falling into any evil which is not brought upon him by external force; and why is reason so impotent in man as to render him almost on every occasion the author of his own misery?" (I.1, 7). The argument is again anchored by the commitment to God's "infinite benevolence"—a benevolence which is guided, as Macaulay makes explicit here, by God's "perfect equity" (I.1, 8). Macaulay uses these attributes of God to claim that it would be inconsistent with these "to create any feeling being, without the intention of conferring happiness" (I.1, 8). She continues,

> Had the powers of God been so limited as to render it impossible for him to have given life to that varied multitude of beings which exists on this terrestrial globe, without its being attended with terror, endured with pain, and often ended with torture; the fatal gift would have been withheld, unless the short lived evil was a prelude to some good. … It is on this reasoning that I ground my opinion of the future state of brutes. (I.1, 8)[5]

That is, if God had not been able to recompense the earthly sufferings of animals with an assured future happiness elsewhere, he would not have created them at all. Since he has created animals, and since they do suffer external pains and terrors pressed on them during their earthly existence, there must be some future, happy existence for them. God's benevolence and equity explain why, even though there is a "chain of subordination which gradually descends from the highest possible excellence which can be enjoyed by a finite being, down to the lowest form of animated life," animals are similarly allowed happiness in the hereafter, if not also in the here and now (I.1, 8–9).

What about the claim that humans are subject to an inequitable relative unhappiness, stemming from our possession of a faculty of reason too "impotent" to prevent us from following wayward impulses? Acknowledging, again, that animals may be relatively happier than humans because of their different

[5] Macaulay's argument does not turn on the attribution of animal intelligence, language, or some other capacity that would bring them closer to the human and human capacities. The only shared capacity is the capacity for happiness or misery.

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capacities and because of the reliability of their instincts, and acknowledging that "the gift of reason and the powers of human imagination have indeed made a fatal havoc on human happiness," Macaulay nonetheless argues that "these gifts are absolutely necessary to support man's state of pre-eminence on this globe, and to fit him for an exalted station in a future life" (I.1, 9). But these faculties do not necessarily lead us to unhappiness, and, indeed, "the human faculties rise, by practice and education, from mere capacity to an excellence and an energy which enables man to become the carver of his own happiness" (I.1, 10). In her strongest remarks on the power of education, Macaulay paraphrases the eclectic Scottish thinker, Lord Monboddo, agreeing "that we can make ourselves as it were over again, so that the original nature is so little obvious, that it is with great difficulty we can distinguish it from the acquired" (I.1, 10).[6] Our relative unhappiness, then, is of our own making —"there is not a virtue or vice that belongs to humanity, which we do not make ourselves," writes Macaulay (I.1, 11)—and so it can also be of our own *unmaking*.

Macaulay's unusual and unexpected introduction to an educational work by way of an argument for the future existence of animals sets up the difference between creatures who do not need to develop their capacities, and creatures who do. She thereby returns the reader to her opening claim in the Preface, that "of all the arts of life, that of giving useful instruction to the human mind, and of rendering it the master of its affections, is the most important" (Preface, i). The art of education is of great importance because human nature is plastic, needing to be shaped, guided, even re-made through education. For Macaulay, education is transformative.

Given that Macaulay is using an argument for the future existence of animals within a larger argument for the importance of education for humans, we could conclude that she is not really interested in the condition or treatment of animals, but merely availing herself of a convenient argumentative method. As I will show, this conclusion is too hasty, as Macaulay repeatedly returns to the topic of animals in her treatment of moral philosophy and education, but for now, I want to emphasize a few points about her initial argument. First, Macaulay's theology is deployed in the first letter, primarily her conception of God as perfectly benevolent. God's attribute of perfect benevolence is indicated as *foundational*, supporting "the presumptive proofs which can be collected from the reason of things" (I.1, 6). Further, Macaulay indicates that our human conception of the attribute of perfect benevolence "answers to the purest ideas we can frame of beneficence, equity, and justice" (I.1, 6). God's perfect benevolence is the complex of pure beneficence, pure equity, and pure justice—thus, as we have already seen, his perfect benevolence is imperiled if we imagine him to treat with partiality "one part of the creation" (I.1, 6).

