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Animal Rights Movement

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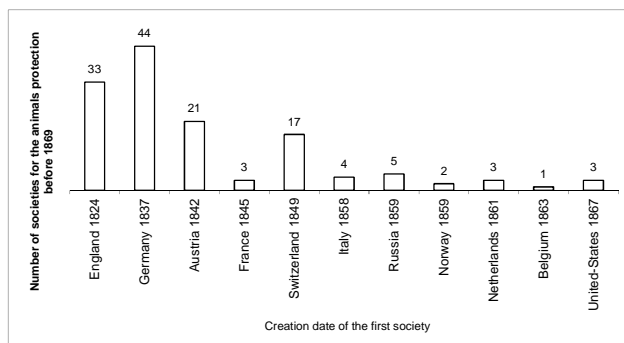
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In the English-speaking world, the expression “animal rights movement” is used to designate activist organizations that, since the late 1970s, have denounced the exploitation of animals. However, by this point, the history of social movements for the protection of animals was already more than one hundred and fifty years old. Indeed, since the start of the nineteenth century, numerous activists have been appalled at the human treatment of animals and have mobilized against the brutality of our customary behaviour. First concerned with cattle, it was only through gradual sociological evolution that animal protection extended to pets and, much later still, to wild species and their natural environment. This long history of mobilization for the protection of animals is inevitably linked to the evolution, not merely of socially acceptable emotions, but also of the threshold of tolerance of uncontrolled violence (Élias, Dunning, 1994; Hirschman). Methodologically, historical analysis has proven essential in retracing the origins of different types of vocations and emotional gratification, thanks to which, still today, animal advocacy can mobilize activists of widely varying sociological profiles.

In 1824, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was the first activist organization in the world founded to reform the way in which human beings treated animals. In 1840, the patronage/sponsorship of Queen Victoria allowed it to become the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and to bring together reputable members of the *establishment*/establishment. In other countries, certain elites organized to form bodies similar to the RSPCA. Members of these activist organizations were concerned about the sight of cattle and draft animals being mistreated/spectacles which involved handling cattle and draft animals. However, they focussed not on animal suffering, but rather on the uncouth

practices of these animals' owners/handlers. In fact, members of the first organizations to protect animals thought of themselves as educators whose role was to develop standards and establish pedagogical measures to educate the masses, and they acted accordingly. Aversion to brutality, injuries and blood, as well as respect for self-control and temperance and an interest in economic returns, formed the basis of the moral standards that protective societies promoted. Animal advocacy was considered one of the most effective means to reduce the violence of the lower classes that, especially in countries like France, risked triggering revolutionary types of riots (Agulhon, 1988).



Source: Table developed by the author.

During the last third of the nineteenth century, moral protests and mobilization against the mistreatment of animals were characterized by a number of interdependent developments. First, the widespread adoption of pets, and especially of dogs, in an increasing number of homes contributed to promoting/glorifying/disseminating the private values of a domestic/private sphere to which middle-class women were henceforth confined (Kathleen, 1994). Scandalized by the fate of abandoned dogs, the women flocked to organizations for the protection of animals that offered them the possibility of participating in the public sphere, from which they were usually excluded, in the name of protecting the weak, part of their private role. Thus, the first dog shelters were created in Great Britain in 1860 and in

France in the 1880s, before becoming the activity mobilizing the most resources of animal protection organizations, which is still the case today. The institutionalization of shelters leads a growing proportion of activists to see themselves as succourers/rescuers/caregivers/?? whose mission is to relieve the suffering of well-loved and loving creatures.

Moreover, Great Britain, soon followed by other countries, witnessed considerable outrage about the spreading practice/development of vivisection (French, 1975). In 1875, in London, Frances Power Cobbe founded the *Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection*. A mere year later, the RSPCA counted no less than ten British antivivisection associations. In 1885, according to the *Bulletin de la Société française contre la vivisection*, there were 26 European antivivisectionist societies: fifteen in Great Britain, three in Switzerland, two in Germany, and two in France. Initially started by traditional elites, disquieted by the rise of a scientific and medical bourgeoisie/middle class, these activist organizations found considerable support amongst women, shocked at the idea that dogs could be vivisected (Lansbury, 1985). Mobilization against vivisection arose at a time when the history of animal protection was reaching a critical turning point. On one hand, in the wake of both romanticism and democratic egalitarianism, concern with the fate of animals was part of the promotion/recognition/development of a levelling of compassion. In fact, animal suffering, described as similar to that of weak victims of powerful torturers, became the focus of a new type of activists, determined to act as vindicators. Animal protection then assumed a critical, even subversive dimension, to the extent that it allowed outsiders to identify with the animal victim, and to protest such an abuse of power (Traïni, 2011).

