

Animal Cruelty

Animal Cruelty

*A Multidisciplinary Approach to
Understanding*

THIRD EDITION

Edited by

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—CLR and MPB

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—CLR

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—MPB

Foreword

When it first appeared a decade ago, this anthology amply met emerging demand for a focused, multidisciplinary discussion of the social, cultural, historical, legal, psychological, political and other dimensions of animal cruelty. In this third edition, it remains a valuable resource for students and scholars working across many disciplines, and for many of us involved in organized animal protection. The recognition of cruelty to animals as a problem deserving of sustained study is now more common, but it is still remarkable to see the weight of contemporary scholarship and thought on the subject come together so well in one volume.

Human cruelty to animals takes many forms, both individual and institutional. Some of that cruelty we as a society prohibit and criminalize, some of it we try to inhibit and discourage, and some of it we accept, authorize or sanction. There is often disagreement about what practices are cruel, and in cases where people do agree, they may differ on what should be done to address the issue. But the inspiring thing about the current moment is that there are few human practices involving animals that are not the subject of sustained moral and practical scrutiny. That is a sign not only of real progress but of a more thoughtful and engaged society overall—one that increasingly values animals, takes account of the importance of the human-animal bond, and seeks to reinforce such connectedness through positive action across the range of social, cultural and political institutions. It is also one that extends its ethical consideration beyond a few privileged species, and grounds its public policy solutions on empirical evidence as well as a compassionate spirit.

In recent years, this deeper understanding of animal cruelty as a complex problem has enabled us to build a public policy framework for addressing certain activities harmful to animals. This has resulted, for example, in the designation of animal fighting and many other acts of animal cruelty as felony-level crimes across the country over the last few decades. As a society we are also far more engaged in examination of the connecting threads between bullying, harassment, exploitation of power and the different forms that abuse—including the abuse of animals—may take. We are also more inclined to recognize the sentinel status of acts of cruelty to animals and their co-occurrence with other forms of violence.

The criminal justice dimension is important, but it also raises challenges for a society engaged in substantive and highly charged debates over policing, sentencing, and the challenges of the justice system as a whole. Those who study animal protection and those who seek to advance it must come to terms with those challenges. I

believe it is feasible—and imperative—that we do our best to balance the goal of accountability with an understanding that punitive approaches have their limits.

It is also true, as the contributions in this work make clear, that law is only one frame of reference. We are going to need others as we try to center cruelty to animals in broader discussions of violence and how to address it as a social problem. This will require thinking clearly about the kind of society we would like to see, one that acknowledges animals as deserving not only of our consideration but of greater inclusion and protection within our social contract. This goal does not and should not rely on punishment alone but on building out new practices, services and infrastructure that recognize and serve to address issues of unequal resources, to the benefit of animals and those who love and protect them. These features of a more humane society are rooted in the human capacity for kindness and an appreciation for the human-animal bond. And we can promote these values through affirmative laws and other positive approaches that focus not on human punishment but on the cultivation of a kind regard for animals within our families, communities and social institutions.

As this volume demonstrates, scholarship has taught us much about human kindness and cruelty during the last quarter century. But it is also clear that there is much more to learn. We need more research and more resources to support further inquiry. Does punishment deter cruelty to animals? Is mandated counseling for offenders effective? What is the value of humane education, prosocial learning and related early intervention in the lives of children? What training would most benefit humane society agents, law enforcement officers, social workers, psychologists and veterinarians? What might restorative justice mean when the cruelty involved is institutional rather than individual? How can future scholarship contribute to the goal of building a more inclusive animal protection movement? In pursuit of the answers to these and other questions, we must encourage and build upon the work that the contributors to this book have set out to do.

Kitty Block, President and Chief Executive Officer
The Humane Society of the United States, and
Chief Executive Officer of Humane Society International