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Elephants, Horses, Dogs, and Us

Kudos to *The New Atlantis* for breaking new moral and political ground with its symposium “Regarding Animals” [Winter/Spring 2013].

For decades, the consideration of animal welfare has been ideologically and most unnecessarily ghettoized. Within academia, the subject is treated largely as a subspecies of either radical feminism, or of the particular (and particularly ruthless) utilitarianism set down by theorist Peter Singer. Much the same is true in the wider world, where the matter of showing mercy toward animals is largely thought to be “owned” by radical groups whose street theater does more to set the cause back than advance it.

But as *The New Atlantis* now goes to show—including via Caitrin Nicol Keiper’s magnificent essay on elephants—the moral treatment of animals could, and should, transcend these and other narrow party lines. What ghetto could possibly hold Leo Tolstoy, vegetarian and champion of humane treatment of other living things? To what fringe group does one assign, say, the Catholic *Catechism*, which insists on the moral treatment owed to animals? Or the growing number of evangelical Christians attentive to that same question?

“Regarding Animals” helps to realign debate about the earth’s creatures where it belongs: in the center of the public square, as a matter of concern for all people. As another fellow traveler, Mahatma Gandhi, is purported to have said, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be measured by the way in which its animals

are treated.” Today a growing number of Americans would agree—mindful carnivores as well as vegans and vegetarians. That is moral progress, and *The New Atlantis* can be proud of having contributed to it.

MARY EBERSTADT

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Ethics and Public Policy Center

In her thoughtful piece about the world’s largest land mammal, Caitrin Nicol Keiper asks if elephants have souls. But that esoteric debate holds lesser import than the questions that have already been answered.

Elephant experts have documented over and over again the depth and complexity of elephant society. Aunts babysit, mothers teach youngsters life skills such as how to ward off sunburn and insect bites, adults share news and gossip and resolve disputes, and elephant relatives mourn their dead. Elephants have the largest brains of any mammal on Earth and think, plan, and remember. Elephants truly never do forget; their memories are extraordinary.

Imagine, then, what life is like for elephants crammed in zoo cages and chained in circus boxcars, their worlds reduced to a few fetid square feet.

Many elephants confined to U.S. zoos and circuses were once roaming the vast African plains and Asian jungles. Numerous elephants owned by Ringling Bros. circus, for example, were snatched from the wild and will never again experience the joys and challenges or the complexities and culture of their rightful homeland.

As recently as 2003, eleven elephants were traumatically captured from Swaziland, Africa. Seven of the elephants were sent to the San Diego Wild Animal Park and the other four to the Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa. (Three older elephants who were shipped out of San Diego to make room for the new, younger elephants were dead within two years.)

Elephants who are born into captivity face a life sentence—albeit one that is often cut short. More than half of the 78 elephants who have died at zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums since 2000 never even reached the age of forty. In the wild, elephants can live into their seventies. Elephants who give birth in captivity—nearly always as a result of painful and invasive artificial insemination—frequently lose their babies soon afterward. In a 25-year period at the Houston Zoo, fourteen out of fourteen calves died: a 100 percent failure rate. The overall infant-mortality rate for elephants in zoos is an appalling 40 percent—nearly triple that of wild births. At least 29 elephants, including four babies, have died in Ringling’s hands since 1992.

Elephants who do survive probably wish they hadn’t. In their natural habitat, female elephants stay by their mother’s side their entire lives and males until their early teens, but at Ringling’s breeding compound baby elephants are torn from their frantic mothers so that they can be tied down and hit with bullhooks and electric prods until they give up all hope and submit.

There is little doubt that elephants possess both heart and soul. But do we humans have what it takes to stop hurting and exploiting these majestic animals?

INGRID E. NEWKIRK
President and Founder
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

Both Noemie Emery’s horseracing essay “Born to Run” and Diana Schaub’s review “Dog’s Best Friend” evidence the good of shared friendship between humans and animals. They serve to remind us of Immanuel Kant’s warning that “He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.”

