CHAPTER VII

THE INDIVISIBILITY OF CRUELTY AND THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF HUMANE REFORM

[The] protection of brutes from cruelty does not prevent labor in other directions, but promotes it. The sentiment of humanity is a unit, and if drawn forth in any one direction it reaches out toward all living things. Men differ widely in their sympathies and sensitivities. The suffering of women affects some the most; of children, others. Some take special interest in the colored race, and some the Indians. One individual feels a particular interest in horses, and others in dogs. It is well to develop these sensibilities in any possible direction.

"An Objection Answered." The Animals' Friend (1874)

The effort to build a national humane movement centered on the shocking cruelties of cattle transportation during the 1870s and 1880s. But the nationalization of animal protection also rested on the social and cultural concerns that it shared with two other reforms—temperance and child protection—and its affinities with a range of other Gilded Age reforms. Its connections with these various causes accounted for much of the strength of animal protection during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The movements for temperance, humane treatment of animals, and child protection all reflected deep concerns about the ramifications of cruelty and violence—for individuals, the family, and the social order. Each cause addressed issues that straddled the line between private and public spheres. Humane advocates in particular acted with the urgent conviction that, if unchecked, the individual's tendency for cruel and violent conduct could have grave consequences for the community in which he lived.

The nexus between animal protection and child protection did not rest merely upon shared affinities. It was also the basis for incorporation of the American Humane
Association (AHA), whose leaders sought to form a national organization through which they could effectively promulgate common concerns for the helpless and the dependent. For a time, the AHA presided over a proliferation of societies that combined child and animal protection work; in many smaller communities, this seemed the best way to advance both causes.

In addition to temperance and child rescue, animal protection complemented numerous other philanthropies of the Gilded Age, especially those focused on the defense and relief of the vulnerable and the indigent. Humane advocates made this complementarity evident in their charitable work and their final bequests, which included many human-centered causes. Such demonstrations of support signaled their commitment to a broader spirit of charity that encompassed both humans and animals. Humane advocates did not diverge from the era's major philanthropic impulses; rather, they sought to extend them into a new arena, that of non-human life.

**Individual Demoralization and Social Degeneration**

From the seventeenth century onward, the demoralizing impact of cruelty upon its perpetrators has served as a rationale for animal protection. Today, the links between animal abuse and the socially maladapted personality have been convincingly established in psychological and social scientific studies.\(^1\) During the Gilded Age and the Progressive era, such links were assumed, if not empirically substantiated, and humane

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advocates frequently cited anecdotal evidence of the relationship between cruelty to animals and violence against humans. There was good reason for paying attention to individuals who displayed violent tendencies toward animals. When John Fields was hanged at Williamsport, Pennsylvania, for killing his brother-in-law, one newspaper reported that Fields had a history of abusing animals. Moreover, according to Caroline Earle White and Mary F. Lovell, there were at least three cases in Philadelphia where people arrested for cruelty to animals later gained public infamy as murderers.²

Humane advocates did not perceive cruelty simply as a personal vice in need of correction. It was a moral problem for the whole society, as concern about the effects of cruelty upon individuals necessarily focused discussion on the larger social world in which they lived. Middle-class supporters of animal protection believed that if cruelty went unchecked it had the potential to spread and corrupt the entire social body. Animal protectionists thus became “culture builders,” promoting notions of the good and proper throughout their society. Caring for animals was certainly thought to make people better human beings. By extension, though, all benevolent efforts directed toward animal welfare would make society better, and mark its civilized status.³

In time, this broader contention became a cornerstone of humane rhetoric and ideology, and underpinned animal protectionists’ attempts to promulgate humane values

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³ I rely upon the definitions and insights Jonas Fryman and Orvar Löfgren present in Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
within the wider social sphere. Early humane leaders were confident about the civilizing effects of their efforts. Just two years into the existence of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Board secretary N. P. Hosack proudly proclaimed the dramatic improvement its work had wrought in New York City. "Nor is the brute the only gainer by this reform," Hosack noted, for "the advantage is on the part of the master, who is thus taught self-control, and society at large are also gainers by this subjugation of the demons of passion and violence in its midst."^4

If to be cruel was to be less than human, then to tolerate cruelty jeopardized a society’s claim to civilization. Therefore, it was incumbent upon those who recognized the importance of benevolent demeanor to instruct and influence others who did not. It was their further responsibility to socialize the entire public sphere in accordance with humane sensitivities. The elimination of cruelty as a visible phenomenon was an essential element in this undertaking. In 1868, importuning Mayor John T. Hoffman to abate the violence of the dog roundup, Henry Bergh quoted a moralist’s comment that “nothing tends more to demoralize the public mind and develop the instincts of cruelty in children, than the spectacle of that faithful friend and companion of man being murdered or tortured in the public streets.”^5 The same observation could have been made about the social implications of mistreating or killing other animals in a variety of conspicuously visible public contexts. Humane advocates viewed the end of dog roundups, the mitigation of cruelty to animals en route to slaughter, and the abolition of frivolous abuse


^5 Ibid., 53.
or killing of animals occasioned by sport or fashion as tangible improvements that would redound to the greater social benefit.

Justice Charles Shea underscored this principle of uplift in *Christie v. Bergh* (1874), in which a horse car driver challenged the ASPCA agents' power to arrest. Shea denied that anti-cruelty legislation was an unreasonable attempt to regulate the rights of property. To the contrary, he insisted, it "truly has its origin in the intent to save a just standard of humane feeling from being debased by pernicious feelings of bad example—the human heart from being hardened by public and frequent exhibitions of cruelty to dumb creatures."6

Such considerations motivated the effort to nationalize humane work. In 1872, Bergh wrote to the governors of all the states that had not yet chartered anti-cruelty societies or enacted modern animal protection statutes, encouraging them to do so. Bergh, George Angell, and (to a lesser extent) Caroline Earle White were already assisting individuals all over the country who wished to form anti-cruelty organizations in their own communities. Both Bergh and Angell undertook promotional tours, trying to spark the formation of anti-cruelty societies elsewhere. In one late 1873 junket, Bergh visited Buffalo, Cleveland, Toledo, Chicago, St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Columbus, lecturing to large public audiences and participating in newspaper interviews. Such tours laid the groundwork for the development of a national animal protection

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movement, helping to propagate the humane ideal in smaller communities away from the eastern seaboard.  

The representational strategy that Bergh adopted for the ASPCA exhibit at the Centennial Exposition in 1876 affirmed this mission of national social transformation. The display at Philadelphia confronted visitors with a shocking collection of spurs, goads, mallets, spears, whips, chains, and other instruments confiscated during the first ten years of the ASPCA's existence. It also included a stuffed bulldog and two stuffed fighting cocks from the New York animal pits, and illustrations of pigeon shooting and the monument to Louis Bonard. When several New York newspapers attacked the exhibit as unsuitable for a fair devoted to "the development of American industry" and "the influence of republican institutions," Bergh responded that "the evidence of the achievements of these Societies on the side of humanity, remain legitimate proof of national progress." Conceding that the display was not aesthetically pleasing, Bergh pointed out that it nevertheless served to remind visitors to the exposition that "the moral element has not been neglected," placing on display the very objects whose use had once affronted humane sensibility in the public sphere.  

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Animal Protection as a Woman's Reform

The humane movement's extraordinary growth during the decade after the first SPCAs formed depended heavily upon the support of women. Animal protection shared some of the characteristics of such manifestations of social feminism as the club movement and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). To a great extent, these reforms allowed women to extend their influence into public life without explicit rejection of prevailing doctrines concerning their proper place. If anything, animal protection benefited from essentialized views of women as the guardians of private and public morality, naturally gentle and tender. In most instances, too, humane work provided critical space for female institution-building activity.9

Several authors have remarked upon the extraordinarily high percentage of women who participated in humane work, although scholarly interpretation and quantitative analysis have mainly concentrated on the female constituency of anti-vivisection and not the broader field of animal protection. However, a review of 479 individuals who included the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) and its sister organization, the American Humane Education Society (AHES), in their wills corroborates the claim that women were stronger supporters of organized animal protection than men were. Between 1871 and 1915, women left more

than two out of every three (68 percent) bequests to the two organizations. Women also predominated among those who left bequests to the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA) between 1869 and 1915. Of 118 individual testators whose gender could be identified (eight donors' gender could not), 58 percent (68) were women.\(^\text{10}\)

The conspicuous participation of women in post-Civil War anti-cruelty work rested in part upon their earlier engagement with the kindness-to-animals ethic as an element of domestic education ideology. In the antebellum era, many mothers tried to inculcate the values of benevolence, mercy, and kindness in their children, on the assumption that the moral sensibility they encouraged would in turn ensure the ethical progress of society. In the postbellum setting, some women strove to project these same values into the public sphere, promoting humane education outreach, supporting legal restraints against cruelty, endowing horse fountains, and participating in animal rescue and relief. The organization of humane societies in the 1860s formalized a set of ideals that women had worked for decades to disseminate within American culture through the kindness-to-animals didactic.

