

ANDREW LINZEY**Animal Rights: A Reply to Barclay**

The following comments are in response to an article by Dr Oliver Barclay entitled 'Animal Rights: a Critique' (Science and Christian Belief (1992) 4, 49–61).

1. Human uniqueness. Barclay prefaces his criticisms of my work by a discussion of the views of two philosophers, Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Inevitably my own contribution is seen as continuous with these philosophers and understood through the same critical lens. This is fair to some extent—since there are some continuities between us—but there are also discontinuities which Barclay fails to grasp. Singer and Regan must speak for themselves as to whether they have been misrepresented as at least in one instance Singer has been,¹ but Barclay's judgement that 'The (sic) animal rights literature rightly points out that their whole position depends upon refusing to draw any sharp distinction between animals and people' (p. 54) is not relevant to myself. As Barclay acknowledges 'Linzey as a Christian does make a distinction between man and animals, though its nature is not very clear' (p. 58). In fact, one of the reasons I give for adopting the concept of 'theos-rights' is precisely because the 'unique significance of man in this respect consists in his capacity to perceive God's will and to actualise it within his own life'.² Far from underrating the spiritual and moral significance of humankind, my thesis depends upon it.³

Barclay makes much of how animal rightists seek to deduce an 'ought' from an 'is'—in the matter of sentience (p. 53). But he fails to see that he is open to entirely the same charge when it comes to human uniqueness. He emphasises human difference without explaining how and why it is morally relevant (see 2 below).

1 One major inaccuracy is detectable in the first line (p. 49) where Singer is identified as 'one of the leading advocates of animal rights'. In fact Singer has gone out of his way to oppose the notion of animal rights and the ambiguous use of the term in his early work he now 'regrets', e.g. 'Why is it surprising that I have little to say about the nature of rights? It would only be surprising to one who assumes that my case for animal liberation is based upon rights and, in particular, upon the idea of extending rights to animals. But this is not my position at all. I have little to say about rights because rights are not important to my argument'. 'The Parable of the Fox and the Unliberated Animals', *Ethics* (1978) 88, p. 122; also discussed in Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, pp. 219–30).

2 Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (London: SPCK and New York: Crossroad, 1987) p. 98. The last five pages of chapter 5 are given over to spelling out my 'theologically qualified' position on rights (pp. 94–8).

3 See, e.g., Andrew Linzey, 'The Servant Species: Humanity as Priesthood', *Between the Species: A Journal of Ethics* (1990), 6, pp. 109–117, and 'The Theological Basis of Animal Rights', *The Christian Century*, (1991), 108, p. 908.

2. *Human dominion.* Barclay maintains that I am 'frightened of the whole concept of dominion even though it is clearly biblical' (p. 59). Untrue. In my book to which he refers, I go out of my way to explain how, while some Christian commentators have sometimes interpreted dominion as despotism, the idea as expressed within the Genesis text suggests otherwise. I summarise my position as follows: 'Jews and Christians have been right to point to man's God-given power over the non-human. Where they have been wrong in the past is in interpreting what this power means. If full weight is given to Christ as our moral exemplar, our power cannot be understood as legitimate except as service, which is necessarily costly and sacrificial'.⁴ Barclay fails to grasp this Christological argument completely. Human difference and power over the non-human are not by themselves sufficient moral justifications for our exploitation of animals. A further question has to be posed, namely, How are we to exercise our superiority? I argue that Jesus provides us with the essential model here, namely lordship exercised through service.

3. *Theos rights.* Barclay argues that: 'When (Linzey) talks about the "theos rights" of higher animals . . . he is introducing a confusion, because what he means is God's rights in his creation and this is an entirely different thing from animals having rights. He has in a sense turned the concept of rights around, but cannot resist the temptation to use the word (sic) rights of animals' (p. 58). Again, Barclay fails to understand that what I am doing is significantly different from Regan or Singer. Right at the start of my discussion of rights, I make it clear in what sense I use this term⁵ and subsequently explain how this differs from other secular attempts.⁶ This is not 'confusion', it is a different theory of rights. Barclay argues that God's rights are 'an entirely different thing from animals having rights' but the whole point of my discussion is to show how it is possible to ground the rights of the creature in the rights of the Creator to have what is created treated with respect. Barclay may legitimately disagree with my view, but he has no right to call it a 'confusion', or dismiss it a priori without argument.

Barclay maintains that 'The Christian approach starts with duties or responsibilities and acknowledges rights only if they arise out of duties or responsibilities' (p. 56; my emphasis). This is breathtakingly dismissive of the long tradition of rights theory within Christendom. Roman Catholic rights theory has grown out of a long tradition of natural law, and in particular, the 'dignity and rights of the human person' was regarded by John XXIII as the dominating theme of modern catholic teaching.⁷ Again,

4 *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, op. cit., p. 29.

5 I offer a three-point definition of theos-rights, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, op. cit., p. 69.

6 I consider six arguments at length against my rights theory (pp. 69–94) and how it differs from that of Regan (pp. 82–6) *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, op. cit.

7 John XXIII cited in David Hollenbach, S. J., *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) p. 42; discussed in Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) pp. 131–137.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer—to take only one protestant example—strongly defends—on biblical grounds—the primacy of rights from which duties flow and not vice versa.⁸ Barclay is free to challenge the tradition which holds to notions of rights; he has no right to claim his view as ‘The Christian approach’.