There is a growing consensus across the political spectrum that animals should be thought of as more than just mere resources for human persons. While a proper understanding of the role and treatment of animals recognizes the priority of persons, a consistent life ethic should aim to promote the appropriate treatment and flourishing of both.

Moreover, as human persons we are obligated to concern ourselves with the plight of animals, not because we are equals, but because of the very fact that we are not. This does not necessarily demand an outright rejection of horseracing, breeding, or pet domestication, but it does mandate an absolute rejection of animal cruelty and a practice of restraint.

As Emery writes, “Man is an imperfect protector of some of his allies, but he must not forsake those who have shared the most with him.” Plaudits to *The New Atlantis* for providing an occasion for serious reflection on how we might improve in this duty.

CHRISTOPHER WHITE
Center for Bioethics and Culture

I am thankful for your essays that cover a range of animal welfare issues. Noemie Emery’s piece, “Born to Run,” addresses the unfortunate relationship between horseracing and horse slaughter. Recent estimates of U.S. horses sent to slaughter indicate a steady increase from about

100,000 in 2010 to 160,000 in 2012. Horse slaughter is the quickest, cheapest, and cruelest way to unburden oneself of the responsibility of horse ownership. With a little more effort and caring, owners could give their horses a second chance. There are hundreds of horse rescue facilities and countless programs that will employ horses for therapeutic riding and police use, to name a few.

The vast majority of the 9 million domesticated horses in the United States belong to responsible owners who continue to care for them beyond their most productive years. Horses hold a special place in Americans' hearts. They helped settle our land and still serve as our trusted companions in work, sport, and leisure. Never have horses been considered food in this country. Due to their unique physical and psychological natures, horses suffer during every step of the slaughter pipeline—from the auction house to the kill box. Slaughter is no way to end the life of an animal who means so much to us.

From the perspective of faith, we understand that God entrusted animals to our care and that they ultimately belong to Him. Matthew Scully, in his 2005 essay "Fear Factories" in the *American Conservative*, writes: "The moral standing of our fellow creatures may be humble, but it is absolute and not something within our power to confer or withhold. All creatures sing their Creator's praises, as this truth is variously expressed in the Bible, and are dear to Him for their own sakes." Animals matter to God, and sending them to slaughter merely for reasons of expedience is a breach of His trust.

Horse owners and breeders are joining together through The Humane Society of the United States' Responsible Horse Breeders Council to alter the perception

of horse slaughter as an acceptable method of relinquishment or disposal. These growing coalitions recognize their critical role in promoting an ethic around horse ownership—one that acknowledges the many benefits (both financial and spiritual) that horses provide to humans, and honors this gift by striving to ensure that these animals are afforded humane, respectful treatment throughout life and in death.

We can protect American horses from slaughter by asking Congress to pass the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act—H.R. 1094/S. 541 in the 113th Congress—which will prevent horse slaughter from resuming in the United States and close our borders to the industry once and for all.

CHRISTINE GUTLEBEN

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Noemie Emery's examination of the ethics of horseracing provided a revealing and thought-provoking glimpse at how humans can simultaneously exploit and deeply care for thoroughbreds. During my years of showing horses and following races at tracks around the country, I saw firsthand that everyone involved in racing, from the groom who cools out the horse after a race at a dusty county fair track in Stockton, California to the wealthy owner in the private box at Churchill Downs, loves these animals. Most trainers and their staffs work incredibly long hours, sometimes surviving on coffee and candy bars, as they travel from track to track, and most don't call it a day until their horses are bedded down and comfortable.

How then to explain the uncomfortable reality of racing? How to explain that approximately 22,000 thoroughbreds are

born each year and 10,000 thoroughbreds are sent to Canadian and Mexican slaughterhouses annually? To try to understand this, we can look, as Ms. Emery did, at the unluckiest and luckiest. Ms. Emery mentions both Ferdinand, who was killed in a slaughterhouse in Japan, and the heroic efforts to save Charismatic when his leg was fractured in the 1999 Belmont Stakes. Ms. Emery didn't say that Charismatic was then sold to breeders in Japan, as Ferdinand had been years before, and that virtually every thoroughbred—indeed nearly every horse in Japan—ends his or her days hoisted upside down in a slaughterhouse. PETA undercover investigators obtained the first-ever footage inside this slaughterhouse, where we captured video of a thoroughbred's last minutes. The horse, frightened and uncertain about what is happening, is tied and sprayed with water. He panics, and at one point, just before being killed, he slips out of his halter and escapes inside the slaughterhouse, only to be caught—and killed—minutes later.