Second, even in this initial, complicated argument, Macaulay hints at her later claims, showing how her theology connects to her moral philosophy. After her first statement of God's benevolence, drawing on the Biblical passages which indicate that the deity "regards us with the tenderness of an earthly parent," and "will not suffer one sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice," Macaulay looks forward, imagining how proper attention to these passages might change existing education:

[6] Macaulay does not give a specific citation and I have not yet been able to track the reference down.

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> For my part, I have always considered it as greatly in the favour of the opinion which the liberal and candid mind is apt to form on the fate of the brute creation, and have often wondered that the clergy have not from the authority of this text, laid more force on the necessity of *extending our benevolence* to the dumb animals, and that they have not in particular more strongly and more repeatedly reprobated every species of cruelty towards them, as opposite to the dictates both of natural and revealed religion. (I.1, 6, emphasis added)

As Macaulay hints here, God's perfect benevolence, extending equally to all his creation, should be a model for "our benevolence," extending beyond humans to an equitable care for all animals (see also II.13, 336). At the very least, God's perfect benevolence to all creatures should serve as a glaring warning to us to "reprobate [] every species of cruelty" towards animals.

Macaulay's theology, then, serves as a link to her moral philosophy, which is similarly centered on benevolence. But where God's perfect benevolence is part of his divine nature, our benevolence must be developed and cultivated through proper moral education.

3. Part 2: Macaulay's Moral Philosophy and Moral Psychology

After establishing the theological views that undergird her *Letters on Education*, Macaulay proceeds to cover a standard set of educational topics in a more expected manner. Following and often explicitly responding to Rousseau's views, along with other well-known writers on education, she addresses infant care and nutrition, the importance of physical activity, how to guard against different childish fears and predilections, what children should read, and so on. The guiding principle of her philosophy of education is that "experience … is the only efficacious instructor of man" (I.3, 23). Recalling the important upshot of her argument in the first letter, she elaborates: "It is by an extensive knowledge of the relation of things, and the effects of causes, by which our reason becomes a more valuable gift than those instinctive powers which nature has bestowed on the brute" (I.3, 23). As she argued in Letter 1, education is necessary to develop the capacities of humans, and it is through education that we can achieve and deserve the happiness that is possible for us on earth and after.

In her Preface to the *Letters*, she connects this view of education with an associationist approach to psychology:

> Without an adequate knowledge of the power of association, by which a single impression calls up a host of ideas, which, arising in imperceptible succession, form a close and almost inseparable combination, it will be impracticable for a tutor to fashion the mind of his pupil according to any particular idea he may frame of excellence. Nor can his instructions be adequate to any such management of the mental faculties as shall invariably produce volitions agreeable to the laws of virtue and prudence. (Preface, i–ii)

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Macaulay leaves the psychological view largely unspecified, holding that we could adopt "Hartley's doctrine of vibration, or Tucker's complicated system of organization" or simply "content ourselves with tracing the cause and course of our ideas, their propensity to run into clusters on the most distant similarity between them, and the vast power and strength of such associations" (I.7, 68–69). Whichever underlying theory we settle on, Macaulay holds that we will see that character and temperament are a product of impressions and their associations. This is because, as she later explains, "all the passions which belong to humanity lie latent in every mind; but we find by experience that they continue inactive till put in motion by the influence of some corresponding impression; and that their growth and prevalence in a great measure depends on the repetition of those impressions which are in their nature adapted to affect them" (II.8, 276). Impressions excite passions, and the mechanisms of repetition and association further amplify and cement the passions excited.

Macaulay's philosophy of education specifies the important mechanisms of experience, association, and habituation, but it also specifies a clear goal—improving the capacities that mark humans as superior creatures. Macaulay asserts that while animals may have been superior to humans in "the first ages of society," the achievements of humans through the development of reason "very fully proves the superiority of the reasoning faculties over the instinctive powers" (I.3, 23). But while education may have worked through human history to allow us to learn from the experiences of many generations, gaining the advantages of civilization and improvement, Macaulay comments critically on the *moral* education of humans. She describes modern man as "a monster of cruelty" and "an eternal scourge to all inferior beings" (I.3, 23). This is because, as she will show, human benevolence fails to follow the model of divine benevolence, being guided not by principles of equity and justice, but by partial inclination. The existing system of moral education fails to produce the key virtue, benevolence. Let's see how Macaulay advances this argument.