4. *Spirit and animal life.* Barclay does not like the way in which I draw the line between what I call ‘Spirit filled, breathing creatures composed of flesh and blood’—whose rights we should respect—and other creatures. Indeed he appears to deny that it is the special operation of the Spirit which gives life to animal beings. He writes that ‘Like Skinner (here he presumably means Singer) and Regan, (Linzey) is claiming too much for too few animals and so weakens his case’ (p. 59)—even though he himself argues that humans have some special responsibility towards the ‘higher animals’ because ‘they suffer more’ (p. 60). Despite what he says about my ‘very loose use of biblical passages’, Barclay interprets Psalm 104 as not presupposing the activity of the Spirit in relation to individual animals but only in creating ‘a new generation’ of life (p. 59). Is the Spirit then only the creative source of species and not individual lives within species as well? I do not think the judgement of Karl Barth (on whom I draw heavily⁹) can be gainsaid: ‘According to the Old Testament, neither soul nor the Spirit can be simply denied to the beasts . . . the creative Spirit which awakens man to life is also the life-principle of the beasts . . .’¹⁰

5. *Doubt and conscience.* Barclay argues that ‘One of the problems with writers such as Linzey (sic) is that they manage constantly to create a situation of doubt, or possibly ill-conscience, about a responsible stewardship of the world and the use of animals’ (p. 60). I am charged with this because I raise questions about the morality of pet keeping and killing wild animals. I fail to see why raising questions of doubt and conscience should be castigated in this way. Our exploitation of animals is massive: we hunt, ride, shoot, fish, wear, cage, factory farm and experiment upon millions every year. If we take seriously the biblical ideas that animals are our fellow creatures, that their lives belong to God, and that we are set in a position of God-like responsibility over them, it seems only right that our consciences should sometimes be troubled as to whether what we now do is acceptable to God.

Barclay wants under this category of ‘responsible’ to justify much of what we now do to animals, but he fails to see that what is responsible stewardship is the question which must be asked of each generation. Here,

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed by Eberhard Bethge, ET N. H. Smith (London: SCM Press, 1971) pp. 127 f.; discussed in *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, op. cit., pp. 70–2.

⁹ For my critique of Barth, see Andrew Linzey, *The Neglected Creature: The Doctrine of the Non-Human Creation and its Relationship with the Human in the Work of Karl Barth*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis (London University, 1986), and also *Animals and Trinitarian Doctrine: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth*, forthcoming in 1992 by Edwin Mellen Press.

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960) p. 361n.

as elsewhere, Barclay ignores the long history within Christendom of profoundly negative attitudes to animals. He lists some important biblical ideas (and I have done at length elsewhere¹¹), but does not allow them to illuminate his understanding. For example, if cruelty or thoughtlessness to animals is 'a serious fault' (p. 60), then we need as an urgent requirement to review all our dealings with animals—in farms, laboratories and in 'sporting' activities—which cause pain and suffering. This minimal insight alone would provide a massive agenda. As to the protest against pricking consciences, it invites the response of Albert Schweitzer that a 'good conscience is an invention of the devil'.¹²

The Revd Professor Andrew Linzey is IFAW Senior Research Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford, and also Special Professor of Theology in the University of Nottingham.

11 See, e.g., Andrew Linzey, *The Status of Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Birmingham: Woodbrooke College, 1985) esp. pp. 26–7.

12 Albert Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967) p. 221; discussed in Andrew Linzey, 'The Place of Animals in Creation—A Christian View' in Tom Regan (ed.) *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) pp. 139–142.

The First
DONALD MACKAY LECTURE
entitled
'TRANSGENIC ORGANISMS IN THE MARKET PLACE'
will be given by
Prof. Derek Burke, Vice-Chancellor of the
University of East Anglia and Chairman of the
Advisory Committee for Novel Foods and
Processes
at Keele University
on September 2, 1993, at 8.0 p.m.
during the British Association for the
Advancement of Science Meeting

Dr. Oliver Barclay responds

I hope that a brief response to Andrew Linzey's 'Reply' may help to clarify a few issues. I am sorry that my original article was not more complete.

I agree that the concept of 'dominion' has been misused by some Christians. I do not however, think that we help by reducing it to 'service' to animals. Stewardship is a more biblically-based concept for this purpose and includes elements of creative development of resources.

We may or may not agree on the nature of the distinctiveness of humankind. The statement that he quotes in his reply does not necessarily involve any ontological differences. His definition could be read as merely functional. I hope we are agreed but I am still not sure. Its relevance is that it determines the kind of dominion that God gave to humankind rather than to superior animals or even angels (see Psalm 8).

When I criticised the concept of 'Spirit filled, breathing creatures composed of flesh and blood' as those that need protection, and need to be distinguished from other animals, my point was that the biblical passages he quotes (1) do not speak of them as Spirit filled, but rather as created afresh by the Spirit and (2) they include equally all animals, however lowly. I do not at all deny the activity of the Spirit in giving and maintaining life in all creatures. To call only some animals Spirit filled is to create a weak link in the arguments for defending animals from exploitation. It also misuses the biblical concept of being Spirit filled, which is applied only to some people some of the time.

On 'theos rights' others must judge; but the confusion arises from using the concept of rights in two very different senses: God's rights and the rights of (only some) animals. A Natural Law approach to animal rights is surely something different from 'theos rights'.

On doubt and conscience I had in mind also his remarks about animal food and farming.

I am glad that we are largely agreed in the end as to the duties that humans have towards animals. I argue that we would do better to abandon the language of rights, which will be counter-productive if it is not better and more straightforwardly justifiable. The old concepts of 'welfare' and duties are more clearly biblical, and easier to grasp and define. They also apply to the whole range of animals, and indeed to the whole environment, rather than to only one group of animals.

Dr. Oliver Barclay is a Zoologist, was for many years Secretary of 'Christians in Science' and is one of the founding editors of 'Science and Christian Belief'.