We also saw where Charismatic was living in 2009. Because his offspring have not been successful, he was at the lowest-level breeding farm in Japan, and on the day we visited he was outside in a field that backed up to a shopping center; his stud fee was a paltry \$5,000. The 2002 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner War Emblem also stands at stud in Japan. Or at least the breeding farm tries to persuade him to, using hormones, steroids, and psychological trickery. He is an object of derision among his caretakers, who joked to our investigators that War Emblem “can't get it up.” He has sired only a handful of foals in the last several years. Will these “winners” meet Ferdinand's fate as their economic value decreases? Often, even the “lucky” horses are not so fortunate.

But at least Charismatic and War Emblem have food, care, and a home, however long it lasts. Thousands of thoroughbreds, like the beautiful gray Royale With Speed, who was sired by \$10,000,000-winner Skip Away and whose grandsire is Secretariat, are burnt out and used up before their sixth birthday. We bought Royale straight off a kill-buyer's truck for \$400. Our investigator was documenting the 36-hour journey from auction in the Midwest to slaughter in Canada. The kill buyer, so called because he buys horses cheap at auction and then turns around and sells them for a little more to be slaughtered for human consumption, was persuaded by our investigator to let her ride on the trailer while other investigators followed close behind for the entire grueling trip from Iowa to Quebec. The investigator documented how the 33 horses, locked in the back of a tractor trailer, rode for 36 hours in subfreezing temperatures without any food, a drop of water, or even a chance to get off the trailer and stretch their legs.

Royale is now healthy and happy on the ranch of a PETA supporter. But how did the descendant of one of the greatest horses who ever raced wind up with ruined ankles, deathly ill with the equine disease known as stranglers, and headed for a slaughterhouse? He had raced for several years, and had won a fair amount. But for every race horse, no matter how loved, there are two issues: how to keep them racing and winning and what to do when that fails.

The first issue was explained to us by dozens of racing insiders who have called PETA to blow the whistle on their industry: drugs, drugs, and more drugs. Not necessarily the illegal kind, like cobra venom, which is also ubiquitous in racing, but the painkillers, anti-inflammatories,

and muscle relaxants that cover the pain of their perpetually sore feet and strained muscles. When this no longer works, when horses which haven't even matured physically are arthritic and lame, or when they just don't win, the people who love them often harden their hearts. The horses are shoved into claiming races and go from owner to owner, sliding in rank as they go, until eventually there is nowhere else to go but to auction.

Yes they are loved. And they are drugged, used up, and cast off. They do like to run, in open fields, and even race each other. But I doubt they like to compete when their bodies need rest, when bone grinds on bone in knees aged beyond their years. To portray these animals as deprived of something if they're not tacked up and racing on a track is to wear the same blinders as the owners who send their horses to auction.

The racing industry could do much to improve this situation, and we've been pressing for this and have seen some of our proposals accepted, including the creation of the first industry-supported retirement program. But the drug "reforms" are meager and acceptance is slow, and each year they're debated as thousands of horses die on the track or end up in slaughterhouses. The SAFE Act would help; please join PETA in supporting it. But like the reforms offered to date, it will not prevent suffering and untimely death.

Until drugs are completely eliminated from the sport and until trainers and owners take responsibility for every thoroughbred, from birth through their entire careers and beyond, racing will remain synonymous with cruelty.

KATHY GUILLERMO
Senior Vice President
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

CAITRIN NICOL KEIPER RESPONDS: Thank you to everyone who responded to the "Regarding Animals" symposium. Ms. Eberstadt and Ms. Gutleben are right to note that there is room for any number of philosophical, religious, and political perspectives to come together in support of more humane treatment for our fellow creatures on this earth.

