IN THE COMPANY OF ANIMALS

A study of human–animal relationships

JAMES SERPELL
University of Pennsylvania

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

First published by Basil Blackwell 1986
Canto edition published by Cambridge University Press 1996

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Serpell, James, 1952–
In the company of animals: a study of human–animal relationships
/ James Serpell.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 57779 9 paperback
1. Pets – History. 2. Pets – Social aspects – History.
3. Pet owners – History. 4. Human–animal relationships – History.
I. Title.
SF411.5.S47 1996
304.2'7. – dc20 96–15185 CIP

ISBN 0 521 57779 9 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

WD

Contents

List of illustrations *page* xi
Preface to the first edition xiii
Preface to the Canto edition xvii
Acknowledgements xxi

PART I: A PARADOX

1 Of pigs and pets 3

PART II: THE CASE AGAINST PETS

2 Substitutes for people 23
3 Instruments of follie 43
4 Pets in tribal societies 60
5 A cuckoo in the nest 73

PART III: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

6 Pets as panacea 89
7 Health and friendship 108
8 Four-legged friends 125

PART IV: EXPLOITATION AND SYMPATHY: A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

9 The myth of human supremacy 147

10 Killer with a conscience 169

11 Licensed to kill 186

12 The fall from grace 212

Notes 237
Bibliography 252
Index 277

Illustrations

Between pages 86 and 87

1, 2 'Before and after': modern agricultural intensification and the quality of life of many domestic animals. By permission of Compassion in World Farming.
3 Pet-owners and bizarre extremes. Rob Nelson, Camera Press.
4 Hitler and Blondi. Ullstein-Bilderdienst.
5 M'tesa walking with his dog. From the original drawing by John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Blackwood, London, 1863, p. 292.
6 The family of Charles I. Van Dyke, The Mansell Collection.
7 Queen Elizabeth II and her corgis. Popperfoto.
8 Witches with familiars. From *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcraft of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (1619).
9, 10, 11 Barasana Indians of Colombia and their pets. Stephen Hugh-Jones.
12 The 'cute response'. John Gajda, Camera Press.
13 Punan Dyak and dog. Reproduced by permission of the Council of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, from the Society's Journal, vol. 38, Part 2, 1965.
14 Songbird and parasitic cuckoo nestling. A. P. Barnes, Planet Earth Pictures.
15 William Hogarth, *Four Stages of Cruelty*, plate 1. Engraved by T. E. Nicholson from the original by Hogarth, The Mansell Collection.
16 Therapeutic pets. Society for Companion Animal Studies.

17, 18, 19, 20 Attachment and affection between dogs and their owners. James Serpell.
21 The rodeo. Ken Callard, Camera Press.
22 Tropical forest. Peyton Johnson, Earthscan.

CHAPTER I

Of pigs and pets

> All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.
>
> George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Until the end of the last global Ice Age, around 12,000 years ago, the human population of this planet derived all of its food and raw materials from wild animals and plants. Anthropologists have coined the phrase 'hunting and gathering' to describe this form of basic subsistence economy.[1] Typical hunter–gatherers live in small, closely knit family groups of fewer than fifty individuals. They are generally nomadic or semi-nomadic, moving from place to place, and establishing temporary camps, according to the dictates of the seasons and the availability of game and other natural produce. A characteristic sexual division of labour exists within these groups. The men do most of the hunting and butchering of game, and they manufacture an ingenious assortment of stone, bone and wood implements and weapons for this purpose. The women, hampered to some extent by infants and young children, perform most of the gathering; foraging around the temporary camps for the edible fruits, seeds, nuts, tubers and other plant materials which form the staple part of the family diet.[2]

Under normal circumstances, the hunting and gathering lifestyle is not especially arduous or uncomfortable. As long as the population remains small, and as long as the groups keep moving so as to avoid exhausting local resources, there is generally sufficient food to go round, and adequate spare time to engage in leisure activities. Existence is far from being a

romantic idyll – from time to time there are food shortages and starvation, and the usual assortment of lethal and debilitating accidents and diseases. Nevertheless, the relationship that exists between hunter–gatherers and the natural resources on which they depend is a remarkably balanced one; they kill and eat what they need to survive, but only rarely exceed the capacity of the environment to replenish the temporary deficits they create.[3] Human beings managed to live in this way, more or less unchanged, for over 90 per cent of their history on this planet.[4]