Many observers and participants believed women's particular qualities as gentle, loving, and sympathetic persons made them the ideal bearers of the humane ethic to the wider world. In 1871, at the second annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA), Mayor Daniel Fox of Philadelphia remarked that "there was no power in the country like that of good women for the production of good works. In their hands, a society can be made eminently useful in the softening influence which they have the power to assert." A few years later, Pennsylvania State Senator A. D. Harlan proclaimed that if "he had the power he would put all humane and charitable work in the hands of women, believing that through their noble nature they were better fitted to do humane work than men." Henry Merwin, author of numerous books and articles on the humane treatment of the horse, expressed similar optimism.\(^{11}\)

Such widely held views about the innate sensitivities of women did not lay the groundwork for their rise to formal leadership in the movement, however. During their first years of operation, the major societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals excluded women from their boards of directors. Initially, at least, the men who founded the ASPCA, the PSPCA, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [MSPCA] all shared in the conventional view that women ought not to play too visible a role in the public affairs of reform organizations. In a letter to George Angell about the policy of excluding females from the MSPCA's board, Henry Bergh noted that "the irresistible power of woman lies in the mighty influence of her gentle and melodious

\(^{11}\) Women's Branch, PSPCA. Minutes of Apr. 19, 1871, Women's Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Papers, Women's Humane Society, Bensalem, PA [WHS Papers]; Silver Festival of the Women's Branch of the Pennsylvania SPCA (1893), 25; and Henry C. Merwin, "When Woman Takes the Reins," "Ladies' Home Journal" (June 1893), 8.
voice—guiding, counseling, and **controlling** the affairs of this world. She mars the beauty, and lessens the sway of her actions whenever she attempts to do that which pertains to the attributes of the sterner sex.”

Like Morris Waln in Philadelphia, however, Angell apparently concluded that women were essential to the success of the work. By 1872, Emily Appleton and another woman were on the MSPCA board; by the next year, the number of female board members had increased to five. Moreover, in 1877, Angell explicitly recommended the addition of women as board members to Illinois Humane Society officials, and he underscored the vital practical support of women on numerous occasions.

Bergh, on the other hand, held to his opinions, and women did not serve on the ASPCA board until many decades after his death. Indeed, some humane workers believed that he had not done enough to draw women into active service. Moreover, some of Bergh’s successors, especially John P. Haines, had ambivalent interactions with women working independently on animal welfare issues in New York.

Even as men headed many of the major organizations of the 1860s and 1870s, women provided crucial momentum to anti-cruelty work. Caroline Earle White was a central figure. Emily Appleton provided critical financial backing for some of the movement’s most important projects. Numerous other women, while less prominent, also carried the work forward. In Bergh’s own New York City, Elbridge Gerry told an

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12 Bergh to Angell, 24 Apr. 1868, ASPCA-NY, LBK 3: 397-98.


audience that “whenever Mr. Bergh was censured by one man he was endorsed by fifty ladies.” Without the support of women, Gerry averred, “the society would never have made such rapid progress.”

Women demonstrated a special commitment to the humane education of children. Angell reported that women comprised the majority of those who participated in Band of Mercy work, and of those who contacted him about the subject. It was one of these women, Georgiana Kendall, who brought Black Beauty to Angell’s attention, and, as producers of didactic literature incorporating the humane ethic, women consistently outnumbered men, codifying the kindness-to-animals theme in numerous works. All but one of the AHES Gold Mine Series authors were female, and women penned most of the era’s animal autobiographies.

Women served the cause in many other ways as well. They endowed fountains, founded animal rest havens, ran watering stations and veterinary dispensaries, organized fairs and other events, and underwrote the publication and distribution of important books and tracts. They were the pioneers of animal rescue work in virtually every community, launching both formal and informal roundup and animal control operations. They supervised anti-cruelty agents, testified as witnesses in cruelty prosecutions, and, on

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16 George T. Angell, “Female Suffrage,” ODA 23 (July 1890), 18; and “Miss Kendall of New York City,” ODA 30 (Nov. 1897), 68.
occasion, challenged public cruelty in the streets. In a few instances, women even instigated arrests or physically intervened against the abuse of animals.  

The fact that the majority of individuals arrested for cruelty to animals were men provided another, more fundamental, reason for some women's interest. Many came to believe that the problem of cruelty to animals arose directly from male propensities toward violence. For Lydia Maria Child, such cruelty foretold the mistreatment of women by the men in their lives. "Wherever I have seen men gentle, patient, and considerate toward animals I have always observed that such men were good sons, husbands, and fathers," Child wrote. "A woman had better beware how she marries a man that kicks his dog, beats his oxen, and stands talking while his horse is left unblanketed in the cold wind, or in summertime tied fast, helplessly in the power of tormenting flies."  

Such a gendered rationale for women's participation in animal protection led inexorably to the proverbial cruelty of boys. In the minds of humane reformers, there had to be a connection between poor socialization of boys and the unvarnished cruelty of men. Indeed, by the 1860s, when organized animal protection work began, the conviction had already crystallized that the proper education of boys should be at the heart of the movement's preventive strategy. Although some early didactic material


18 Lydia Maria Child, "The Relation of Man to Animals," Independent, 3 Mar. 1870, 3.
featured girls behaving cruelly, humane authors and activists alike held to a consistent representation of the problem as a boyish vice. These advocates simply assumed that boys were predisposed toward unthinking cruelty to animals in a way that girls were not. While girls in humane literature served as voices for compassionate treatment, boys dominated the genre’s reprobates, tying objects to dogs’ tails, torturing insects, robbing or smashing birds’ nests, and drowning and stoning birds, cats, and small mammals.19

Female proponents of humane education believed that proper mothering was the most important avenue of socialization. In one line, Harriet Beecher Stowe captured the essence of the moral mother’s responsibility to instill gentleness in a boy’s character. “A boy has in him a sort of wild, uncultured love of domination and sense of power,” Stowe wrote, “which are no sins, but may be made the foundations of great virtue, if he be early taught that his strength and power of control are given him for the protection of weakness, and not for the oppression of it.”20

In the era of organized humane work, animal advocates’ deepening belief that childhood socialization was the key to their movement’s success helped to fuel the ever-greater emphasis they came to place on the humane education of children in the public schools. In the minds of humane advocates, instruction in kindness was essential to the ultimate elimination of cruelty. The properly educated child would have due regard for animals, avoid the temptations of vice, and grow up as a well-socialized individual who treated his dependents—women, children, and animals—with kindness and loving regard.


In addition to the lesson of kind regard for one’s dependents, teaching strategies emphasized the utility of birds and animals, on the assumption that thoughtless cruelty might be stemmed by a greater appreciation for animal life and its practical value.21

Stories about animals aided in the inculcation and reinforcement of appropriate domestic relations as well, and female authors frequently employed such narratives as part of an effort to foster ideal models of middle-class masculinity. Lydia Maria Child’s use of animals as symbolic exemplars of moral conduct for men exemplified this approach. In “My Swallow Family,” Child described a male bird who doted upon his offspring and helped his mate to fashion their nest: “It was evident that the bird had formed correct opinions on ‘the woman question;’ for, during the process of incubation, he volunteered to perform his share of household duty.”22

Animal protectionists trumpeted humane education as an instrument to prevent delinquency and turpitude and to foster good citizenship, and were able to draw upon the common belief that cruelty had a contagious aspect. An editorial in the Cincinnati Post advocated the teaching of kindness to animals in the interest of larger goals, especially social order: “Brutality and crime--crime of all sorts and conditions--are brothers. The boy who grows up brutal will seldom develop into a good citizen. . . . He will belong to that great class of undesirables which force cities to maintain large police forces.”

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writer underscored his conviction that “brutality, even of the kind that kills inoffensive birds with pebbles in a slingshot, grows on one. It feeds on its own activity.”

Temperance

Its alignment with temperance further elucidates the gendered character of humane reform. The two movements were congenial complements, linked by bourgeois assumptions and common tactics. Each depended on female constituencies concerned with reshaping the behavior of men. Like temperance, kindness to animals was easily cast as an emblem of individual virtue and domestic harmony. Both reforms proceeded on the assumption that children were tractable subjects who could be led to genteel patterns of conduct (even if their parents could not). The two causes also shared what temperance historian Jack Blocker has termed “the theme of self-control that lay at the core of middle-class identity in the nineteenth century.”

