

# BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Issue VIII

August 2008

[cla.calpoly.edu/bts/](http://cla.calpoly.edu/bts/)

## **Book Review Of Brian Luke's *Manhood and the Exploitation of Animals***

Laura Donnellan LLB, LL.M.

School of Law,

University of Limerick,

Ireland

### **Structure of the Book**

In *Brutal: Manhood and the Exploitation of Animals*, Brian Luke examines the relationship between animal exploitation and gender. Animal exploitation encompasses hunting, animal experiments and animal sacrifice. Luke links the past and continued existence of these practices to the predatory nature of men and the need for men to assert their masculinity. The book is divided into three parts, with each part focusing on a different aspect of animal exploitation. Part One: Justifying Men's Exploitation of Animals includes two chapters, Chapter

1 *The Species Boundary* and Chapter 2 *Men's Predation and the Natural Order*. Part Two: Understanding Men's Exploitation of Animals is divided into three chapters; Chapter 3 discusses *The Erotics of Men's Predation*; Chapter 4 examines *Sacrifice: A Model of Paternal Exploitation*; and Chapter 5 explores the *Vivisection as a Ritual Sacrifice*. Part Three: Opposing Men's Exploitation of Animals concludes with two chapters, Chapter 6 on *The Ethics of Animal Liberation* and Chapter 7 on *The Politics of Animal Liberation*.

## **Introduction: Central Issues**

From hunter to animal sacrifice to animal experiment, the issue of masculinity is the common thread that weaves throughout the book. The comprehensive introduction begins by distinguishing between the role of women and men in the animal liberation divide. Luke notes that men are viewed as being predatory in nature while women exhibit an emotional attachment to animals. Women as life-givers identify with animals and through gestation and suckling have caring and nurturing capacities that can be transferred to animals. Females generate life directly in a positive manner, whereas men due to biological constraints are unable to gestate thus it follows that their generation of life is viewed as an indirect form and consequently has negative connotations. In using the negative/positive direct/indirect terminology, Luke argues that women create life and as a corollary, men cause death. He asserts that both men and women can perform certain tasks equally, such as household duties,

teaching, gardening etc. However, these tasks fail to enhance the male status. The writer notes that women by gestation and suckling have their femininity affirmed and are empowered by the ability to create new life. Paradoxically, men are emasculated by their inability to create life in a positive sense, and thus seek other outlets to express their masculinity. Luke asserts that hunting is a predominantly male activity, while women make up the majority of its opponents. Luke refers to the theory that men who oppose the exploitation of animals are considered to be less male than their counterparts who partake in the practice. According to Luke, many men feel that their masculinity has been already been compromised, that to be involved in the animal liberation movement would further erode their masculine sensibilities. In exploring the discourse, Luke contends that it is considered more natural for a woman to be opposed to animal exploitation as her opposition is in keeping with the nurturing and compassionate attributes of womanhood. He cites the feminist point of view, in which women identify more with animals than men because women are oppressed in a similar manner to animals. However, he admits that some women, in their endeavours to be liberated, may become exploiters themselves. While acknowledging this, Luke confirms that there are women who enjoy hunting and other exploitive practices in the same way as men do. In this situation these women are not vulnerable and oppressed. Luke makes a valid point in relation to women as protestors. Some anti-animal advocates have espoused the view that female protestors are deflecting their emotions to animals instead of their children and husbands. From this reader's point of view

it also raises the question whether these anti-animal advocates would view women who engage in hunting as transferring their violent tendencies from their children to a more vulnerable animal.

Luke offers a word of caution to those who view animal exploitation as gender neutral. The cosmetic and fur industry are strongly associated with female consumers. Although leather is an animal product, activists do not have the same contempt for it as they do fur. Luke notes that fur sales have decreased (by 45% in the period 1986 to 1991, at p.14). Although not discussed in such terms in the book, it would seem that women who wear fur are viewed in a manner that can be described as double deviant. Women are biologically predisposed to be compassionate and nurturing. When a woman acts in a manner inconsistent with this view, her actions are considered more heinous than a man in the same situation. In reference to the cosmetic and fur industries, it would seem that killing for sport or meat or science is acceptable violence as it is violence that is inherent to men, or as Luke puts it “male violence” (at p.16). In essence, Luke is referring to arguments that suggest that women in their perceived role of nurturers and carers cannot justify the wearing of fur or cosmetics. Female violence is not recognised nor tolerated. In their endeavours to address animal suffering, the majority of women consumers purchase cruelty free products. This reflects women as being caring and responsive as they actively source products not tested on animals. Men seem to put aside any sympathies they may have and purchase the animal tested product for

convenience. This is accepted by society. Luke finds that the masculine packaging and branding of male products implies domination and masculinity. Similarly to fur, the cosmetics industry is managed predominantly by men but this not does prevent us from equating cosmetics with women.