At the start of two consecutive letters on benevolence, Macaulay posits benevolence as the most important virtue in her moral philosophy: "the virtue of benevolence … is of so comprehensive a nature, that it contains the principle of every moral duty" (I.12, 112; see also II.13, 336). Macaulay distinguishes genuine benevolence from other "qualities of the heart", including merely material generosity and other forms of giving that are partial, inconsistent, or inequitable (I.12, 112–13). Macaulay does not explicitly define true benevolence, but we can be guided by her gloss on divine benevolence as answering to the "purest ideas we can frame of beneficence, equity, and justice" (I.1, 6; see also III.6, 382). In a later letter on the "Perfect Benevolence of God" she adds that "His benevolence can never be alloyed with the weakness of partiality, with any variability … his justice, or to use a more adequate term, the fixed determinations which perfect wisdom dictates, can never give way to any of those feelings by which that useful and benign passion, sympathy, counteracts the selfishness of our natures" (III.4, 366). Unlike divine benevolence, our benevolence, as we will see, is bound up with sympathy, which helps to counteract our native selfishness. Like divine benevolence, our benevolence involves wishing and doing well for others in a way that is equitable to and across

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those others and respecting of considerations of justice. Furthermore, in the human, Macaulay specifies that benevolence involves the "exercise of our benign affections," an exercise which gives the greatest "mental felicity" (I.12, 113). We may not be able to achieve the perfection of divine impartiality, but "a delightful sensation is annexed to a benevolent action, on the reflection, that the increasing the happiness of one of his creatures is pleasing to God, and that such an action is a faint copy of his goodness" (III.4, 369). We may only be able to achieve a "faint copy" of divine benevolence, because our benevolence is rooted in human psychology, but, when developed appropriately, acting benevolently will produce human happiness.

Given the importance and desirability of cultivating benevolence, then, Macaulay wonders, "why does not education bend her whole care to produce a fruit thus advantageous to the possessor, and which when multiplied in private characters, would operate strongly in favour of public happiness[?]" (I.12, 114). Her answer returns to the importance of experience and learning from habituation and example, and from the difficulties, in this case, because of a lack of examples of true benevolence: "We are all partially good, and some are more extensively so than others; but there are few, very few of the sons of men, who are benevolent" (I.12, 114). Extending Rousseau's arguments in *Emile*, Macaulay warns that instead of witnessing true benevolence, children are trained to practice a pseudo-benevolence that is "merely putting the hand in the pocket" – the unthinking, partial, and arbitrary administration of "pieces of metal" (I.12, 116–17).

The key to Macaulay's view of how to educate children in benevolence is found in a later letter on sympathy: "If men … neglect to cultivate sympathy, which enables us to acquire notions of equity, and thus to trace the virtues of the sovereign mind, that quality in them, which carries the appearance of benevolence, is the mere power of habit" (I.20, 191). This consolidates several important points. First, Macaulay repeats the point that true benevolence is guided by *equity*, and thereby follows *divine benevolence* ("the virtues of the sovereign mind"). Second, she clarifies that we must *acquire* "notions of equity," and that we do this through the cultivation of *sympathy*. Finally, she dismisses forms of apparent benevolence that are not structured by equity and cultivated sympathy as mere habituated behavior, not virtue. Furthermore, the key letters on benevolence and sympathy also incorporate lengthy discussions of animals. In each letter, Macaulay describes existing inconsistencies and inequities in the treatment of animals to argue that true benevolence would, like God's perfect benevolence, deal equitably with all creatures capable of happiness and misery.