The end of the Ice Age brought this long period of economic and cultural stability to an abrupt conclusion. Within the space of a few thousand years, a socioeconomic revolution took place which overthrew the existing order and replaced it with something entirely new and unprecedented. This revolution was initiated by the domestication of plants and animals, and some authorities have described it as the most important and influential episode in the history of our species.[5]

Judging from the archaeological evidence, the first species to make this transition from a wild to a domestic state was the wolf (*Canis lupus*). Domestic wolves, the ancestors of the dog, first made their appearance among the prehistoric settlements of the Near East somewhere between 14,000 and 12,000 years ago. They were closely followed by domestic sheep and goats. Somewhat later, around 9,000 years ago, domestic cattle and pigs were also being farmed in parts of Asia. Horses, asses, camels, water buffalo and domestic fowl followed them and, around 3,000 to 4,000 years ago, the domestic cat emerged from wild obscurity in ancient Egypt.[6] The domestication and cultivation of plants coincided with the development of animal husbandry. Wheat, barley and various other cultivated plants appeared early on in Europe and Asia, while in the New World, maize, potatoes and beans were farmed, along with a different assortment of domestic animals, such as the llama, the alpaca, the turkey and the guinea pig.[7] By about 4000 years BP (before present) all of our most important domestic plants and animals were already permanent fixtures of human society.

The birth of agriculture and animal husbandry marked the beginning of the end of traditional hunting and gathering. By the time of Christ, farmers and livestock herders had already ousted the hunters from at least one-half of the inhabited earth. At the time of the discovery (or rediscovery) of the New World in the fifteenth century, they probably occupied only 15 per cent. Here and there, a few groups, such as the North American Indians, made valiant attempts to repel the invaders, but for their pains they were either obliterated or reduced to slavery and abject dependency. Now, only tiny, isolated populations of true hunter–gatherers remain, eking out an existence in some of the most marginal and least exploitable corners of the globe.[8] With the exception of the so-called 'whaling industry' and the sporting activities of the leisured rich, hunting as a way of life has almost vanished from the face of this planet.

The shift from hunting to farming also produced a fundamental change in human relationships with animals. Traditional hunters typically view the animals they hunt as their equals. They exercise no power over them, although they may hope to persuade the animal to be more easily captured by means of certain magical or religious practices. This essentially egalitarian relationship disappeared with the advent of domestication. The domestic animal is dependent for survival on its human owner. The human becomes the overlord and master, the animals his servants and slaves.[9] By definition, domestic animals are subservient to the will of humanity and, for the majority of species involved, this loss of independence had some fairly devastating long-term consequences.

Take, for example, the unfortunate case of the domestic pig. The Eurasian wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), from which the pig is descended, is an intelligent, sociable mammal which is still surprisingly common in parts of Europe and Asia. It is a creature of open forests and woodland. The typical wild boar social group consists of a matriarchal herd or 'sounder' containing, perhaps, half a dozen closely related females and their offspring. Sub-adult males sometimes form bachelor

herds, while mature males are generally solitary. Herds are not exclusively territorial, although they may be aggressive toward outsiders, and they generally roam over an area of about twenty-five hectares. Wild boars are most active during the daytime and around dusk, and spend much of their time foraging for food. They are omnivorous and feed on a wide variety of plants, including fungi, ferns, leaves, roots, bulbs and fruit, as well as on insects, insect larvae and earthworms, and small vertebrates such as mice and frogs. Much of this food is obtained by rooting around in the soil with the bony and muscular snout. Foraging parties are noisy, maintaining a continual, conversational exchange of grunts, squeals and chirps. At night these animals sleep *en masse* in large dens or nests. They are also extremely partial to wallowing in mud, an activity which helps to keep them cool in warm weather and rids the skin of external parasites. They are naturally clean animals, and deposit their excrement in specific dunging areas.