Luke posits that humans are generally inclined against harming animals. In coming to this conclusion, he contends that women are more likely sympathise and support animal liberation as their involvement in no way derogates what it is to be female. For men, animal liberation can be viewed as compromising their masculinity. On the other hand, animal exploitation, whether it is hunting or vivisection, provides men with an enhanced sense of virility.

## **Main Arguments**

**Part One: Justifying Men's Exploitation of Animals includes two chapters, Chapter 1 *The Species Boundary* and Chapter 2 *Men's Predation and the Natural Order*.**

This part focuses on the how men justify their exploitation of animals. In Chapter 1, Luke expresses sanguine optimism and argues that for the most part humans are sympathetic to the suffering of animals. It is part of the human condition. Luke examines the attitudes towards animals and he provides anecdotal evidence to support his conclusions. He gives contemporary examples to illustrate his arguments. He refers to the effect of the film *Free*

*Willy* (at p.38) and the starring whale called Keiko who lived in a cramped aquarium. Following the success of the film, Keiko was airlifted to Iceland where he lived out his final days. The operation cost in excess of \$1.5 million. This example highlights the length we go to help animals. Luke uses nursery tales as examples of how the true fate of farm animals is kept from children. Luke considers this a deception (at p.44). His pragmatic approach seems at odds with childhood naivety. Perhaps children should be saved from the truth until they are at an age when they can understand. Most children remember the sadness of Bambi's mother dying at the hands of a hunter in the film. The story of the pig in *Babe* is mystical story that has delighted millions of children. Babe is saved from slaughter as he demonstrates an extraordinary ability to herd sheep. Luke has utter contempt for these films and fables, which to him shows the "artificial world we construct in the stories we tell children" (at p.45). While there is some merit to his argument, the reader might well be more inclined to agree with the deception than inform a child of the harsh realities of life.

Chapter Two delves deeper and finds that men's exploitation of animals is part of the natural order. In both chapters Luke questions the continued exploitation of animals. Luke refers to the willing victim, which hypothesizes that animals that present themselves to the hunter are asking to be killed. There is a perceived element of nobility for the animal in offering itself by not running away from the hunter. The hunter almost sees himself and the animal as part of

a kinship. The hunter compares himself to an animal and views himself as a natural predator. Animals kill other animals to survive. In using this analogy, the hunter justifies his actions. Luke quotes the maxim: “flesh eats flesh” (at p.53). Luke points out that only 20% of animals are carnivores. Hunters argue that hunting is both natural and necessary. The chapter presents the view of the hunter. Hunters argue that animals need to have a purpose whether it is providing food or clothing. Animals can be used in any manner as we see fit. Luke disagrees with such a view and raises an interesting point. He opines that the killing of a mortal animal may be more problematic than killing a human who possesses a non-mortal soul. He cites Professor Reverend Andrew Linzey in support of this contention, who proffers: “If, for an animal, this life is all that he can have, the moral gravity of any premature termination is thereby increased rather than lessened”(at p.10).

The chapter concludes that hunting is a gendered activity. The image of the hunter portrayed by the media imbues in the audience an image synonymous with a strong, sexual and manly male. In juxtaposition to this image, the opponents of hunting are depicted as emotional and uniformed women. Luke is faced with a delicate balancing act. His innovative book challenges the pre-conceived notions of gender and animal exploitation. The exploits of both men and women are unearthed. However, the balance tips more in favour of women. This becomes more apparent as the book proceeds to Part Two.