Macaulay's view on teaching true benevolence focuses on how the child must receive, witness, and practice true benevolence. First, Letter 13 begins with the advice that tutors should "make their pupils feel the utility of benevolence, by being themselves the objects of it" (I.13, 119). That is, tutors should ensure that they do not treat any pupil with more or less care than any other, and that their pupils feel that they are each receiving equitable attention from their tutor. Macaulay is concerned with tutors who distinguish children through "capricious partialities," and urges instead that they should follow "strict principles of equity" in their relations with pupils (I.13, 119). But her point about learning benevolence through feeling themselves the objects of it connects with another educational

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principle that threads through the text, namely, that "according to our cultivation, such will be our harvest" (I.10, 100). This principle is employed where Macaulay wants to urge an attitude of reciprocity, care, and tenderness between the adult educator and the child. She encourages parents, and fathers especially, to be tender and affectionate to their children in order to help them develop "firmness and stability" as adults (I.10, 98), as well as "filial piety and virtue" (I.1, 12). In the context of teaching benevolence, she suggests that receiving inequitable treatment will grow those "malignant passions" that stifle and crowd out the "benign affections" needed for the development of true benevolence (I.13, 119).

Second, witnessing inequitable treatment will also impede the development of true benevolence. Macaulay writes, "it is not through the medium of self only, that children should be taught lessons of benevolence; they should see it dispensed to every object around them with such a constancy, as should keep them in perfect ignorance that the vices of injustice and inhumanity have any existence" (I.13, 119–20). Having focused largely on benevolence to humans at this point, and the examples of alms-giving and other charity, Macaulay pivots, asking, "If brutes were to draw a character of man, Hortensia, do you think they would call him a benevolent being?" (I.13, 120). She responds:

> No; their representations would be somewhat of the same kind as the fabled furies and other infernals of ancient mythology. Fortunately, for the reputation of the species, the brutes can neither talk nor write; and being our own panegyrists, we can give ourselves what attributes we please, and call our confined and partial sympathy, the sublime virtue of benevolence. Goodness to man, and mercy to brutes, is all that is taught by the moralist; and this mercy is of a nature which if properly defined, can only be distinguished by the inferiority of its degree from the vice of cruelty. (I.13, 121)

Returning to her description in Letter 3 of modern man as a "monster of cruelty," Macaulay alleges that we may ascribe benevolence to ourselves, but from an animal's perspective, it is merely a "confined and *partial* sympathy," a general feeling of goodwill toward the members of our own species, with a half-hearted policy of mercy toward all others—a mercy that is little better than the vice of cruelty.

Macaulay argues in Letter 13 that since inequitable treatment of animals is pervasive, children fail to witness the examples of true benevolence they need in order to cultivate that virtue themselves. Surely, she writes, most tutors prevent their charges from wanton cruelty, like Domitian's vicious treatment of flies, but they do not step in to prevent other kinds of seemingly 'innocent' childish diversions: "Would he prevent him from robbing birds of their young? would he shut out all habits of cruelty by keeping him from the chace and other sports of the field, or from the hardened barbarity of putting worms on a hook as baits to catch fish?" (I.13, 121). Our claims to mercy do not even extend so far as to prevent these common activities, not to mention meat-eating. In Letter 4, where Macaulay discusses "the Use of Animal Food," she reluctantly allows giving "gravy" to "suckling infants," as the "best corrector of the acidities of human milk," but then states she has no interest in

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"bringing them up to be devourers of animal substances" (I.4, 38). Macaulay cites necessity as requiring a moderate diet of meat, and in her explanation of this point, she employs her principle of equity in an illuminating way: "No—the cruel necessity which our wants impose on us, to inflict that fate on other beings which would be terrible to ourselves, is an evil of sufficient weight, were the use of animal diet confined within as moderate limits as the present state of things will admit" (I.4, 38). She is clearly ambivalent about even the most moderate practices of meat-eating, for in eating animals, we inflict a fate that we would find terrible to be subjected to; similarly, when we rob parents of their young, threaten and attack others for our own amusement, and impale living bodies on hooks. In each of these cases we act without mercy, but more importantly, we act in a way that is inconsistent with equity and justice, and therefore with true benevolence.