In the Northern Hemisphere, mating takes place in the autumn. The boar courts the sow by displaying and 'chanting' and by nudging her with his snout. He also champs his jaws together to produce salivary foam. The boar possesses lip glands which secrete a sexual scent or pheromone, the smell of which is highly stimulating to the sow. The production of salivary foam probably helps to disperse this pheromone. The boar also tests the receptivity of the sow by placing his chin repeatedly on her rump. If the female is receptive, she will 'stand' for the boar to permit mounting and copulation.

Farrowing takes place the following spring. As she approaches term, the sow leaves the herd and constructs a large nest of twigs, leaf litter and dried grasses in which she gives birth to up to twelve piglets. The piglets remain in the nest for about ten days before following their mother on her foraging expeditions and, eventually, rejoining the matriarchal sounder. At this age the piglets are playful and intensely curious. Although they have an exaggerated reputation for ferocity, wild boars obtained as piglets are easily tamed and make charming pets, almost dog-like in their affection and loyalty.[10]

The life of the modern domestic pig stands in sharp contrast to that of its wild progenitor. In the West, methods of farming pigs have been revolutionized within the past hundred or so years, and the trend has been toward increasing intensification. Gone are the days of the humble farmyard pig, contentedly rooting in the soil for various edibles or foraging in the woods for beechmast. Gone are the days of the mud-wallow or the appetizing bucket of swill, the leavings of the farmer's kitchen and other surplus farm produce. The pig of modern agribusiness is born and raised in artificial confinement throughout its brief and uncomfortable life. It has been reduced to the status of a strictly utilitarian object; a thing for producing meat and bacon.[11]

From the moment of conception, the intensively farmed domestic pig is regulated and controlled, and rarely permitted to engage in any of the natural activities enjoyed by its wild ancestors. About a week from giving birth, the sow is herded into a farrowing crate; a narrow steel cage in which she is able to stand up or lie down but is impeded from making any other movements. Despite this, sows engage in various stereotyped activities which have been interpreted as frustrated attempts at nest-building. These are accompanied by clear signs of distress. The use of these crates is justified by the desire to reduce piglet mortality, particularly by preventing sows lying or stepping on their young. In reality, the differences in piglet mortality between crates and other, more open farrowing systems may be quite small. Between one-tenth and one-third of a piglet per litter is the estimated improvement using crates.[12] The newborn piglets are allowed to suckle from their incarcerated mother for anything from a few hours to several weeks, depending on the rearing methods employed. (A short period of suckling is essential in order to give the piglets the opportunity to acquire passive immunity to certain diseases from the mother's milk and colostrum.) Under less intensive systems, the piglets remain with the mother in small weaning pens until they are anything from three to seven weeks of age. The pens are equipped with 'pig-creeps', the porcine equivalent of cat-flaps, which allow the piglets access to their

own separate trough of food.[13] Modern textbooks on pig-rearing, however, recommend removing the piglets from the mother as soon as possible – within twelve to thirty-six hours after birth. This has several advantages to the producer. Sows deprived of their piglets stop lactating and become sexually receptive again more quickly. Early removal also reduces the likelihood of the piglets acquiring some infection from the filthy conditions surrounding the farrowing crate.[14] It is customary to carry out a list of routine operations on the piglets as soon as possible after they are born: their 'needle teeth' or incisors are clipped, their tails are docked, their ears are notched for identification, and the males are castrated. No anaesthesia is employed during these operations.[15]

In the most intensive systems the piglets are generally isolated within hours of birth in small individual cages which are stacked, row upon row, in tiers. Nourishment is supplied in the form of regular, controlled doses of liquid food at roughly hourly intervals. To get an idea of the totally impersonal and technological nature of this pig-rearing process, it is worth quoting verbatim from a major textbook on the subject:

> In most refined systems, each piglet is contained within its own isolated space and provided with its own air-conditioned environment. There is no direct contact between piglet environments and the surrounding room environment. Slightly less refined is the provision of a crypto-climate for the group of piglets, with aerial connections between the piglet spaces and the surrounding room environment. Each piglet space is, however, supplied with a thermal conditioning element in the form of an overhead heating element or a heated floor pad. A third system provides only for a controlled room environment, with the individual piglet places constructed of open wire mesh cages.[16]

The author's chief objection to the latter system is that farm personnel, working in the room, may become uncomfortably hot.