Most SPCAs had handled cases in which drunkenness played a part in cruelty or neglect. Humane advocates understood that the suffering of animals, especially horses, often resulted from vicious beatings by intoxicated drivers and caretakers. Sometimes, moreover, a groggeries might be the venue of a dogfight. On other occasions, agents might find a badly neglected animal outside a saloon with its dissolute owner inside on a binge. Caroline Earle White believed that a great portion of the cruelty that the humane movement confronted was the result of intoxication. “By it,” she said, “men are changed

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23 “Teach Humanity in Schools,” ODA 44 (Dec. 1911), 98.

into demons, and, losing all self-control and consciousness of what they are doing, beat and maim or kill anything that comes in contact with them." Temperance was entirely compatible with animal protectionists' goal of moderating the emotional anger and unrestrained recklessness that often led to cruelty. Given this understanding, White conjectured, humanitarians might do well to add their efforts to the temperance crusade.  

Humane work greatly benefited when the WCTU embraced kindness to animals as a platform during its "Do Everything" phase under Frances Willard. After its formation in 1874, the WCTU rapidly became the largest and most influential women's organization in the country. Focused on the goals of promoting standards of respectable behavior and not on acquisition of the vote, the WCTU significantly expanded the base of women's social activity. With its broad and growing constituency, the WCTU brought the anti-cruelty cause to a far greater audience than the humane movement could have reached on its own.

Humane education, as a preventive reform, especially appealed to temperance advocates, who, like animal protectionists, targeted their efforts at the socialization of boys. Temperance also provided useful strategic examples; the English movement's Bands of Hope, in which children pledged themselves to purity of thought and action, served as models for the American Bands of Mercy. George Angell made extensive use of the WCTU networks to promote and distribute humane literature. Some WCTU

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propagandists employed humane publications in their work, and it was in large measure due to such support that, by 1893, *Black Beauty* had been translated into numerous languages and shipped all over the world.26 There was a clear relationship in this and other works between the values of humaneness and the temperance habit. The villains in *Black Beauty*, *Beautiful Joe*, and other anti-cruelty novels were drunkards, while their protagonists were pious, gentle, and abstemious. In *Pussy Meow*, a feline autobiography, one humane household displayed a photograph of Frances Willard on its fireplace mantel. Such characterizations gave these novels "cross-over" appeal and reinforced the link between the two movements.27

Mary F. Lovell (1843-1932), Caroline Earle White’s close associate in Pennsylvania humane work, played the critical role in linking temperance and humane organizations. In 1891, with Willard’s blessing, Lovell established and led the WCTU’s Department of Mercy, authoring numerous leaflets and articles under its banner. The *Union Signal* commonly highlighted anti-cruelty work, Department of Mercy reports, humane issue alerts, book reviews, fiction, photography, artwork, and advertisements.

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26 See “The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union,” *ODA* 24 (Nov. 1891), 65; and “Our Translations of Black Beauty,” *ODA* 26 (Sept. 1893), 41. Angell often cited the supportive remarks Willard offered when she enrolled as a member of the MSPCA. The WCTU distributed a special address Angell wrote for its November 1887 convention, repr. in *ODA* 20 (December 1887), 79-84. For Willard’s April 28, 1887 letter, see “Good News,” *ODA* 20 (June 1887), 4.

Frances Willard’s cat, Toots, was the subject of occasional features in the Signal, and for a time a photograph of the two circulated to admiring supporters.28

In addition to Lovell, numerous other women combined temperance and humane instruction in their outreach to local schools. Such workers were able to build on the momentum and precedent of the drive for compulsory scientific temperance instruction in the schools of every state, waged successfully between 1878 and 1901. In October 1908, Lovell urged the national convention of the WCTU to campaign for kindness-to-animals instruction, and many WCTU members participated in the compulsory humane education movement between 1900 and 1920.29

The two causes shared a number of prominent adherents. Sarah Knowles Bolton (1841-1916), educated at the Hartford Female Seminary, began writing in the 1860s and eventually gained fame as an author of juvenile biographies. In 1874, she and her husband Charles became deeply involved in the Women’s Crusade in Ohio. Bolton joined the WCTU and served for a few years as its assistant corresponding secretary. She


29 On the campaign for compulsory temperance education, see Merle Curti, The Social Ideas of American Educators (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 248-49; Jack Blocker, American Temperance Movements, 82; and Alison M. Parker, Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 42. On the role of WCTU workers in promoting humane education, see “Tenth Annual Report of the WCTU Department of Mercy,” JOZ 10 (Mar. 1901), 28; “Mrs. Lovell and Humane Education,” ODA 50 (June 1909), 10, “The San Diego League,” ODA 49 (Sept. 1916), 58; and “Our Youngest Band,” ODA 54 (Nov. 1921), 94. In 1897, Emma Page, a blind WCTU state superintendent, authored the humane education text Heart Culture, which was widely distributed in several editions. See Our Fellow Creatures 8 (Jan. 1900), 3; and “Obituary,” JOZ 19 (Sept. 1910), 111. On the compulsory humane education campaigns, see Chapter XV.
wrote several books and tracts concerning alcohol, and, in one novel, *The Present Problem* (1874), she invoked the increasingly familiar links between cruelty to animals, child and spousal abuse, and intemperance. Bolton also wrote several titles devoted to the welfare of animals.  

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919), one of the late nineteenth century's most popular authors, also supported both movements. Wilcox came from a family of Good Templars, and temperance was a theme in many of her works. Like so many advocates, Wilcox was often called upon to justify her concern for animals. "Many times I am asked why the suffering of animals should call forth more sympathy from me than the suffering of human beings, why I work in this direction of charitable work more than toward any other," Wilcox wrote. "My answer is that because I believe that this work includes all the education and lines of reform which are needed to make a perfect circle of peace and good will about the earth." Wilcox was the author of numerous appeals for non-human animals, and her poem "Voice of the Voiceless" quickly assumed the status of an anthem for humane advocates after it appeared in 1913.  

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A third notable supporter of both causes was the writer and feminist Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward. Ward was an active temperance worker whose writing also touched on alcohol's evils. After embracing the anti-vivisection cause in the 1890s, Ward employed the theme in several novels and assumed a prominent role as a public critic of animal experimentation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, she was a fixture at annual committee hearings concerning vivisection in the Massachusetts legislature.33

Similar affinities were evident among male supporters of humane work. Abraham Firth, station master at Clappville, Massachusetts, and later superintendent of the Boston and Worcester Railroad, served as Secretary of the AHA, compiled a humane education reader, and helped to edit Our Dumb Animals. As part of his commitment to the temperance cause, Firth helped to establish coffeehouses that served as alternatives to bars and saloons. Anderson Wimbush, a pro-Union southerner who moved to Minneapolis, participated in both temperance work and the early campaigns of the Minnesota SPCA. Alcohol, Wimbush wrote, "causes more cruelty to helpless women and children and dumb animals than all other causes combined." J. Howard Moore, socialist, vegetarian, and animal rights advocate, also wrote on the temperance question.34


The erection of public fountains represented another point of confluence between animal protection and temperance. Water had important symbolic and practical meanings within the ideology of temperance, and in its many forms and uses it was a frequent subject of instruction for youth. For WCTU members, sponsorship of fountains was a significant act of civic concern, since the availability of safe drinking water in public places gave thirsty people an alternative to alcoholic beverages. Humane advocates also felt confident, as one ASPCA annual report noted, that “a large proportion of the human beings who thus slaked their thirst, were deterred from taking into their mouths an enemy, to steal away their senses.” In addition, easy access to drinking water for horses reduced the appeal of watering troughs set up outside saloons and drinking establishments to lure customers. Two separate manufacturers routinely advertised “Drinking Fountains for Man and Beast” in the Union Signal, and, like animal protectionists, temperance supporters also paid for memorial fountains dedicated to their cause and its champions.

Child Protection

In some ways, animal protection’s relationship to child protection was even more straightforward than its links to temperance, for the so-called “child rescue” movement

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emerged directly from SPCA work. However, the association with child protection did not rest upon precisely the same constellation of social and cultural premises as the connection with temperance, in spite of the fact that, in the broadest sense, all three causes were concerned with cruelty and violence. The correlation between animal protection and child protection had more to do with organizational form and the underdeveloped administrative capacities of the local, state, and national governments in the arena of child welfare. Child protection adopted the organizational models and some of the statutory precedents of animal protection, and, in some communities, humane societies actually incorporated the protection of children into their missions.\(^\text{37}\)

Moreover, the child rescue movement does not fit tidily within the rubric of social feminism. Certainly, women cared about the domestic violence that child protection societies uncovered and confronted. In many cases, too, child protection societies enjoyed solid support from women. However, men dominated most societies for the prevention of cruelty to children and, as some scholars have suggested, these organizations sometimes pursued goals and policies that undercut women’s interests. Ultimately, women and feminists gave their energy and support to other child welfare initiatives, some of which were at variance with the philosophy of the child protection societies. Organized child protection seems to have been driven more by class than by gender concerns.\(^\text{38}\)


\(^{38}\) Many of the individuals the child protection societies investigated and prosecuted were lower class women, who in their mistreatment and abuse of innocent children had fallen below all acceptable
Importantly, substantial organizational links between the two movements lasted for a few critical decades only, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The lack of government will or capacity to address problems of child welfare created both demand and opportunity for anti-cruelty societies to take it on as part of their activity. Especially in smaller communities, humane societies began to handle both child and animal welfare concerns. However, this was a temporary and transitional association. It ended rather quickly as the professionalization of social work, the Progressive era's expanded focus on the child, and the emergence of the welfare state crowded out the particular model of private action represented by the humane societies. Under these circumstances, the child protection function of many humane societies atrophied or altogether ceased by the World War I era.  