Macaulay also argues for a positive education aimed at cultivating care, not just preventing cruelty, and this brings us to the third aspect of Macaulay's view on cultivating true benevolence in children. Following her entreaty to prevent nest-robbing, fishing with live bait, and other forms of normalized cruelty toward animals, she asks of the tutor, "Would he set him the example both of a negative, and an active goodness in a total forbearance of every unnecessary injury, and in the seizing all opportunities to do acts of kindness to every feeling being?" (I.13, 122). That is, would the excellent tutor not only prevent his pupil from unnecessarily injuring animals, but also teach them to practice kindness to them? Macaulay's tone turns more personal and direct, and she writes,

> I take a warm interest in the happiness of the brutes, as far as it is compatible with the nature of things. The stile of my amusements are quite opposite to that of Domitian's. I take pleasure in restoring life; and though I do not give harbour to all animals, yet I never make them suffer for having taken shelter under my roof; and I am so persuaded of the advantages which attend the indulgence of such sensibilities, when not accompanied by caprice and partiality, that I would have all those who are about the persons of children act the same part, though their tempers should not be of the kind to receive pleasure from it. (I.13, 122)

She follows this statement of the "advantages" that attend the indulgence of caring sensibilities, advantages, presumably, to the extension of sympathy and benevolence, with an anomalous insertion of a lengthy segment of a poem, "Edward and Eltruda, A Legendary Tale" (1782) by Helen Maria Williams. The excerpted section characterizes Eltruda as an extraordinarily caring person, reuniting lost lambs with their bleating mothers, replacing fallen bird's nests, and assisting widows, infants, and mourners.

Macaulay's own sensibility toward and care for animals is aligned with Eltruda's more sentimental variety, and both are used to make an important point. Keeping and caring for animals will give children "the practice of benevolence," in addition to being "an agreeable and innocent amusement" and to giving the "knowledge … of brute nature", which will cure them of "prejudices founded on ignorance, and in the vanity and conceit of man" (I.13, 125). In the effort of cultivating "general

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benevolence and universal sympathy," Macaulay urges that educators encourage and facilitate hands-on care for and engagement with animals (III.2, 357). Not only will this contribute to happiness and develop the "benign virtues," it will also teach the child about the behavior, needs, and activities of the different animals, which will in turn work to unseat or prevent prejudices (I.13, 124). This completes Macaulay's account of how to cultivate true benevolence in children—they must receive benevolence, they must witness it around them, and they must practice it. In each case the key point is that the benevolence must be true benevolence, founded on notions of equity which are acquired through the cultivation of sympathy.

Macaulay is not simply trying to offer a view of proper moral education, but also to diagnose and address how things have gone wrong. She establishes that benevolence is the key virtue, that the development of true benevolence depends on an individual having notions of equity, that notions of equity are themselves acquired through sympathy, and that sympathy must be cultivated. This helps to explain the centrality of animals in Macaulay's treatment of moral education, for she believes that the existing attitudes and practices toward animals tend toward the corruption or stifling of sympathy, not its cultivation. That is, the existing system of education fails in several ways to teach true benevolence: by subjecting children to inequitable and occasionally unfeeling treatment; by exposing children to examples of inequitable and unjust treatment of animals; and by failing to cultivate the psychological capacities necessary for the development of true benevolence.

In Letter 20, discussed briefly above, Macaulay employs two new interlocutors to examine how existing practices toward animals corrupt and impede the cultivation of sympathy.[7] Alcander and Lysimachus are described as sitting on a promontory and observing "sportsmen" who are "so intent on running down an innocent animal, and who are cutting the thread of an existence which was given for enjoyment, in such a manner, as to combine a high degree of mental with bodily pain" (I.20, 189). Having powers of sympathy that have been cultivated correctly, Alcander and Lysimachus each "actually partake of some of that misery which at this moment you see overwhelming a fellow creature," whereas the sportsmen do not (I.20, 189). Alcander considers this a topic worthy of inquiry, for although "constituted of the same material," possessing "the same portion of sympathy given them by nature," and subject in the same way as their prey "to pain, to death, and to all the agonizing sensations which arise from excessive fear," the sportsmen persist in their hunt (I.20, 189). Even more astonishingly, they are likely "honourable men," and if it were suggested to them that they might "use the same cruel violence against one of their species," given enough "power" and "prejudice", they would be outraged (I.20, 189–90). Nonetheless, Alcander continues, their outrage would be "an error," for