At seven to fourteen days, the piglets are moved again to new quarters where they are housed in groups in slightly larger cages. In these cramped and boring conditions the

young animals are inclined to engage in what are euphemistically termed 'social vices'; chiefly biting or sucking each other's navels, tails and ears, apparently out of sheer frustration. To combat this behaviour, it is recommended that the piglets be kept hot (22 to 27°C) and therefore lethargic, in near darkness, and free from sudden disturbances.[17] Pigs reared in these artificially confined conditions are delicate and notoriously susceptible to stress. Sudden noises or bright lights make them frightened and potentially aggressive towards each other. They may also induce a condition known as PSS or 'porcine stress syndrome', an affliction characterized by extreme stress, rigidity, blotchy skin, panting, anxiety and, often, sudden death.* PSS can strike factory-farmed pigs at any age, but it is particularly galling to the producer when the pigs are close to market weight after several months' investment of food.[18]

Once onto solid food, the weanling piglets or 'weaners' are grown on in small groups in pens until they reach slaughtering weight at around six to eight months of age. For ease of cleaning, the pens have concrete or slatted metal floors, and no bedding is provided. It is obviously difficult to assess whether pigs are comfortable on such floors, but all the evidence is to the contrary. Given the choice, pigs prefer to stand or lie on sand or straw bedding, and foot deformities and lameness are common in animals raised on hard floors without access to softer bedding areas. Most pigs are slaughtered before serious deformities have time to develop, so there is little economic incentive to farmers to provide more comfortable conditions. Aggression and social vices are prevalent in the unpleasant and overcrowded conditions of the growing and finishing pens so, once again, the pigs are kept in total or partial darkness for most of the time.[19]

Finally, once they reach a suitable size and weight, the pigs are subjected to the terrifying ordeal of transportation and slaughter. One day, after months of inactivity, boredom

* It is now established that certain genetic strains of pig bearing the 'halothane' gene are more susceptible to PSS (Grandin, 1994).

and frustration, they are herded out of their pens and crammed, like so many sardines, into a livestock truck where they spend hours or even days, virtually unable to move and without food or water. Those which are understandably frightened and uncooperative are not dealt with lightly. Handlers are generally in a hurry and they are frequently provoked to the point of undue violence, usually administered through the toe of a boot, a stick or a club or, more often nowadays, through the tip of an electric prod. Pigs are maimed, bruised and killed during transport and, in the words of Peter Singer:

> Animals that die in transit do not die easy deaths. They freeze to death in winter and collapse from thirst and heat exhaustion in summer. They die, lying unattended in stockyards, from injuries sustained in falling off a slippery loading ramp. They suffocate when other animals pile on top of them in an overcrowded, badly loaded truck. They die from thirst or starve when careless stockmen forget to give them water or food. And they die from the sheer stress of the whole terrifying experience, for which nothing in their lives has given them the slightest preparation.[20]

At the abattoir, some pigs exhibit every symptom of abject terror; screaming and jostling one another in a nightmare of blind panic.[21] Ideally, death is relatively quick and painless, the animal being stunned by an electric current or a captive-bolt pistol before its throat is cut. Unfortunately, the circumstances of slaughtering are not always so humane.* If stunning is performed inexpertly, the animal probably suffers more than it would from having its throat cut. One author describes the situation in a nutshell: when slaughtering is 'done well by caring people, pain and misery can be minimized; done badly, untold horrors will be routine'.[22]

The pigs that go to slaughter are, arguably, the lucky ones. A few unfortunate sows and even fewer boars may be selected for breeding. Nowadays, to discourage aggression, breeding

* Grandin (1988: 205) reported witnessing 'deliberate acts of cruelty occurring on a regular basis' at 32 per cent of the slaughter plants she surveyed in the United States.