From the earliest years of the nineteenth century, there had been a lengthy tradition of “child saving,” which centered on poor, orphaned, runaway, and abandoned children who were considered dependents of the community. These children were placed in apprenticeships and asylum homes, and, later in the century, with “boarding mothers.”  

In the years leading up to and following the Civil War, a number of philanthropic societies, including the Children’s Aid Society (1853) in New York, tried to address the misfortune of abandoned and homeless children. On occasion, police might...
make an arrest in a case of severe neglect, and the press condemned many other forms of cruelty to children. However, direct intervention in the lives and intrusion into the homes of poor families that were otherwise intact were not common.41

In the immediate post-war years, the phenomenon of cruelty to children, encompassing both abuse and neglect, began to capture broad public notice. Attention focused increasingly on the absence of effective public or philanthropic agencies ready to confront and handle their exploitation and mistreatment. Law enforcement authorities, preoccupied with more serious offenses, were not inclined to investigate and prosecute parents or guardians who could plausibly claim the right to discipline children over whom they had authority. At the same time, existing charities devoted to the care of children were in a position to assume control over their lives only after gaining legal custody.42

Early in their histories, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals began to receive complaints about cruelty to children in both private and public contexts. George Angell tried to discourage the Boston citizenry from bringing such pleas for intervention to the MSPCA. “Our hands are quite full of the work we have undertaken, and we cannot consistently open the door to other reforms,” Angell wrote. “At the same time, we believe if our theories for the humane treatment of animals could prevail, cruel treatment


of children would constantly decrease, so that our work indirectly accomplishes what is sought by those who ask our aid in special cases."\(^{43}\)

Within a year of the ASPCA's formation, both *Harper's Weekly* and the *New York Tribune* called for the establishment of a similar organization devoted to the children of New York. Whenever people approached Bergh to intervene in such cases, he declined on the ground that the mistreatment of children was outside the ASPCA's domain. In several instances, the newspapers specifically chided him for this restraint. In fact, the reproaches Bergh suffered for excessive devotion to the interests of animals gave rise to a steady association in the popular press between cruelty to animals and cruelty to children. This phenomenon was not limited to New York, as newspapers in other cities dwelled on the same theme.\(^{44}\)

In June 1871, Bergh and Gerry did intercede in the case of Emily Thompson, an exploited and abused child who lived in the vicinity of the ASPCA headquarters with a woman who had become her guardian under now unknown circumstances. The precise legal ploy the two men utilized is lost to history, but its implications are not. "Mr. Bergh has taken a very important step," the *Brooklyn Eagle* commented. "He has recognized the human race as animals." Another editorial suggested that "interference in such cases

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\(^{43}\) "Cruelty to Children," *ODA* 6 (Jan. 1874), 75.

is rarely ever sanctioned by public opinion.” Such an instance required “just such a
determined and fearless man as Mr. Bergh to take up the cause of oppressed and abused
children, and prove that the parental relationship no more authorizes or justifies a father’s
brutality to his child than ownership justifies cruelty to his horse.”

Bergh and Gerry were ideally suited to challenge the barriers of family and
guardianship in the case of cruelty to dependent minors. They were conservative,
privileged members of New York City’s upper stratum who, while anxious to introduce
what Elizabeth Pleck calls “a more humanitarian definition of child cruelty,” did not
dispute the right of parents to properly discipline their children. There were important
distinctions between the animal protection movement’s legal authority to intervene to
stop public cruelty even against the claims of property, and the assertion of legal power to
reach private conduct toward children in the domestic sphere. But both involved the
imposition of social authority beyond traditionally accepted, and nearly sacrosanct, lines
of demarcation. While they had clear doubts about whether they, their organization, or
anyone else had the legal authority to remove a child from the custody of a guardian, and
wanted to proceed cautiously, Bergh and Gerry were not the sort of men to cow before
such hurdles once motivated to act.

45 Editorial, Brooklyn Eagle, 20 June 1871, ASPCA-NY, SBK 4: 26; and “Cruelty to Children,”
Undated, unsourced article, ASPCA-NY, SBK 4: 1. Gerry and Bergh may have invoked an old English
writ, de homine repugando, which allowed magistrates to remove a person from someone else’s custody.
Elizabeth Pleck holds that this was the legal ploy the two men used to secure Mary Ellen’s removal in
1874. See Pleck, Domestic Tyranny, 71.

46 Pleck, Domestic Tyranny, 76.

47 Elizabeth Pleck suggests that humanitarian sentiment about the mistreatment of children rose
steadily in the immediate post-Civil War years, making it possible for reformers to overcome objections
that the removal of children was a violation of the privacy of the family. Pleck, Domestic Tyranny, 74-78.
Judge Shandley of the Court of Special Sessions found the child's guardian guilty of assault but suspended judgment. Despite his finding in the case, he did not remove the girl from the woman's custody. Only after Emily's 80-year old grandmother, hearing of the case at her home in New Jersey, hastened to Bergh's headquarters in search of her granddaughter did Judge Barnard grant Gerry's appeal for a writ of habeas corpus to remove Emily. The little girl returned to Cape May to live with her grandmother.48

The pressure to take consistent action when such cases surfaced had further intensified by early 1874, when Bergh and Gerry chose to intervene in a situation that had fateful consequences for the course of the humane movement. One day, Etta Wheeler, a social worker from St. Luke's Methodist Mission, came to see Bergh at the ASPCA office, where she related a tale of extreme child abuse. Several of the people Wheeler visited for her work had spoken of a young girl, Mary Ellen, who was frequently beaten and imprisoned in her home. Wheeler confirmed the story through an ailing woman who routinely heard the abuse through the thin walls of the tenement in which all the parties lived. The social worker's plea moved Bergh and Gerry, and they decided to investigate further. Bergh's trusted agent Alonzo Evans gained entry into the child's home by passing himself off as a census worker. In time, the sensational details of the case captured public attention.49


49 On the case, see Etta Angell Wheeler, “The Case of Mary Ellen,” NHR 1 (Aug. 1913), 182-83; “Death of Mary Ellen’s Rescuer,” NHR 10 (Jan. 1922), 20; Eric Shelman and Stephen Lazoritz, Out of the
As Bergh later recalled, the fact that Wheeler had already approached the Children's Aid Society, without satisfaction, greatly influenced his decision to intervene. After humane agent Evans confirmed the circumstances, Bergh and Gerry conferred. Bergh elected to petition the court for Mary Ellen's removal in his capacity as a private citizen, and not on behalf of the ASPCA, and Gerry then determined to secure a writ of habeas corpus in the Court of Special Sessions.50

The identity of Mary Ellen's real parents, and the path by which she had entered the system of child placement administered by the Commissioner of Charities, remained obscure even as the case unfolded. As Bergh and Gerry learned, the Department of Charities had granted custody of Mary Ellen to Francis and Mary Connolly under an indenture, although the implication that she was the illegitimate child of Mrs. Connolly's first husband, now deceased, hung over the matter as well. After Bergh and Gerry petitioned Judge Abraham Lawrence, presenting him with the evidence they had collected, the judge issued a special warrant under the Habeas Corpus Act, permitting officers of the ASPCA to take Mary Ellen into custody. Once in court, the little girl told

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of her own dire circumstances, and displayed the welts and cuts that Mrs. Connolly’s whip and scissors had caused.\(^\text{51}\)

Several witnesses described the abject conditions in which Mary Ellen lived. Among those who testified were Alonzo Evans, ASPCA agent; Etta Wheeler, social worker; and Margaret Bingham, the Connollys’ landlord. The most dramatic testimony came from Mary Smith, the sick neighbor who with her husband inhabited rooms adjoining those of the Connollys. From her sickbed, Smith, who first informed Wheeler of the child’s suffering, testified that Mrs. Connolly beat the girl daily with a horsewhip.\(^\text{52}\)

Mary Connolly, Mary Ellen’s stepmother, took the stand to defend herself, specifically denying that she had struck the child with her scissors. Later in the course of the proceedings concerning Mary Ellen’s fate, the District Attorney secured a grand jury indictment against Connolly, and she was arrested and held over at the Tombs. Several weeks later, Connolly stood trial before Recorder Hackett and a jury. The jury found her guilty of felonious assault, while acquitting her of the charges of assault and battery, assault with intent to do bodily harm, assault with intent to kill, and assault with intent to