Ms. Guillermo makes an important point: people who own or care for animals genuinely love them. And yet it is at the intersection of our lives with theirs that they so often come to unhappiness or harm. To bring animals into our world means to take away their freedom and to take responsibility for their condition. (Depending on the animal, taking on this responsibility may range from mutually beneficial—as with a pet rescue dog—to perhaps impossible to perform humanely—as with a wild elephant.) Ms. Newkirk and Ms. Guillermo describe some of the shocking ways that we have sadly failed, and Ms. Guillermo is joined by Ms. Gutleben in suggesting some concrete steps in a more positive direction. There is much more to do, as all of these contributors have devoted themselves to doing.

Mr. White emphasizes the value of friendship between humans and animals—a friendship that, because it is unbalanced, requires more from us in learning to understand and protect them. What can we do to bring these friends a greater measure of the joy they bring to us, on their own terms? The fact that people do love animals and want to make a connection with them is not a blot on anybody's character; it is, instead, the place to start in trying to help them. Anybody who has ever had such a connection will recognize it as one of God's great gifts in life.

The Question Concerning Heidegger

Mark Blitz, in “Understanding Heidegger on Technology” [Winter 2014], reminds us that we must study Heidegger both carefully and cautiously—cautiously, in light of the connection between his thought and the Nazis; carefully, in light of the depth and power of a thought that all the same continues to speak to us.

I write here to extend a line of questioning that Professor Blitz’s very helpful essay raises in its final paragraphs. Professor Blitz asks whether Heidegger has not rushed too quickly past moral-political distinctions implicit in ordinary life, distinctions that may well provide a better starting point for reflecting on and guiding technology than Heidegger offers. For my part, I wonder whether our typical moral-political judgment of Heidegger’s career as uniformly negative does not itself obscure important distinctions and changes in Heidegger’s stance that a full understanding would need to attend to.

For example, Heidegger is rightfully criticized for two distinct periods: his actions before the war when he was a member of the Nazi party, and his actions after the war when he obstinately refused to apologize or express any remorse for those actions. Yet the characters of these two actions are not identical. In fact, one reason for criticizing Heidegger’s failure to acknowledge and think through the moral-political dimensions of his actions before and during the war (in addition to the necessary moral condemnation his actions deserve) is that it obscures and distracts us from attending to Heidegger’s own change of thought, a change that amounts to an implicit self-criticism.

A major theme of Heidegger from early to late is the crisis of our times. In *Being and*

Time he describes it as our obliviousness to the question of Being; in the Nietzsche lectures of the 1930s he calls it nihilism; in the Bremen lectures and other postwar writings he calls it technology. At all stages Heidegger argues that the human distinction, even the core of human greatness, is our capacity to raise the question of Being; to uncover our own deepest assumptions and treat them as questions rather than dogmatic certainties. The crisis of our times is that we are less and less able and willing to open ourselves to these questions.

Nonetheless, Heidegger’s stance toward our crisis changes over time. The dominant theme of the early writings culminating in Heidegger’s 1933 rectoral address is courage, resolution, and self-assertion. At that time Heidegger believed that a culture worthy of the name, one that made a place for the highest human activity, radical questioning, could be founded in Germany, if only genuine philosophers took the opportunity presented by the Nazis to take responsibility for the political community. Yet this proved to be a delusion, even by Heidegger’s own lights.

In the Bremen lectures and other late writings we find a different picture. Heidegger still believes that we live in an era of nihilism and a fundamental forgetting of the single most important question for human beings as human beings. Now, however, he argues that technological nihilism is not a merely human failing or sin. Rather, it is implicit in how we see the world itself and what we think it means for anything to be at all. As such, it is not something that we humans control or choose, since it shapes our very sense of what it means to control or choose something.