sows are generally kept isolated in individual narrow stalls in which they are unable to turn round.* They remain in these stalls until they come into oestrus or 'on heat', an event which is often detected by sitting on the sow's back or rump when, like the wild boar sow, she will exhibit the 'standing' reflex.[23] As soon as she signals her condition in this way, she is herded quickly out of her pen and into one of the boar pens where, ideally, nature is allowed to take its course. More often, if the sow is frightened or shows signs of being coy and uncooperative, the mating procedure becomes nasty and brutish. The sow is pushed, shoved and physically restrained by stockmen in order to get her into a suitable position for mounting. The boar is likewise discouraged from engaging in any of the normal preliminaries of courtship and, because artificial selection has so altered the physical proportions of the domestic pig, he is often unable to achieve intromission without manual assistance. Once a successful copulation has been performed, the boar is pushed aside, and the sow is summarily herded back to her stall where, more often than not, she remains until farrowing.[24]

Needless to say, research has found methods of streamlining this clumsy and time-consuming business of copulation and conception. Modern techniques of artificial insemination can dispense with 'natural' mating altogether, although, once again, the sows are not always obliging. Like their wild ancestors, domestic sows find the sight, sound and smell of a sexually active boar stimulating, and they are more inclined to conceive in the presence of one. Undeterred by this, research has yielded an aerosol can containing artificial boar pheromones with which the sow can be sprayed to get her in the mood. Some artificial insemination programmes have even resorted to playing tape-recordings of boar mating cries to their sows. Hormone injections are also widely used to

* During the last ten years, pressure has grown within many European countries for the adoption of humane alternatives to the stall-housing of dry (i.e. pre-oestrous or gestating) sows. UK legislation has recently phased out the practice of tethering sows in stalls, a procedure which further restricted their ability to move.

accelerate and control the sow's reproductive activities. To reduce the amount of time between conceptions, and to ensure that farrowing takes place in convenient batches over short periods, hormones can be injected into the sows while they are still suckling their piglets. Hormones are also used to induce sows to give birth at a time of day which suits the farmer.[25] In short, pig-breeding is concerned with just two aims: to increase the rate of piglet production, and to reduce the non-productive periods of the sow – the periods during which she is consuming valuable food, but is not actually gestating or suckling piglets. As one textbook bluntly puts it: 'The sow has one commercial purpose in life which is to produce weaners and the more efficiently she does this, the higher will be the profit margin on any pig enterprise.'[26]

Nobody in their right mind would consider the existence of the modern domestic pig a pleasant one. But for those who engage in factory farming or benefit from its produce, this kind of callous and brutal treatment is easily justified. Like many other species on this planet, humans like to eat meat, and they are prepared to kill and inflict a certain amount of suffering on other animals in order to indulge this preference. If we assume, for the sake of argument, that people have a right to go on eating meat, as their ancestors have done for about three million years, then it obviously makes sense for us to exploit our domestic livestock in the most cost-effective and efficient way. And this is precisely what modern, intensive farming is all about. The actual methods employed may vary from species to species, but the basic principle remains the same: maximize productivity; minimize costs.[27] From start to finish, modern agribusiness is based on this simple industrial formula. The pig breeder aims to produce the largest number of weaners per sow per annum, the grower seeks to get his pigs to slaughtering weight in the shortest possible time, the transporter wants the animals loaded and delivered with the minimum delays, and the slaughterman is chiefly concerned with increasing the rate at which he can kill and butcher the pigs that arrive at his abattoir. And at the end of the chain stands the spectre of the voracious consumer, who is

solely interested in buying the highest quality meat and bacon for the lowest possible price. The fact that this principle also ensures that the livestock involved are subjected to a lifetime of continual deprivation, distress and discomfort seems to be largely irrelevant; merely an unfortunate by-product of the harsh, economic necessities of life. And the minority of people who display genuine moral concern for the welfare of farm animals often seem to be regarded as either stupid, sentimental or just plain crazy.

This kind of hard-nosed, economic attitude to the exploitation of domestic animals is a simple and straightforward one, and it is one that is tacitly endorsed by the majority of people in the western world. Humans have a right to eat meat; farmers have a duty to supply this demand as cheaply as possible; animals inevitably suffer as a consequence. Why complicate the issue with imponderable questions about the morality of it all? Indeed, as a basic philosophy it would be exceedingly difficult to fault, if only it were consistent; if only it applied right across the board to all our dealings with all domestic species. But, quite clearly, it does not. There exists in our society an entirely separate category of domestic animals which, for no obvious reason, is exempt from this sort of treatment. These animals are, of course, the ones we normally refer to as pets.