\(^{52}\) "The Mission of Humanity," \textit{N. Y. Times}, 11 Apr. 1874, 2; and "Mary Ellen Wilson—Further Testimony as to the Child’s Ill-Treatment by her Guardians.” \textit{N. Y. Times}, 12 Apr. 1874, 12.
maim. The woman who had so cruelly harmed the child received a one-year prison sentence.53

Although Gerry produced evidence that Mary Ellen was the granddaughter of a London couple who lived in good circumstances and might be able to take her into their care, Judge Lawrence designated himself as Mary Ellen's guardian, and placed her in the temporary custody of a police matron. Ultimately, the judge assigned the girl to the Sheltering Arms, a home that trained children for domestic service. Etta Wheeler thought this an unsatisfactory resolution to the case, and eventually persuaded Judge Lawrence to place Mary Ellen in her care. Wheeler took Mary Ellen to Rochester, where she grew up under the guardianship of relatives in Wheeler's own family.54

The case of Mary Ellen proved catalytic because it underscored the degree to which children were "falling through the cracks" of a patchwork system of child welfare. The proceeding left many New Yorkers with the lingering misgiving that Mary Ellen's experience was not an isolated one. The failure of government to enforce existing statutes and the absence of an efficient public administrative and bureaucratic apparatus to manage child placement and related responsibilities were obvious. The Department of Charities barely monitored the conditions under which children in its charge lived (and worked). Hundreds of dependent minors passed through the Department of Charities


54 "Mr. Bergh's Case," N. Y. Tribune, 1 May 1874, 2; "Little Mary Ellen," N. Y. Sun, 1 May 1874, 3; and Watkins, "The Mary Ellen Myth," 502. Mary Ellen grew up, married, and raised daughters of her own; see Stephen Lazovitz, "Whatever Happened to Mary Ellen?" In later years, Mary Ellen Schutt appeared at a convention of the American Humane Association (AHA) as a living symbol of the child rescue movement's value. See AHA, Ann. R. 1913, 47.
every year and authorities made very little effort to ensure that the children were not ill-
treated or exploited. Its reliance on foster homes was also under challenge from
reformers who preferred the manageable environment of state-run institutions. 55

After the case concluded, Gerry, Bergh, and Quaker merchant John D. Wright
incorporated a separate organization, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty
to Children (NYSPCC), to focus on child protection. Wright assumed the presidency, but
Gerry secured the enabling legislation and handled all other formalities. Speaking to the
audience at its first public meeting, Gerry predicted that “as soon as the habitual abusers
of children learn that there is a law to reach them, there will be very few cases like that of
Mary Ellen.” From that point on, child welfare became the central focus of his life, and,
after Wright died, Gerry took over the presidency, serving in that capacity from 1876-
1901 and, after 1879, devoting himself more or less full-time to its management. Bergh
served on the NYSPCC’s board of managers until his death in 1888, and occasionally
played a role in specific cases. 56

While some critics attacked the interventionist ideology and sectarian bias of the
NYSPCC, others expressed strong approval of its efforts to ensure compliance with
relevant statutes and to punish violators through prosecution. “There are in this city

55 “Waifs and Strays,” N. Y. Times, 11 Apr. 1874, 4; Editorial, N. Y. Times, 14 Apr. 1874, 4; and
“Our City Charities Versus the Case of Mary Ellen,” N. Y. Times, 16 Apr. 1874, 4.

56 The founding meeting, with women comprising some three quarters of those in attendance, was
information on Gerry, see “Gerry’s First Dollar,” New York Journal, 31 Mar. 1889, ASPCA-NY, SBK 13:
15. Gerry’s writings include “The Relation of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Child-
Saving Work,” Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections 9 (1882), 127-30;
“Cruelty to Children,” North American Review 137 (July 1883), 68-74; and “Children of the Stage,” North
American Review 151 (July 1890), 14-21. On Bergh’s service, see NYSPCC, Ann. R. 1876, 33-34.
today eight or ten excellent institutions for the benefit of friendless children, but they
have power only over those legally entrusted to their care," the New York Post noted.
"The laws passed by the New York legislature for the protection of little children and the
prevention of cruelty to them are ample in scope, but hitherto it has been nobody's
business to enforce them." The state deputized the NYSPCC to represent the public
interest in court proceedings relating to crime, abuse, and misconduct involving children.
The NYSPCC sought to identify situations in which children were being cruelly treated,
to secure their removal from such situations, and to prosecute, convict, and punish those
responsible for such mistreatment.57

What happened next offered a stunning parallel to the SPCA phenomenon less
than a decade earlier. The developments in New York sparked a nationwide proliferation
of like-minded societies committed to the passage and enforcement of statutes protecting
children. At first, they concentrated on cases of physical abuse, but, over time, the
SPCCs became active in the disposition of a range of cases.58

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the SPCCs steadily gained
importance, concomitant to the revolution in jurisprudence that Michael Grossberg has
called "judicial patriarchy"—nineteenth-century judges' increasing appropriation of
family law power, including authority over child placement. Through judicial agency,
the state came to play a primary role in constructing and carrying out the principles and

Feb. 1875, ASPCA-NY, SBK 6: 185. On Protestant proselytism, see Steele, Angel in Top Hat, 196, and
Pleck, Domestic Tyranny, 75. For a defense against charges of sectarian bias, see "Pity the Little
Children," N. Y. Post, 8 Apr. 1875, ASPCA-NY, SBK 6: 215. On the range of SPCC cases, see "Cruelty to
Children," N. Y. Times, 5 Feb. 1875, 4; and "Friends of Ill-Treated Children," N. Y. Times, 2 June 1875, 5.

policies of family law. The use of child welfare and child-rearing standards assumed ever-greater importance in judges' determination of appropriate parental and filial relations, and the courts became the keystone of an institutional complex legitimating state intervention in family life. \(^{59}\)

Many of the new societies elsewhere modeled themselves after the NYSPCC. In Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, concerned citizens formed separate anti-cruelty organizations devoted entirely to children. In many smaller communities and states away from the East Coast corridor, however, another organizational form emerged, that of the dual-purpose humane society. Some of these were SPCAs responding to both public and private appeals to become active in the protection of children. Where appropriate or necessary, they modified their charters to incorporate the additional function of child protection. Occasionally, as in the case of the Albany-based Mohawk and Hudson River Humane Society, animal protection was added to the responsibilities of an established child protection organization. The Connecticut Humane Society represented still another model, addressing itself to cruelty to animals, child rescue, and the abandonment and neglect of the elderly. A fourth variation was that of the state-sponsored agency or bureau, which straddled the boundary between government agency and private philanthropy. \(^{60}\)


\(^{60}\) A little over a year after the Mary Ellen case, the Washington Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals removed a child from an acrobatic performance at a variety theater; it would change its charter and name some years later. See "An Unfortunate Child Rescued," \textit{N. Y. Times}, 15 Nov. 1875, 1. As late as 1909, the Arkansas Humane Society, organized for the protection of animals, was reincorporated as an agency with jurisdiction over the treatment of children. On the Connecticut model, see "Report," \textit{Connecticut Humane Society, Ann. R. 1880-81}, 11-13.
In Chicago, this consolidation of purposes proved very eventful. In May 1877, Illinois passed its first legislation prohibiting cruelty to children. Only two months later, the Illinois SPCA took steps to change its name to the Illinois Humane Society and to incorporate children into its sphere of concern. The organization had contemplated such a name change for several years prior to the addition of child protection work, because, as its president John L. Shortall explained some years later, the term “humane” encompassed a general commitment to the identification, relief, and prevention of suffering wherever it lay. The Illinois society became the first animal protective organization to carry the designation “humane” in its title, thereby helping to solidify its use as a descriptive for the larger movement. Numerous societies subsequently adopted it for themselves.61

The desire of reformers in many communities to combine child and animal protection work fatefuly altered the development of the AHA. When the original AHA delegates assembled in 1877, there was no public discussion of child protection. However, at its conference in Buffalo the following year, a debate ensued over the incorporation of child protection into its mission. Bergh, White, and Angell, while supportive of the goals of child protection, all believed it problematic to join the two concerns in one society. Bergh noted that there were numerous private and state-subsidized institutions for the protection of children but none for the protection of

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animals. White expressed her view that "if the subjects were united, very soon after all the efforts would be for the children and the animals would not be thought of." The majority of delegates present disagreed, however. Elbridge Gerry, by now an enthusiastic child rescue advocate, moved the proposition to revise the charter, and it carried.\(^{62}\)

Consequently, quite a number of the AHA constituent organizations evolved as dual- and sometimes triple-function societies. Over the years, the AHA annual meetings were bifurcated, with child and animal protection each taking up separate days of the conference. The multifunctional humane society was an important organization in those communities where no relevant government agencies existed, as well in those areas where such agencies were relatively undeveloped. The stated purposes of the Kansas City Humane Society, for example, included the humane destruction of worn-out animals, the policing of overloaded vehicles, the protection of children from drunken or abusive parents, the return of lost children to their homes, and the placement of infants and children taken from unsuitable situations.\(^{63}\) On occasion, the objectives and functions of the child and animal protection societies directly converged in individual cases. In 1880, the Pennsylvania Society to Protect Children from Cruelty (PSPCC) sought custody of two children whose father made a living

> buying up worthless dogs, killing them and extracting the 'fat' for sale as a cure for rheumatism. The slaughtering and rendering of the oil are done in the shanty, which is the sole abode of the family. It would be impossible to describe the filthy condition... The two children were in a neglected condition, with scarcely any clothing; the father spending his earnings chiefly for rum.