Nonetheless, the description of vivisectionists as despicable torturers also aroused the indignation of the scientific community, who rapidly organized a devastating counter-attack against the opponents of vivisection. In 1882, British scientists founded the Association for the Advancement of Medicine by Research. In 1884, the French psychiatrist Valentin Magnan likened the protection of animals to a form of madness caused by hereditary degeneration. In 1909, in the United States, Charles Loomis Dana, President of the American Neurological Society, described the protectors of animals as sick individuals suffering from zoophil-psychosis (Buettinger, 1993). Scientism and sexism thus encouraged the social circulation of a stereotype attributing activism on behalf of animals to an excess of emotions, characteristic of pathologies to which the feminine nature was particularly subject.

Thus, after being defended by the most prestigious elites of a number of countries, animal protection became increasingly labelled as due to a surfeit of sentimentality, inappropriate in the public sphere. However, since the second half of the twentieth century, a series of distinct developments/heterogeneous evolutions has helped to restore the prestige of animal advocacy. On one hand, attachment to pets has become much more widespread across the social classes than in the previous century. The socialization of children in developed countries is increasingly characterized by emotional and imaginary bonds with pets, stuffed animals, and animal characters in comic strips or cartoons. Moreover, the discovery of such concepts as biocenoses, the ecosystem, climax, and biodiversity, have contributed to the slow emergence of an ecology that would come to provide compelling scientific justification for the protection of wild species and their natural environment. Activists, specialists in the natural sciences, founded organizations to protect wild species threatened with extinction. Thus, in 1961, for example, Sir Julian Huxley and three

British ornithologists founded the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) which, thirty years later, claimed 4,700,000 members. The widespread interest in wild species also owes much to those in television and the cinema who, following in the footsteps of Jacques-Yves Cousteau, have contributed to making fauna, previously distant and unknown, into a more familiar television spectacle. Within homes, especially through a child's eyes, the lines separating pets, stuffed animals, and wild or domestic species seen in documentaries or cartoons, has blurred. This evolution appears even more significant since it challenges the distinction between "useful" animals and "harmful" animals that nineteenth century protectors of animals promoted. This profound change in the depiction of animality has favoured the broadening/extension of the vocations of *succourer* and *vindicator* — originally exclusively oriented towards pets—to also include wild species and cattle. Thus, in 1963, British activists from the *Hunt Saboteurs Association* attracted attention through the dramatic/sensational act of using their bodies as barricades to disrupt the fox hunt, despite the risks involved. In 1972, the same activists founded the *Band of Mercy*, then, in 1976, the *Animal Liberation Front* (ALF), and launched commando operations against industrial livestock farming and laboratories to liberate the largest number of animals exploited by human beings. ALF activists assumed the role of *liberators*, determined to defy the law and face danger as long as the action undertaken could save the life of an animal perceived as worthy of compassion.

Moreover, between 1970 and 1978, principally at Oxford, animal ethics prompted a group of academics to re-examine issues of moral philosophy. Richard Ryder, Peter Singer, Tom Regan and others have fuelled debates around the notion of antispeciesism, that is, the desire to challenge discrimination against members of different species. Certain activists involved in this philosophical debate, following the

example of Henry Spira in Manhattan in 1976, organized protest campaigns against animal experimentation. However, the role adopted by these activists was more that of the classic figure of the educator, rather than the more recent ALF role of the liberator (Singer, 1998). Regardless, along with ecology, the philosophical reflections of anti-speciesists have contributed to restoring the legitimacy of animal protection. The sophisticated controversies of animal ethics and the university diplomas of a new cohort of activists challenge the derogatory image of an involvement supposedly stemming from mindless sentimentality. In fact, the expression "animal rights movement" does not merely describe a new series of protest activities, but enhances/intensifies the work of legitimization and political affiliation initiated by one of the most recent generations of animal protection activists. Indeed, in English-speaking countries, "rights talk" claims a twofold legitimacy, both from a grounding in philosophy, and from the legacy of movements as significant as the civil rights movement.