According to 1994 figures, an estimated 36 million pet dogs and 35 million pet cats currently live within the countries of the European Union, together with a further 173 million other miscellaneous pet animals, ranging from cage birds, rabbits and guinea pigs through to reptiles and aquarium fish. Over half of all the households in the EU contain at least one such animal, and a substantial minority contain several.[28] The figures for the United States are even more remarkable: 54 million dogs, 59 million cats, 16 million birds, 7.3 million reptiles and amphibians, and 12 million fish tanks distributed among some 56 per cent of all households.[29] Most of these animals belong to domesticated species, just like our old friend the pig. Yet few of them serve any significant practical purpose. We do not slaughter and eat them. We do not milk

them or scramble their eggs. We make no use of their fur or their hide, and we do not harness them to ploughs. In economic terms the majority are completely useless. Yet we allow them the run of our houses, give them personal names, and treat them as honorary members of the family. We stroke them, cuddle them, play with them, groom them and ensure that they receive all the exercise and social contact they need to keep them happy and healthy. They are regularly supplied with specially prepared, vitamin-enriched food, provided with warm and comfortable places to sleep, and at the first signs of illness, are immediately taken to expensive and highly trained doctors. And when they eventually expire, they are mourned like departed loved ones, even to the extent of being buried with full ceremonial honours.[30]

Pets, particularly dogs and cats, can also be a considerable source of embarrassment and inconvenience to their owners. They limit a person's freedom and independence; they may be noisy, dirty, smelly or disobedient and, in some cases, they may exhibit behaviour problems such as aggression, anxiety, destructiveness and hypersexuality, all of which can turn them into a serious nuisance. Pet-ownership is undoubtedly a major responsibility.[31] Yet it seems to be a responsibility which most owners are prepared to take on, despite all the potential drawbacks.

The financial costs of pet-keeping are equally staggering. Americans spend around $8.5 billion annually on dog and cat food, and the most recent figures published by the American Veterinary Medical Association show that they also spend in excess of $7 billion on veterinary care for pet dogs, cats and birds.[32] In Britain, the figures are scarcely more modest. British pet-owners spend in the region of £1.3 billion ($2 billion US) each year on dog and cat food and treats.[33] Other expenses are largely a matter of guesswork, but if we allow for a conservative doubling of costs in the last decade, then it is likely that roughly £300 million is spent on various pet accessories, such as cat-litter, treats, medication and cosmetics, aquaria and equipment, leads, collars, clothing, toiletries, beds, toys, etc., while a further £350 million goes on

veterinary fees and drugs.[34] And these are only the direct expenses. A whole host of indirect costs also arise from pet-keeping, the main burden of which is currently shouldered by taxpayers. For example, British government surveys suggest that dogs are causal factors in about 0.6 per cent of all road accidents involving injuries to people. Admittedly, the vast majority (76.4 per cent) of these injuries were slight but, nevertheless, a substantial proportion were classified as serious, and a few (0.9 per cent) were fatal. Other surveys indicate that dogs are also responsible for causing up to 16 per cent of road accidents not involving injuries. A 1984 study estimated the total financial cost of these accidents in terms of lost output, damaged property, health care, police work and administration at around £40 million per annum. More recent figures are not available but clearly one would need to double or even treble this amount to allow for inflation over the last decade.