\(^{63}\) "Work of Kindred and Humane Societies," National Humane Journal 14 (Feb. 1886), 22.
Like animal protectionists and temperance advocates, SPCC advocates frequently noted a strong tie between the cruelties they targeted and parental drunkenness.  

George Angell, a life member of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC), cautioned against the dual-function society in all but the smallest communities, citing its lack of effectiveness. Among other points, he insisted that "A much more careful management is required in dealing with cases relating to children than in cases relating to animals." Angell consistently maintained that there were already a hundred societies devoted to human welfare for every one focused on animals. He also cited the issue of risk. There were many citizens, Angell noted, who, "while willing to risk the chance of lawsuits against a Society which can involve only the value of a very poor horse, are not willing to risk lawsuits founded on the misconduct or collusion of agents, which by separating a mother and child, may . . . result in a verdict or verdicts of five thousand dollars." Nor did the division of labor prevent occasional friction between the SPCAs and the SPCCs. In 1887, while expressing his strong sympathy with its objects, Angell chided the MSPCC for basing an appeal for funds and support on the claim that one difference between animals and children was that "the abuse of animals is seen."  

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66 ODA 20 (June 1887), 7.
William Stillman and the Incorporation of the AHA

By the early years of the twentieth century, new approaches to social work began to weaken the relationship between animal and child protection. Nevertheless, those societies that encompassed both concerns within their scope of activity gained a strong champion in William Olin Stillman (1856-1924), an Albany, New York doctor who served as president of the AHA between 1904 and 1924. Stillman remained stubbornly loyal to the dual-purpose society and to the approach to child rescue that Gerry and the NYSPCC championed. Moreover, Stillman invigorated the AHA as no executive before him had been able to do, giving it a true claim to national influence during his tenure.

Although the members of many humane societies recognized the importance of concerted national effort, it would prove an elusive goal in the years that followed the AHA’s formation in 1877. Organizational jealousies, absence of funds, and the lack of a central headquarters all impeded the development of a truly national organization that could harness the diverse energies of its constituent societies. In 1887, George Angell frankly appraised the AHA’s fragility, noting its precarious finances, its grant of voting power on an equal basis to all member organizations, large and small—regardless of their contributions—and the problematic character of its commitment to dual-function societies. Angell thought formal incorporation of the AHA as a national society inadvisable, and found it particularly improbable that the organization could ever “take charge of every form of cruelty to both humans and animals over a whole continent.”

Other humanitarians also lamented the weakness of the AHA, which had no permanent headquarters or regular staff, and, with the exception of a few dedicated officers, was not much alive save at its annual meetings. The lack of systematic and continuous work even led some of the AHA’s strong supporters to wonder whether it had accomplished anything of definite and permanent value. Writing sympathetically, Mary Lovell stressed that too few member organizations recognized “that keeping the national society under extreme limitations is one way of prolonging the difficulties of their own work and retarding its success.” There were many cruelties that could best be combated by sustained effort of a national nature. Some AHA members thought the organization should be a vehicle for supporting the spread of humane ideas and programs into regions where very little work had been done. Occasionally, enough funds were accumulated to employ an advocate for such work, but efforts did not progress very far.68

The fortunes of the AHA began to shift in 1892, when the Mohawk and Hudson River Humane Society (Mohawk and Hudson), in northeastern New York State, elected Stillman its president. Under Stillman’s leadership, the Mohawk and Hudson became one of the most impressive organizations in the field. A well-connected and apparently tireless worker, Stillman persuaded a local developer to part with an old hospital building for use as a shelter for unfortunate children in the Albany vicinity. The large building in downtown Albany became the headquarters of the Mohawk and Hudson, and a functioning shelter for children. The Mohawk and Hudson gradually came to include branches in twelve different New York counties. Income and staff grew at an impressive

rate. Stillman built the society into a regional power and a model of efficient management and drew attention to himself as an up-and-coming humane advocate. In the mid-1890s, Stillman became a vice president of the AHA, and in 1904 he assumed its presidency. During the next two decades, he transformed the AHA, securing its headquarters, building its endowment, and giving it a serious claim to national leadership as an umbrella organization of American humane societies.69

Just prior to Stillman's ascent to leadership, during the period 1899-1902, a few key actors within the AHA attempted to make national incorporation of the organization a priority. Matters came to a head at the 1902 annual meeting held in Albany, Stillman's hometown. When members of the Committee on Organization met the day before the conference, they found that the New York State Convention of Humane Societies, comprising some twenty child and animal protection entities, was planning to subvert the incorporation scheme. At a separate meeting of the convention, antagonism to the proposal continued to build. Some advocates asserted that the plan called for managing the AHA as an organization to combat all forms of social cruelty, no longer limited to just children and animals. Others objected to the idea that a national society might enjoy superordinate enforcement authority over their own groups. Stillman failed in his efforts to mediate the issue before the AHA plenary sessions convened. When debate began there, Elbridge Gerry spoke out sternly against national incorporation, and Caroline Earle White forcefully answered his criticisms. When Gerry disparaged the historical accomplishments of the AHA, White corrected his portrait of an ineffectual union of

interests. Gerry's public disparagement of the plan rested mainly on the claim that it was improbable Congress would grant police power to any organization for operating in all of the states, although proponents quickly denied that such authority would be a goal of their application. The proposal's supporters were more interested in the moral authority that national incorporation would confer, especially for spreading the work throughout the country, and in setting the AHA up for the direct receipt of bequests and larger donations. Some concluded that the SPCAs and SPCCs of New York State, and especially the ASPCA, opposed the plan because of their fears that a national group might siphon off money that would otherwise be directed to their own treasuries. A national rival, it seemed, posed too great a threat to some of the well-heeled societies. The ASPCA, which had played no active role in AHA affairs for several decades, was especially derisive of the plan, and would subsequently undertake active political intervention against the AHA's incorporation.  

The ASPCA eventually objected that the plan to formalize a national society combining animal and child protection could do justice to neither cause, a position consistent with its own policy and its historical relationship with the NYSPCC during a quarter century of activity. Later, when Representative John F. Shafroth of Colorado, mindful of the nine states and territories where no organized entity for such work existed, introduced a bill calling for the creation of a government board devoted to child and animal protection, rumors of active opposition by the New York groups began to

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circulate. A New York colleague assured the congressman that the ASPCA and the NYSPCC would attack the bill, fearful, as one observer put it, "that their prestige as the self-styled heads of humane work in this country will suffer, and consequently, their revenues shrink."71

When the smoke cleared after Albany, the principal advocates of national incorporation were Stillman, Francis Rowley, Caroline Earle White, James Brown, Crammond Kennedy, and John L. Shortall. They quickly abandoned plans to seek a national charter of incorporation from the Congress, instead securing normal incorporation under the laws of the District of Columbia in November 1903. Elbridge Gerry and the New York State Convention of Humane Societies withdrew from the AHA. Although his home society, the Mohawk and Hudson, went along with this decision, Stillman chose to support the AHA and its incorporation in his individual capacity. It was a critical moment in the history of the humane movement, for the AHA was now a legal entity empowered to hold, invest, and distribute funds received by either gift or bequest.72

These developments also set the stage for Stillman's rise to the AHA's presidency. He had been serving as a vice president for some years already, but, in 1904, when Albert Leffingwell resigned as president to take up a diplomatic appointment at Warsaw, Stillman's fellow directors chose him to fill out the term. Now Stillman applied his considerable energies to the goal of establishing the AHA as the central agency of a

71 "ASPCA Circular," JOZ 11 (Nov. 1902), 125; and E. K. Whitehead, Letter to the Editor, JOZ 13 (May 1904), 52-53.

national network of child and animal protection societies, and he made quick and substantial progress toward this goal. Under his leadership, the organization gained a modest endowment, its own building (at Albany), a small full-time staff, a monthly magazine (the *National Humane Review*), and permanent stability. Stillman was reelected as the AHA's president annually for twenty consecutive years, until his death in 1924.  