**Part Two: Understanding Men's Exploitation of Animals Chapter 3  
The Erotics of Men's Predation; Chapter 4 Sacrifice: A Model of  
Paternal Exploitation; and Chapter 5 the Vivisection as a Ritual  
Sacrifice**

In Chapter Three, Luke explores the link between hunting and predatory sexuality. The argument put forward is that hunting is a form of eroticism. Luke likens the relationship of the hunter and the hunted to a romantic, passionate and seductive affair. The animal is overcome by the power of the hunter. The hunter legitimises his actions on the basis that hunting is a natural and instinctual practice. The violence inflicted upon the animal is justified and defended. By extension, violence of men towards women and children can also be justified. Luke cites James Whisker, who rejects the sexual side of hunting and opposes the contention that hunters are sexually dysfunctional. Whisker admits that hunting can make one feel manly, but so could other sports. In support of this, Whisker refers to the involvement of women in hunting. It could not be said that women derive any sexual pleasure from hunting. Luke perhaps meekly rejects this and argues that women may experience hunting from a different perspective (as can some men) but this does not invalidate the theory of predatory sexuality. In his conjecture, Luke notes that hunters who derive a heightened sexuality or eroticism from hunting can be considered *normal* men and not in any way dysfunctional or deviant. Whether the same could be considered of a female hunter is not within the ambit of the book, but would



nevertheless provide an interesting debate. By normalising the hunter, anti-hunters' are faced with an arduous task in proving that hunters are engaging in morally unacceptable practices. Luke controversially compares hunting with rape. He gives the example of a male rapist who defends his actions on the grounds that he is the victim. He has lost control or power and by raping he is justifiable seeking revenge. In a similar way, the hunter may perceive a threat from an animal and responds by killing the animal to save his own life. He too considers himself a victim. The evidence would suggest that in most cases the hunter is the one who initiated the threat. The analogy with rape may sit uncomfortably with some. While there is some merit in the argument, it could be argued that Luke is comparing a woman who is raped to an animal who is hunted. While his focus is on the rapist and the hunter as victims, the comparison of non-consensual sex and the death of an animal cannot be ignored. Is he suggesting that women and animals have the same status in the eyes of hunters? If so, the implication is that both are inferior, vulnerable and open to similar exploitation at the hands of men. While this is true in some respects, it is nevertheless an unsettling comparison. It is however in line with Luke's examination of women and animals as prey.

Luke offers an insightful discussion on the use of animal terms in reference to women. He looks at the word "fox" (at p.99), a term often used to describe an elusive woman. Men would like to conquer this woman, whereas a woman labelled a "dog" (at p.99) offers a man no challenge in the same way a dog that

comes when called. A man's masculine status will be enhanced by his conquering of the fox, while there are no kudos for him capturing the dog. Luke refers to a story recounted by Andrea Dworkin (at p.106). Three hunters had gathered around reading pornographic material. A 13-year-old girl became lost in the woods and stumbled upon the three hunters. The hunters rape the young girl. Dworkin had linked pornography to rape but this event caused her to link hunting with pornography and subsequently rape. This ties in the arguments made by Luke that often hunting is associated with the sexual predatory nature of men. Admittedly, many readers may find it difficult to understand how hunters could derive sexual pleasure from hunting. However, Luke provides a number of accounts from hunters become sexually aroused while hunting. This reader found its extension to rape very disquieting. The three men could be rapists irrespective of their hunting. It is accepted that hunting empowers men and reinforces their masculine status, but can this be said to include the rape of a child? In hunting communities, men who derive sexual pleasure from hunting are considered normal. For most people it is unthinkable to consider rape or paedophilia normal. The attribution of normality to sexual predation in hunting is thus undermined. Perhaps these individuals are sexual deviants and would be considered abnormal irrespective of their interest in hunting. Luke does not explore this aspect.

Chapter 4 on Sacrifice provides a fascinating discussion on the nexus between animal sacrifice and gestation. Luke's argument centres on the theory that men

are envious of the gestation abilities of women. He describes three options open to men in their quest for establishing patriliny. Men's need to establish paternity is evidenced in their participation in blood sacrifice. Men may engage in male activities such as war, hunting or science, or they may decide to reevaluate their contribution to the giving of life by amplifying their involvement via the process the fertilization (i.e. if there is no sperm there is no fertilization). A third option is for men to take a female activity and turn it into a male activity. Men are predominantly involved in science and it is these scientists that develop milk substitutes for babies and have provided for the incubation of foetuses outside the womb. By engaging in animal sacrifices, the men involved are controlling the life or death of the animal. In this way he can devalue women's reproductive capacity by taking part is what is termed a "spiritual labour", where female assistance is not required. Luke draws parallels between the sacrificing of a child and the sacrificing of an animal. Both have similar property status. In referring to the biblical story of Abraham offering the ram instead of his son, paternity was constructed through "managed violence". In using this example, a child who is to be sacrificed but is substituted by an animal reinforces the paternity of the sacrificer. The sacrificer becomes the father of the child. If instead of a particular child, the animal is sacrificed instead of children or people in general, the paternity of the sacrificer is widened and the sacrificer becomes responsibility for the continued lives of children and humanity in general. Similarly, circumcision within the Jewish tradition is carried out almost exclusively by men and in the presence of