Animal bites and scratches form another indirect cost of pet-ownership. It has been estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 people require medical treatment for dog bites annually in Britain,[35] and the average cost to the health service for each treatment is about £70. This would represent a potential cost to the taxpayer of up to £14 million per year. In the United States, dog bite has been described recently as a problem 'of epidemic proportions, affecting more than 1% of the US population annually and accounting for widespread exposure to zoonotic diseases and more than 20 fatalities each year'.[36] Even the most conservative estimates suggest that close to 600,000 people a year require medical treatment for dog bite in the USA[37] and, in these days of escalating health costs, the total bill for treating all the victims is unlikely to be less than $120 million. Dogs also cause serious and fatal injuries to domestic livestock. It is difficult to estimate the total cost in compensation to farmers, but roughly 10,000 animals in Britain, chiefly sheep, poultry and cattle, are killed or injured by dogs every year.[38] As carriers and transmitters of infectious diseases, pets also represent a significant health hazard, although the extent of the danger to humans has been

grossly exaggerated by the anti-pet lobby.[39] Of the few disease organisms transmitted from pets to people, the majority cause relatively minor ailments such as local infections from bites and scratches, diarrhoea, and skin rashes. A small number are more serious. Aside from rabies, the disease which has attracted most attention in recent years is toxocariasis, a condition caused by the larvae of two kinds of nematode worm, *Toxocara canis* and *T. cati*. These worms normally inhabit the digestive tracts of dogs and cats, respectively. Humans can become infected with *Toxocara* through contact with soil contaminated with animal faeces, or through direct contact with infected pets. The most exaggerated national estimates suggest that roughly 16,000 people, mainly children, are infected by *Toxocara* every year in Britain, although the vast majority never develop any clinical symptoms and probably suffer no permanent harm. In a small proportion of cases (about 10 per year in England and Wales), the larvae migrate through the bloodstream and may lodge in the liver, the brain, the lungs, or in the back of the eye where they cause, respectively, liver-enlargement, epilepsy, asthma-like respiratory problems, and impaired vision.[40]

Canine and feline waste products are not only a potential source of infection, they can also be a considerable nuisance. On an average day the dog population of Britain deposits 4.5 million litres of urine and 1 million kilograms of faeces, some of it in parks and other public places where it is aesthetically objectionable, and where it can interfere with human recreation. It is impossible to put a price on the nuisance value of this kind of environmental pollution. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly a source of disgust and inconvenience to many people.[41]

Figures and statistics of this kind will doubtless raise a small forest of eyebrows but they are not intended, in this case, to arouse anti-pet feeling. They are provided merely to illustrate the formidable investment which pet-keeping represents; an investment which, it seems, pet-owners and pet-owning societies are prepared to make despite significant costs and in the absence of any measurable economic return. In other

words, as far as pets are concerned, the simple rules which normally govern our treatment of domestic animals no longer apply. Instead of maximizing productivity, minimizing costs, and turning a blind eye to the welfare of the animals involved, we do exactly the opposite. The economic benefits of pet-keeping are negligible at best. Yet the majority of pet-owners spare no expense to ensure that their animals are as happy, contented and secure as they possibly can be.

Of course, pets have had to pay a price for the pampered status they enjoy. Dogs and cats and other pets are not allowed the sort of freedom they would experience as wild animals. But it is doubtful whether most of them suffer much as a consequence. A well-fed cat is a fairly inactive creature, and even those which are confined all their lives to small flats or apartments seem to experience little distress. Dogs are such intensely sociable animals that most of them willingly remain close to their owners rather than wander at will. Purely as a matter of convenience, the majority of cats and a substantial number of dogs are neutered at an early age. These operations generally deprive pets of normal sexual interest, and obviously prevent them from having offspring or participating in the pleasures of parenthood. But again, the degree of suffering caused by this infringement is probably minimal. Surgery is performed under anaesthetic, and it is unlikely that the animal has any concept of the possible pleasures it might have enjoyed were it still physically intact. Artificial selective breeding has transformed the dog into a bizarre variety of shapes, sizes and temperaments, and not all of these changes have been in the animal's best interests. Many breeds suffer from congenital physical disorders, some of which condemn them to a lifetime of discomfort.[42] Pets are also subjected to unnecessary and inhumane 'cosmetic' surgical procedures, such as tail-docking, ear-cropping or declawing,* either to suit

* In Britain, the vast majority of veterinarians have long been ethically opposed in principle to tail-docking, ear-cropping and the surgical 'declawing' of cats for non-medical reasons. Until recently, however, many were willing to perform tail-docking operations in order to prevent lay persons from carrying out these procedures inexpertly. In 1993, despite opposition from the UK Kennel Club, it