**The Complementarity of Humane Reform**

In *Reckoning with the Beast*, James Turner speculates that concern for animals served a displacement function, allowing Victorians to transfer "their charitable impulses from the forbidden ground of the working-class slums to a more acceptable object of benevolence." Turner implies that either ideology or self-interest prevented those who supported animal protection from addressing the harsh conditions that industrialism imposed on the working classes. The guilty feelings they could not comfortably or consciously express or act upon in respect to the hovel or the factory, Turner theorizes, were shunted into the more acceptable impulse of kindness to animals. Animal protection provided a surrogate channel for humanitarian impulses until certain human-

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centered causes became socially acceptable. Turner goes even further in suggesting that "the status of animals under industrial capitalism provided a safe outlet for some mild carping at an economic system otherwise warmly embraced by its grateful beneficiaries."^75

The theory of displacement rests on both depreciation and mischaracterization of humane reform, reducing concern for animals to a metaphor for other social anxieties. Above all, this psycho-historical conjecture marginalizes the possibility that some people in the nineteenth century felt drawn to action and philanthropy purely for the betterment of animals. For those endowed with imaginative sympathy toward animals and their suffering, humane work became an intrinsically absorbing pursuit.^76

The displacement hypothesis also overlooks the evidence that animal advocates themselves provided in their recorded words and deeds. The sight and knowledge of animal abuse, then as now, struck at the most basic emotions and sympathies. Many animal protectionists confirmed that such experience motivated their interest and activism, and some dated their awareness to their earliest years. Angell, Bergh, White, Lovell, Elizabeth Morris, Mucklé, Dore and others asserted that their childhood instincts favoring kindness toward animals helped draw them to the cause. It seems more

^75 Turner, Reckoning with the Beast, 54, 56, 123, 139, quote on 56. Turner’s hypothesis is essentially non-falsifiable, but it should certainly be noted that the evidence he tenders in support, that of the coincidence between the rhetoric of animal protection and that used to describe the relationship between laborers and employers, or between masters and slaves, is very thin for such a sweeping psycho-historical judgment. Many pre-Victorian discussions of kindness to animals employed the analogy of servitude in discussing the human-animal relationship.

^76 Despite his assessments of their motives, Turner is nevertheless content to call humane advocates “animal lovers,” an inappropriate description that is unmindful of the considerable variation in views of those who comprised the movement. This usage becomes more suspect through analogy. It would be misleading—to say the very least—for any historian of the abolition or civil rights movements to designate adherents as “Negro lovers.” See Turner, Reckoning with the Beast, 135.
reasonable to look for the source of their concern in predisposition, childhood socialization, or emotional growth rather than to attribute it to displacement, which would have been an extraordinarily precocious manifestation of adolescent class consciousness under the circumstances.\footnote{77}

The paucity of charitable investment in the prevention of animal suffering in comparison to human-centered philanthropy animated humane advocates as well. S. Morris Waln, Quaker benefactor of the PSPCA and a supporter of diverse philanthropies, addressed the point, noting that “there is every provision the world over for the unfortunate of our race, but little for the patient, speechless servants who devote their lives to us.” George Angell also argued that support for other causes dwarfed animal protection, admitting that this conviction was partly responsible for his decision to form the MSPCA. In 1873, Angell answered a friendly query about whether it was not more “important to form societies for the protection of men than of animals?” In reply, he noted that Boston at that time had no less than “134 organizations, supported by private benevolence, for the protection of men,” compared to just one for animals.\footnote{78}


\footnote{78 PSPCA, \textit{Ann. R.} 1871, 4; “S. Morris Waln,” \textit{ODA} 3 (Feb. 1871), 69; and “Cruelty to Animals,” \textit{Boston Daily Evening Transcript}, 1 Mar. 1873, 6.}
Such intentionality on the part of advocates is noteworthy because animal protection did not always prove to be a "safe" or a popular cause. Even supposed allies found occasion to admonish animal protectionists that "humans were far more worthy subjects for labor than all the curs that ever yelped." On occasion, journalists, lawyers, and others publicly questioned the sanity of those who left money to the cause. Indeed, all too often the wills of those who left money for animals were challenged on the grounds of mental incompetence.\(^{79}\)

From the earliest, SPCA workers had to fend off the charge that human-centered philanthropy ought to have priority over charity toward animals. Henry Bergh was a frequent subject of cartoons and satirical pieces highlighting the wrong-headedness of concentrating on animals. Caroline Earle White cast such accusations as the favorite resort of "cavillers," arguing that "the same persons who find fault with us for working for animals will demand of societies laboring in behalf of humans why they don't help some other human beings. Thus the antislavery agitators were constantly asked why they did not give their attention to the miseries of their white brethren at the north."\(^{80}\)

In most cases, humane advocates maintained their preferred commitment to animal protection even after certain human-centered causes became more socially acceptable. Not one key figure in humane work for animals abandoned that course to undertake now-sanctioned efforts on behalf of downtrodden or disadvantaged human


\(^{80}\) Women's Branch, PSPCA, Annual R. 1871, 9-10.
beings. In fact, all of the major humane leaders, once associated with the cause, pursued animal protection as a lifelong labor. It was the issue that commanded their passion.

The displacement theory badly underestimates the strength of post-Civil War philanthropies in general. Americans in this era expressed their concern for fellow citizens through a range of eleemosynary institutions that formed either before or contemporaneously with the SPCAs, and animal protection complemented a variety of other Gilded Age causes. These included penal reform leagues, moral purity organizations, poor relief charities, widows' and sailors' groups, immigrant assistance fraternities, provident and benevolent associations, farm schools, asylums, and children's aid societies. Most of these reform movements were based on notions of moral guidance. In its totality, this complex of interests amounted to a new abolitionism, in which the cruel person, the drunkard, the abusive husband or father, the saloonkeeper, and the brothel owner replaced slaveholders as the rogues and reprobates of the postbellum world. The abused child, the needy freedman, the unwed mother, the "white slave," the beaten helpmate, the immiserated prisoner, the neglected mental patient, and the suffering horse were all acceptable outlets for middle-class humanitarianism.81

Recent historical scholarship testifies to the strength of post-Civil War social reform. The first decade of SPCA work coincided with the rise of women’s rights as an independent reform movement, and several authors have emphasized the vitality of social feminism during the post-Civil War years. Reconstruction, the struggle of former slaves

and other freedmen to secure liberty, equality, and justice, was an even stronger locus of reformist energies. In the decade and a half that followed the war’s end, many Americans actively participated in benevolent and public-minded initiatives in support of African-American citizenship, education, opportunity, and welfare. For some, as Eric Foner has suggested, “the Reconstruction experience became a springboard to lifetimes of social reform.”

Nor was concern for the poor and disadvantaged classes stunted in this era. During the immediate postwar period, a growing number of middle-class reformers began to address the mistreatment and exploitation of free laborers in an industrial economy. By 1873, for instance, legislation to restrict the employment of children in factories had passed in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and was under serious consideration in New York. In the mid-1870s, pioneering social gospelers like Washington Gladden were already attempting to focus public concern on the impact of laissez-faire economic competition upon work conditions, urban life, and the nation’s social and religious character. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the middle-class

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women of the WCTU transcended class interest by showing support for workers at a time when the struggle between labor and capital was being waged in earnest. Eventually, even Socialism found a hearing within the WCTU and certain other middle-class circles, especially after the publication of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* in 1888.

Humane advocates frequently integrated concern over the mistreatment of human beings into their animal protection work. As part of her campaign against the cruelties of the streetcar trade, Caroline Earle White implored legislators to address the situation of drivers who in winter suffered and sometimes died from exposure to the elements. In 1897, agents of the Women's Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WPSPCA) arrested the job bosses, not the workers, who kept and employed mules and horses under abysmal circumstances at a canal construction site south of the city. Reviewing the situation, the *Journal of Zoophilv* underscored the dual exploitation of animals and African-Americans who performed the work: "If the condition of the horses and mules used in the work at League Island was deplorable, not less so was that of the unfortunate laborers employed there. Low wages, wretched fare and lodging, and hard work, standing mostly in water the while, are among the miseries they have had to endure."85

Animal advocates, of course, generally conceived of their work as directly beneficial and even essential to human well-being. In their minds, there was no tension between human and animal interests. They believed that they were honoring both concerns in their campaigns against the mistreatment of animals used for meat and milk,

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and their efforts to call attention to the attending health risks of such products. They worked to promote rational municipal animal control solutions and orderly procedures for horse-drawn transportation on the same grounds.