men. The father controls the exercise and control of violence carried out on the child. Blood from the child is considered to have salvific properties, while menstrual blood and blood from childbirth are deemed impure and polluted. This undermines the position of women as life givers. Sacrificial blood is symbolic of life and blood is needed to live. Men can control this blood in way that they cannot control menstrual and child birth blood.

Luke also refers to the Christian tradition of baptism. He cites the views of some feminist writers who view the baptism of a child as a means for men to appropriate the birth from women. The spiritual labour assumes a higher position than the birth. Luke concludes that ritual killing constitutes a threat towards people. Men can decide who to kill and who to save and in doing so it allows men take credit for the continued existence of life. While ritual sacrifice was a practice of old, nowadays humans cannot be lawfully sacrificed. This weakens Luke's argument. Men have a choice to take or save a life and if they take a life they face the wrath of the judicial system. Perhaps this is an overriding principle that regulates men's behaviour rather than attributing their decisions to spare a life on the grounds of the establishment of patriliney.

Chapter Five takes the previous chapter to another level. Ritual animal sacrifice is said to no longer exist but a new form has taken its place; namely that of vivisection. Vivisection is mainly associated with men as women were traditionally excluded from university. The masculinization of science and its

corresponding feminization of its opponents have served to reinforce vivisection's association with men. Luke states that most theorists exclude vivisection from their analysis on the grounds that vivisection has proved useful in developing therapies for human diseases. Luke recognises that animal rituals serve no real purpose. He disagrees with this exclusion as he refers to documentary evidence in support of this. Luke notes that animals used in developing cancer treatment have failed to significantly improve survival rates. He also refers to the lack of hygienic practices among physicians at the turn of the last century. The practice of washing hands by physicians did not become a common practice until 1885. It was believed that antiseptics tested on animals provided a cure for women suffering from puerperal fever during childbirth. However, the washing of hands would have greatly reduced the death rate. Luke also discusses the importance of female healers. Women traditionally practiced alternative medicine using herbs to treat ailments. These women were considered to be witches and were subjected to witch burnings. The practice of alternative medicine by women began to re-appear in the nineteenth century, which also witnessed the establishment of vivisection as a scientific practice. Physicians in an attempt to display their manliness associated themselves with the scientists. Women healers were the subject of cynicism and derision. Men saw science as a way of proliferating their patriliney. Luke gives the disturbing example of the sixteenth century public vivisections involving dogs with pup. The pups would be cut out and showed to the mother and then harmed. Luke views this as a method of male control over female birthing. Vivisection was

not confined to animals as humans were often experimented on in the post World War II period. A more innocuous example is that of childhood immunisation. A child is injected with a small amount of the disease. It is done on public health grounds but conjures images of a ritualistic nature. The doctor can decide to give the child the proper dose or a fatal dose. Again, Luke equates this with male control over violence. As children are required to be immunised before starting school, immunisation signifies the child's progression from a female-associated domestic realm to the male dominated public school system. While Luke raises an interesting argument, it would seem that a doctor's decision to administer a proper dose or a fatal dose is not controlled by masculine urges but down to their training, ethics and the law. A doctor who administers a lethal dose to a child would be considered at the very least negligent, a trait that would seem counterproductive in one's quest for male domination. Statistics are not provided on the gender breakdown in the medical profession, so it could well be a female doctor that provides the immunisation.

**Part Three: Opposing Men's Exploitation of Animals concludes with two chapters, Chapter 6 on *The Ethics of Animal Liberation* and Chapter 7 on *The Politics of Animal Liberation***

In Chapter Six, Luke looks at the factors which lead to the animal liberation movement, including the rise of second-wave feminism and environmentalism.