Heidegger does not deny, rather he asserts, that seeing the world through the lens of technology ultimately threatens

our very humanity: if we see the world simply as “standing-reserve” or as simply a means that can be used for any end whatsoever, the danger is that we will come to see *ourselves* simply as means. The commodifier becomes the commodified, a fate chillingly illustrated in the concentration camps. Yet Heidegger also claims that an act of will cannot erase the danger of technology. That would be to assume that we humans are the absolute masters and so to merely reaffirm the technological worldview while attempting to solve the problems of technology. No political movement, no self-assertion on our part can change the fundamental way Being or the world appears to us, and all attempts to do so only entangle us in technology in an ever deeper, because less self-aware, way. And this seems to be Heidegger’s judgment on his own delusional engagement in politics.

I ask, do not the Bremen lectures express just this self-critique on the part of Heidegger? Professor Blitz draws our attention to Heidegger’s infamous equation of mechanized agriculture with concentration camps, Allied war crimes, and the hydrogen bomb. It should be noted that Heidegger’s statement is primarily defensive in intention. It says, *yes, we Germans committed atrocities; but so too have Germany’s critics*. Whatever we may wish to say about Heidegger’s defensiveness here, does not this statement implicitly admit that Germany and the Nazis in particular were examples of, agents of, the dehumanizing force of technological nihilism? Does it not amount to a tacit admission that Heidegger’s participation in the Nazi movement furthered nihilism rather than reversing it?

To be sure, we may well wish to criticize the late Heidegger on his own terms,

albeit on opposite grounds than our criticism of the earlier Heidegger: having had excessively high expectations from politics earlier on, he now expects too little from politics and therefore avoids the burden of responsibility. Yet Heidegger would respond that to judge him only from the point of view of morality, of good guys and bad guys, can easily be another way of missing the all-important question: what does it mean to be? What is the reality that exists outside of human beings, that forms the very condition of the possibility of human beings and their doings, moral or otherwise? As Professor Blitz would no doubt agree, to judge Heidegger’s actions without attention to his claim that human greatness is intimately entangled with our ability to raise the question of Being is to have only a very truncated understanding of the phenomenon of Heidegger. Besides, Heidegger’s fundamental claim may be simply correct.

THOMAS W. MERRILL
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I write out of gratitude for Mark Blitz’s very thoughtful discussion of Heidegger’s challenging understanding of technology. I have long wondered about something Professor Blitz touches on in his essay. He points to Heidegger’s hope that if we see that technology is “only one way in which things can reveal themselves,” i.e., one way of showing the truth, we can come to appreciate other ways of revealing, and so not be trapped by the fate of technology. Heidegger’s relativism is meant to rescue us from the tyranny of technological rationality. As he expresses this in “The Question Concerning Technology,” these other ways of revealing or “bringing-

forth” are, like technology itself, also kinds of “poetry.”

Heidegger himself seems to understand his manner of thinking as being outside of the path taken by the entire history of rationalist, Western philosophy (both ancient and modern) that culminated in the dominion of technology over both ourselves and the rest of nature. The new form of thinking to which he points will now even appreciate nature (*physis*) as an instance of poetic revealing rather than the standard by which we make reasoned judgments: in the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, the laurel of nature now belongs to poetry.

This seems to be the context in which Heidegger directs our attention to language as a deposit of wisdom not yet bulldozed by rationalism. Poets, poetry, and language open us up to alternatives to technological thinking. And so we are directed to find in antique German words a resonance with our own experienced dissatisfaction with the dominion of technological rationality.

Perhaps the most frustrating feature of Heidegger’s thought is the totalizing character of what he presents as our fate. Blitz refers to this in the conclusion of his essay as the “pervasive unified horizon” that obscures the ground for making distinctions and therefore choices about happiness, the good, and the sacred. But Blitz also points hopefully to the possibility of a “rational discussion” about how technology relates to our happiness, the good, and the sacred.

I share Professor Blitz’s hope, but wonder how we can then take some parts of Heidegger and leave others. The non-technological space Heidegger opens up is for poetry, it would seem, not rational discussion. What is the standard by which

we choose among the parts of Heidegger that interest us?

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I recently had the pleasure of reading Mark Blitz’s remarkably cogent and comprehensive essay, and wish to offer a friendly qualification.