In the same vein, as historian Susan Lederer has pointed out, many of those who campaigned against animal vivisection did so in part because of their concern that such experiments would lead to unethical procedures on vulnerable human beings, an anxiety that was borne out in several notorious instances. Fear that the cold-hearted vivisector might replace the caring doctor at the bedside drove opposition not only to live animal experiments but to classroom dissection.\(^{86}\)

Above all, animal advocates were convinced that the inculcation of kindness was an inestimable boon to humankind. “Is not everything which tends to elevate man in the moral scale, a benefit to him?” asked Caroline Earle White. Animal protectionists believed their cause a vital one for the education of the heart over the head. “Whatever humane societies have done for animals,” Francis Rowley declared, “they have done vastly more for mankind, to enlarge its vision, to quicken its sympathies, and to ennoble its spirit. Unless we reach the deep springs of life out of which flow the deeds of men,

our education merely of the intellect may but make it all the more effective to work social
and industrial evil." 87

Some of the animal protection movement’s most prominent figures also supported
a range of charitable institutions serving human needs in their home communities.
Bergh’s work with Gerry in forming the NYSPCC, and Angell’s tacit support for child
rescue work in Massachusetts have been discussed. White’s crucial role in the formation
of the PSPCC in 1876 is less known, perhaps because, once Philadelphia’s child
protection organization was firmly and fairly established, with men and women on an
equal footing in its management, White resigned from its executive board. In doing so,
she reasoned that such a popular cause would have no trouble recruiting other board
members, and acknowledged that animal protection was the cause she personally
preferred to advance. Nevertheless, White remained an active supporter of child
protection work in Philadelphia, and served on the board of managers of the St. Vincent’s
Aid Association, which provided nurses, clothing, and other necessities for the benefit of
destitute mothers and their infants. In addition, the Women’s Branch let the PSPCC use
its rooms during the fledgling organization’s first months of activity. 88

The philanthropic interests of other prominent humane advocates further bear out
the complementarity of animal protection as a social reform, and the sympathy and

87 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R. 1870, 9; and “Humane Education Called Vital Need,”
Christian Science Monitor, 26 Apr. 1922, Vivisection SBK 7, Frederic Schiller Lee Papers, Archives and
Special Collections, A. C. Long Health Sciences Library, Columbia University, New York, NY [Lee
Papers].

88 “Protection of Animals,” N. Y. Herald, 15 Nov. 1878, ASPCA-NY, SBK 8: 1; Jane H.
Campbell, “Mrs. Caroline Earle White, The Friend of the Animal Creation,” Woman’s Progress 1 (June
1893), 118-19; Elisabeth Somers, “History of Society to Prevent Cruelty to Animals,” JOZ 14 (Dec. 1905),
134-35; and Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Sept. 27, 1876, WHS.
support its adherents showed for other causes. During the 1870s, Colonel Alfred Wagstaff, who championed many of Henry Bergh’s proposals in the New York Assembly, also sponsored legislation to restrict the use of children in factory work.\(^89\)

White’s brother George Earle progressed from anti-slavery work to campaigns for the improved treatment of livestock in transit to municipal reform in the city of Philadelphia.\(^90\) Albany’s William O. Stillman founded a school for nurses, led the child protection society in his home county, and only then gravitated toward animal protection.

John C. Dore, a pivotal figure in the formation of the Illinois Humane Society, was the president of a Newsboys’ and Bootblacks’ Home. Rodney Dennis, founder of the Connecticut Humane Society, served as a trustee of an industrial school, an insane asylum, and the Hartford YMCA.\(^91\)

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (she added the name Ward after her marriage in 1888) provides an even more striking example of varied yet related reform concerns. Phelps was active in women’s rights work for decades before coming to the cause of anti-vivisection. She was, moreover, one of the first American authors to take up the theme of industrialization and its social evils, examining the issue just as she came to national attention with publication of *The Gates Ajar*. Phelps first targeted the harsh impacts of industrial capitalism upon the laboring poor in “The Tenth of January,” a story published


\(^{90}\) “George H. Earle,” *JOZ* 16 (July 1907), 77.

in the Atlantic Monthly in 1868. Several years later, she dealt with the subject in The Silent Partner, a novel that depicted the dehumanizing circumstances of mill labor and the factory system.\(^92\)

The obituaries and bequests of less well-known supporters of animal protection also illustrate its position within the network of middle-class movements. From the 1860s through the 1920s, animal advocates supported or participated in an array of diverse philanthropies. Their obituaries reveal a characteristic set of leanings toward temperance, child protection, hospital care, refuges for “fallen unfortunates” like the Florence Crittenden Homes, asylums, sanitariums for the incurably ill, and other charities aimed at the poor and the disadvantaged. The pattern holds for members of all three of the pioneering SPCAs.\(^93\)

For instance, in addition to supporting Bergh’s ASPCA, Louise King, an Augusta, Georgia heiress, established both a widows’ home and several Georgia anti-cruelty organizations. Another supporter of Bergh’s organization, Benjamin Merriam, left money for the YMCA, the Tract Society, and several orphans’ institutions as well. In 1884, the German émigré Ottilia Assing, acknowledging their reform work, made Bergh and Frederick Douglass the dual recipients of her testamentary largesse. Ellen Gifford, a significant benefactor of both the ASPCA and MSPCA, left money to hospitals and to

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assorted charities devoted to widows, children, African-Americans, the aged, the blind, the incurably ill, and discharged convicts. Elizabeth T. Hicks provided equal bequests of $25,000 to the ASPCA, the NYSPCC, and Swarthmore College, and additional money for the support of a colored orphans' asylum. Charles Da Costa favored a similar set of charities in his 1890 bequest.94

The women who worked with Caroline Earle White exemplified the same broad spirit of charity. Sarah E. Morris, a vice president of the WPSPCA, was an active WCTU member who had worked with the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. Helen Parker, a WPSPCA board member, was a strong supporter of the Home for Incurables in West Philadelphia. Another WPSPCA board member, Sarah K. Davidson, spent over fifty years as president of the Foster Home of Philadelphia. Davidson's sister, Annie Lowry, whose $25,000 helped to endow a veterinary dispensary for the WPSPCA, actually left four times that much to the American Sunday School Union. When Annie Waln Ryerss bequeathed money for the formation of a rest haven for horses, her will insisted that no medical or surgical experiments were to be carried out on the horses. In the event that such a thing occurred, the charter would be forfeited and the property of the

organization turned over to the Society of Friends for use in the instruction of Native Americans.95

George Angell’s associates displayed comparable philanthropic inclinations, manifest both in their lives and in their testamentary provisions. William Baldwin, longtime MSPCA board member, abandoned his business career to lead the Boston Young Men’s Christian Union the same year that Angell founded the MSPCA. Edward H. Clement, editor of the Boston Transcript and a highly active member of both the MSPCA and the NEAVS, went south during Reconstruction in order to participate in efforts to educate and empower the freedmen. Jane Sever left bequests to the MSPCA, the Boston Seaman’s Aid Society, and homes for children, inebriates, and the poor. Eliza Powers’s bequests were of a similar character, although hospitals and infirmaries were her favorite human charities. Arioch Wentworth, the Boston merchant, provided legacies to a New Hampshire home for the aged, a hospital, the YMCA, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Bates College, in addition to the MSPCA.96

The philanthropic career of Margaret Olivia Sage (1828-1918) is also illuminating. In 1907, railroad magnate Russell Sage’s widow created a foundation in his name to support analysis and action for “the improvement of social and living conditions in the United States of America.” Although the foundation she set up operated according


to the most modern, Progressive era principles of social philanthropy, Mrs. Sage was the product of another epoch. The broad scope of her interests was more characteristic of nineteenth-century evangelical sentiment, and before establishing the foundation she generally funded religious work, hospitals, and colleges. While the Russell Sage Foundation did not provide financial support to animal protection, Mrs. Sage herself was one of the anti-cruelty movement’s strongest financial backers in the early years of the twentieth century. She was a significant donor to the AHA, the ASPCA, and the New York Women’s League for Animals. Among other things, she provided funds to support an animal hospital, the fountains and watering stations maintained by the New York groups, and an animal ambulance. She also gave money for the creation of a wildlife sanctuary in Louisiana. 97

Conclusion

The growth and evolution of animal protection during the last quarter of the nineteenth century drew heavily upon its relationships with temperance and child protection. All three movements focused on the social implications of individual cruelty. In addition, temperance and child protection helped to sustain an organizational infrastructure for the spread of humane values. Animal protectionists made use of

temperance's networks of activism to advance their own cause. Child protection, on the other hand, actually emerged from and developed alongside animal protection work, as organizations in numerous communities embraced the challenges of both reforms.

Humane societies played a crucial role in the transition to state-sponsored child welfare bureaucracies. In addition, many dual-function societies became constituent organizations of the AHA, the first group to unite humane workers from diverse regions and communities under one umbrella.

Beyond its relationships with both temperance and child protection, the philanthropic proclivities of adherents affirm that concern for animals was neither a trivial nor a peripheral cause of the Gilded Age. It reflected many of the premises of late nineteenth-century moral reform ideology. It also complemented numerous charitable initiatives directed at vulnerable and dependent humans, many of which animal protectionists themselves supported during their lives and through their testamentary provisions. Advocates were confident that their work on behalf of animals did result in significant benefits to humankind, both direct and indirect. Their philanthropic affinities show that organized concern for animals was part of a larger "social religion," an aggregate of wide-ranging but coincident reforms that aimed to assist the helpless, the vulnerable, and the disadvantaged. These affinities help to explain the steady growth and evolution of the humane movement during this period.