[7] In this letter the voice and narration shift from a single letter-writer (presumably Macaulay) addressing a single interlocutor, Hortensia, to the presentation of a conversation between two men. Why does Macaulay change her form here? The existing culture of *ad feminem* attack, especially on women's advocacy for animals (see Donald 2020: 8-10), may explain why Macaulay ventriloquizes through two male voices in this letter. Having a male voice (Alcander) argue against the male activity of hunting may be more effective than having a female voice make that charge, but more generally, having two men make a series of points about the need to cultivate sympathy and feeling for others helps to insulate that part of her view from a charge of feminine weakness.

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cruelties and violence within species are common throughout history, including the history of humans. Alcander mentions cannibalism, enslavement, and the alleged Spartan practice of hunting Helotes. Such pervasive, rampant cruelty prevents the cultivation of sympathy, and thus obstructs the development of true benevolence.

It is at this point that Macaulay has Alcander make the important point quoted above, that without the cultivation of sympathy, one cannot acquire the notions of equity and thereby develop true benevolence (I.20, 191). Alcander then states that we will never induce "a more extensive benevolence than was formerly practiced amongst men," unless "all our barbarous customs are abolished, and our sentiments change their heterogeneous nature for *a more consistent system of feeling*" (I.20, 191, emphasis added).[8] Macaulay's topic in these letters is education, and she has repeatedly claimed that the existing state of moral education is seriously flawed. The actual forms of benevolence practiced by humans are partial and inequitable, founded on an *inconsistent* system of feeling. When Macaulay compares the sympathetic responses of Alcander and Lysimachus to the hunted hare with those of the hunters, she is indicating something important about her conception of sympathy. Cultivated sympathy produces feeling for any creature capable of suffering as the sympathizer suffers. Humans and hares alike are subject to bodily pain, as well as the "mental pain" of fear and terror. We are *all* sensitive creatures, vulnerable to suffering. But one only sees this commonality—only acquires these notions of equity—through sympathizing with the pain and fear of the hare, and such sympathy is blocked by an activity like hunting.[9]

In a later treatment of sympathy and equity in Part II of the *Letters*, Macaulay makes these connections clear:

> If we trace, Hortensia, the origin of those virtues in man, which render him fit for the benign offices of life, we shall find that they all center in sympathy. For had the mind of man been totally divested of this affection, it would not in all probability have ever attained any ideas of equity. Yes, it was the movements of sympathy which first inclined man to a forbearance of his own gratifications, in respect to the feelings of his fellow creatures; and his reason soon approved the dictates of his inclination. A strict adherence to the principles of equity, may be said to include the perfection of moral rectitude. This being granted, all human virtue will be found to proceed from equity; consequently, if the principle

[8] Hume's discussion of animals in EPM 3 is considered by Macaulay in this letter. She accuses Hume of a speciesist inconsistency, like others, "Mr. Hume's speculations on this subject are not free from the same errors. Thus inconsistency and mutability hang on his system, in the same proportion as they hang on every system of morals founded on human sentiment" (I.20, 193). The explanation for this error, she holds, plausibly, lies "in their founding rectitude on a principle of utility, and then in confining utility to the benefit of their own species" (I.20, 192). This may be one of the earliest recognitions of the speciesist tendency in utilitarian value theories.

[9] See Greentree (2019: 310) for a discussion of this point about equality in compassion for suffering. Greentree nicely compares Barbauld's "Mouse's Petition" with Macaulay's (1781) Preface to the 6th volume of her *History*, noting that both authors use the image of an "equal eye" of "compassion". Greentree notes that this extends sympathy beyond the human realm, but his focus is on Macaulay's work as a sympathetic historian, with eyes turned toward oppressed humans.