Professor Blitz’s chief criticism of Heidegger’s theory of technology is that it is inclusive to the dangerous extent of blurring “distinctions that are central to human concerns,” and thus “ignores or occludes the importance and possibility of ethical and political choice.” In support of this position Blitz emphasizes a particularly insensitive remark in which Heidegger suggests that modern mechanized agriculture is “in essence the same” as nuclear weaponry and mass extermination. Blitz understandably concludes that any such standpoint that would enable one to mention mechanized agriculture and death camps in the same breath ought to be “ignored or at least modified because it overlooks or trivializes the most significant matters of [political-ethical] choice.”

One problem with this account is that it appears to conflate Heidegger’s claim of equivalence “in essence” with a claim of moral equivalence. When Heidegger remarks that the hydrogen bomb, for instance, is “in essence” the same as modern mechanized agriculture, he is not necessarily suggesting that these ought to carry the same moral significance, but rather that such developments are, at their deepest level, conditioned by the same technological manner of understanding beings as a whole.

It is important that for Heidegger technology is essentially a form of revelation,

the manner in which beings appear to us, and that this mode of revelation is not subject to choice but rather itself conditions the possibilities for choice. Technology is therefore not a collection of useful, neutral tools and instruments to be used wisely or poorly, because the essence of technology shapes categories of thought that would be responsible for wise or moral choice. Thus Blitz's suggestion simply to ignore or modify Heidegger's account of technology, and ultimately to focus on "how to use technology well" may be good advice, but it fails to confront Heidegger on his own terms.

It may in the end be possible to reconcile Heidegger's account with some of Professor Blitz's concerns. One might interpret Heidegger's comparison of mechanized agriculture with nuclear weaponry not as a dismissal of important moral distinctions, but instead as reflective of an understanding that the threat of technology is of such depth as to encompass even moral considerations. One danger of technology is that it threatens to reveal human beings themselves, in addition to things, as homogenized, replaceable material (e.g., human resources). In such a scenario moral distinctions would be irrelevant insofar as their possibility rests on an essential difference between humans and things. To simply reject Heidegger's account of technology for not focusing on morality is thus to risk ignoring a much more fundamental threat involving the conditions for the possibility of morality. To accept Heidegger's account of technology does not therefore entail the sort of moral-political insensitivity of which he (whether rightly or not) is so often accused.

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MARK BLITZ RESPONDS: I thank Professors Merrill and Duff and Mr. Beattie for their kind remarks and thoughtful responses.

Concerning Professor Merrill's first specific point, Heidegger's thought both before the rectoral address and after is that we stand within Being but do not control it. The resoluteness he discusses in *Being and Time* is not meant to be an attitude, virtue, or act of will but an existential possibility, an element of our disclosing of Being. Concerning Professor Merrill's second point, equating Germany in the Second World War with its "critics" belongs to the obfuscation of vital differences that is characteristic of what is problematic in Heidegger's political understanding. As for Professor Merrill's third point, to judge Heidegger only politically is indeed to see him too narrowly. I do not, in this essay or in other things I have written about Heidegger, suggest the contrary.

The issue that Professor Duff raises at the end of his letter is an important one. I believe that the best way to deal with it is to see whether what is especially cogent in Heidegger can be understood in other terms (say, Plato's or Hegel's, considered in the light of the issues Heidegger brings up) rather than trying to choose among and thus discard parts of his presumably coherent thought. We might consider the efforts of some thinkers first influenced by Heidegger (say, Klein, Kojève, and Strauss) in these terms.

With regard to Mr. Beattie's point, Heidegger's "own terms" involve the fundamental interplay between man and Being. If this "deepest" level does not allow fundamental ethical and political distinctions, perhaps it is being understood insufficiently, or is not in truth the deepest level. Heidegger indeed argues that technology

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shapes categories of thought. But this does not mean that his view is altogether true. The questions that I would ask each of the letter writers are the three that I asked in the penultimate paragraph of my essay. I repeat the first: “Is the way that beings present themselves to us meaningful only in Heidegger’s sense, or can an account be given for this meaning that at the same time allows and even demands moral choice and openness to being beyond what Heidegger allows?”