He compares anthropocentrism and environmentalism and concludes that

humans are reluctant to accept responsibility for eating meat. To assure ourselves as to its acceptability we look to biblical stories to support our actions. However, by doing so we deny an animal presence. This chapter leads the reader into the final chapter on the politics of animal liberation. This chapter presents Luke with an opportunity to challenge the views of other writers, most notably Singer, Reagan and Linzey. Vegetarianism raises a number of important issues. Modern intensive farming is a major source of pollution and by adopting a vegetarian lifestyle the world would witness a reduction of 1/3 of the total energy that is needed to support a carnivorous diet (not to mention the reduction of suffering of factory-farmed animals). However, Luke asks the questions whether vegetarianism provides real benefits for the animals and the land. Peter Singer argues that for an individual vegetarian the effects are negligible. However, a large collective group does make a difference. Luke finds Singer's arguments to be "shaky". He argues that it is difficult to find evidence to show that vegetarianism actually affects the industry. For the individual vegetarian there is a sense of nobility and perhaps it is a way of shielding them from personal culpability for the oppression of animals. To Luke, vegetarianism or veganism is an indirect action as it is based on the hope that this will reduce the number of animals slaughtered for meat consumption. He proposes that a more direct action would be to buy factory animals and place them in a sanctuary, block vehicles transporting live animals on their way to the slaughterhouse, or destroy equipment or facilities used in agriculture. Vegetarianism may at best be viewed as a complementary or

supporting practice of the more direct subversive methods of thwarting animal agriculture.

There is also a sexist element to animal liberation. Reagan and Singer dismiss the emotional side of animal liberation. Both writers speak of animals as being capable of reason but do not refer to animals as having emotions. Singer views sentiment and emotion as being female attributes and in the Preface to the 1975 edition of *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002 at p.xxi) Singer states: “the portrayal of those who protest against cruelty to animals as sentimental, emotional ‘animal lovers’ has had the effect of excluding the entire issue of our treatment of nonhumans from serious political and moral discussion”. Singer’s words suggest that attaching female feelings trivialises the animal rights movement.

In furthering his arguments on sexism and animal liberation, Luke points to campaigns run by PETA in which models are pictured in manner tantamount to pornography bearing the slogan “I’d rather be naked than wear fur”. There are two sides to these campaigns. On the one hand, the advertisement is targeting women and is attacking them for wearing fur, and on the other hand, the advertisement presents naked female models that provide titillation for men. These advertisements vilify women but not the commercial industries involved, which are male dominated.



Luke concludes that the problem is sexism. In order to stop animal exploitation we need to challenge the constructions of manhood. Luke concludes that we need to “reject a polarized conception of gender” (at p.229) and that “we are able to revoke the requirement that men create through violence, thus clearing the path to animal liberation” (at p.229).

## **Commentary and Conclusion**

*Brutal: Manhood and the Exploitation of Animals* provides a passionate and illuminating discussion. Luke’s ubiquitous portrayal of men as sexual predators paints a disturbing account of man’s narcissistic endeavours to assert dominion over women, children and animals. It is interesting that the writer is male. Being male gives him an insight into the male psyche and allows him to express freely views that could be construed as unacceptably anti-male from a female author. His book presents a novel theory of animal exploitation. His views on vivisection and animal experimentation as a modern form of ritual sacrifice are both fascinating and disturbing. It begs the question: are men conscious of their struggle for patriliney? Do most men consider themselves sexual predators? Are men jealous of women’s ability to gestate? Perhaps Luke’s account is at best considered a hyperbolised account of the struggles of manhood. While there are elements of truth, one wonders whether the male mind works in such a sinister and malevolent way. Nevertheless, the book offers an absorbing recount of sexism and animal exploitation.

The book is well written and presented. The themes are presented in a coherent manner. The use of anecdotes provides the reader with tangible examples. The author's conclusions on how to end animal exploitation are somewhat over-zealous. Whether man can evince his masculine tendencies of violence will not be solved in our lifetime. On the point of vegetarianism or veganism, Luke does not consider the situation of a world of vegetarians/vegans. If we were all vegetarian or vegan then there would be no need for the continued breeding of sheep, pigs, cows and other animals used for flesh. Most people would not keep these animals as pets and most sanctuaries could not hold the animals. Arguably these animals would become extinct. Is it better than they become extinct and never experience living than living a deplorable life as a factory farm animal? Perhaps ethical farming is the better solution. We will never convince the world to give up meat but we may be able to create a kinder world for these animals to live in. These issues are not considered in the book. This cannot be considered a failing as the book is written from the perspective of a vegan. His sentiment is in keeping with his values.