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> of equity itself owes its source in the human mind to the feelings of sympathy, all human virtue must derive its source from this useful affection. (II.8, 275)

Macaulay repeats her point that the achievement of virtue requires adherence to the principles of equity, that ideas of equity are attained through the movements of sympathy, and that sympathy inclines us to feel for our "fellow creatures." Included in "our fellow creatures" are all those beings created by God for happiness, beings who are, at the moment, cruelly and callously treated. So long as these customs and practices remain, humans will, at best, develop only partial, speciesist sympathy and benevolence, and thereby fail to follow the example of divine benevolence. Further, by persisting in our casual, unthinking cruelty, we imperil our own happiness, for "universal benevolence" is "the best means to procure our own happiness, both in the satisfaction which is naturally annexed to it, and in rendering us acceptable to our maker" (I.20, 195–96).

After discussing the importance of developing sympathy, Macaulay has Alcander and Lysimachus consider an objection. At the close of Letter 20, Lysimachus worries, "that line of destruction which runs through all animal nature appears to militate strongly against the supposition, that the slaughter of the brute species by man is contrary to the intention of Providence or repugnant to the divine mind" (I.20, 196). If Macaulay and Alcander are right that true benevolence depends on sympathy with animals, and the discovery, through sympathy, of the principles of equity that connect us to them and create obligations toward them, then any inhumane treatment would be seriously wrong. But nature, as Tennyson will go on to memorably write, is "red in tooth and claw" (*In Memoriam A. H. H.*)—how does this not amount to an inconsistency in the divine attitude toward his creatures' variable treatment of each other?

Alcander's answer helpfully takes us back to Macaulay's point in Letter 1 about the capacities of humans and animals. He first counters: "though the destruction of animal by animal is not only admitted by God, but is an universal principle in the mundane system, it does not follow that slaughter should be the delight and amusement of the human mind" (I.20, 196). Alcander uses a classic example of cats and mice:

> A cat worries its prey, without considering whether she is doing evil, or the contrary; but man has sympathy in his nature, and his knowledge of the relation of things causes him to put himself in the place of the sufferer, and thus to acquire ideas of equity, and the utility of benevolence, which, as far as it is improved, will carry us in an opposite line from cruelty, or unnecessary slaughter. (I.20, 196–97)

The cat's predatory play is permissible because the cat is not capable of sympathy in the way humans are. Alcander's claim "but man has sympathy in his nature" suggests that the cat does not, and perhaps no animal species does. But more importantly, even if some animals have a capacity for some kind of fellow-feeling with members of their own species or others, Macaulay implies that only humans

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have a capacity for sympathy that works with the "knowledge of the relations of things" to enable sympathetic trans-positioning. In this response, Macaulay clarifies *how* sympathy allows an individual to acquire the all-important notions of equity, namely, by habituating a switch in perspective which, presumably, allows one to feel the sufferings of another creature.[10] When I sympathize with the hunted hare, I am imagining myself being chased by baying hounds and mounted riders, heart rate racing, senses attuned, fearing a painful death. But the hare does not, and according to Macaulay, *cannot*, sympathize with me in this complex way. Neither can the cat sympathize with her prey, which is why it is not inconsistent with God's divine benevolence or perfect equity that cats play with the mice they go on to kill.[11] But because I can, if I do sympathize in these ways, I will be carried away from cruelty and towards a more genuine and impartial benevolence.

Macaulay's response to this objection returns us to the bedrock of her moral philosophy, her theology. Along with the need to preserve her theology from any implication of inconsistency in God's benevolence, equity, or justice, Macaulay's response also reiterates her acceptance of an order of being. Humans have more complex capacities than animals, earning them a higher place in the order of things, a place that carries with it a duty to develop those capacities so as to be deserving of that place. Humans in her moment are educated to feel only for their fellow humans, and to treat other creatures with perfunctory mercy at best. Her claim is that these forms of treatment fail to track a common ground between humans and all other fellow creatures: the shared capacity for physical and mental suffering or happiness. So long as this common ground—this notion of equity—is overlooked, we are guilty of inequitable and inconsistent principles, and we fall short of virtue.

4. Conclusion: Towards Reform

Macaulay's *Letters on Education* is a complex text that takes up a wide range of different topics under the general umbrella of a discussion of human education. I have tried to show that the theme of human relations to animals is a thread that does not merely wind through the text but serves as a core structuring element, uniting and supporting her theology, moral philosophy, and moral psychology. Macaulay offers a strong case for reforming moral education, especially through changes to the existing treatment of animals. In order to cultivate true benevolence, we must reform the impressions, associations, habits, and examples children are exposed to. In doing so, we might correct the moral mis-education of humans, producing not "monster[s] of cruelty" and "eternal scourge[s] to all inferior beings" (I.3, 23), but truly benevolent and caring fellow creatures. In a moving passage, Macaulay silently

[10] In this, Macaulay seems to align herself with a conception of sympathy like that of Adam Smith or David Hume; see Gordon (forthcoming) for an extensive discussion of Macaulay's views on sympathy, positioning them in relation to Hume's. Further work to compare Macaulay and Smith would be valuable.

[11] Why did God create cats and mice if this is how things play out? Macaulay does not consider this question specifically, but in a later consideration of the permissibility of hunting for the purpose of population control she states that "this part of the system of providential government lies quite out of the depth of human knowledge to comprehend, and must ever remain an object of faith and confidence" (III.2, 356). It is beyond us to understand God's plan in populating the world with cats who play with the mice they slay.

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quotes Bernard Mandeville's (1988) vivid description of the slaughter of "a large and gentle bullock," arguing against his conclusion that such a sight would produce "commiseration," even in a hardened "follower of Descartes" (II.8, 277–78, quoting Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees* I, 180–81). She holds, "Mandeville is mistaken; so forcible is the power of habit, that these dreadful sights are daily seen without exciting horror, or one soft tear or sigh of sympathy; and consequently, habits such as these, must tend to weaken and even to destroy this heavenly quality" (II.8, 278). She calls for a range of reforms following this statement, making it clear that until humans alter their treatment of animals—including the inconsistent system of feeling for them, barbarous customs, partial prejudices, and uninformed assumptions—we will fall far short of the virtue and happiness of which we are capable.

More work is needed to compare Macaulay's approach to that of her contemporaries, especially since she seems uniquely to unite some of the starting points and arguments associated with the rational theologians of her moment with the educational focus of didactic literature, and with the affective and sentimental calls for reform found in poetry and other literary forms. Also unusual and worth further attention is her lack of interest in framing the discussion of animals in terms of natural rights, reserving the language of rights for her discussion of the proper relations between rulers and their subjects. Moreover, Macaulay's position as primarily a political theorist and historian opens new avenues for situating her calls for reform to human-animal relations. Unlike other women writers, Macaulay does not focus solely on domestic educational reform, but also recognizes that "as laws, example, precept, and custom are the prime sources of all our impressions, it must be greatly in the power of government to effect, by a proper use of these sources, that improvement on which true civilization depends" (II.8, 276). She continues:

> Could we therefore, by the spirit of our laws, exclude from society the operation of every impression which partook of the smallest tincture of cruelty, and did we encourage the operation of every impression which had a benevolent tendency, it appears probable, that we should exalt the sympathizing feeling to a degree which might act more forcibly than the coercion of rigorous laws—to the restraining all acts of violence, and consequently all acts which militate against the public peace. For example, were government to act on so liberal a sentiment of benevolence, as to take under the protection of law the happiness of the brute species, so far as to punish in offenders that rigorous, that barbarous treatment they meet with in the course of their useful services, would it not tend to increase sympathy? *would it not enlarge our notions of equity*, by pointing out to public observation this moral truth, that tenderness is due to those creatures, without whose daily labour society would be bereaved of every enjoyment which renders existence comfortable? (II.8, 276–77, emphasis added)

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Macaulay is calling for legislation that punishes cruelty to domesticated animals who labor for humans, arguing that this would have the effect of increasing sympathy, enlarging our ideas of equity, and indicating the "moral truth" that tenderness is due to such creatures. Macaulay is an original thinker, a powerful philosopher, and a rich and subtle writer, and her works deserve increased attention.[12]

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