

Chapter 16

The Animal Welfare Trade-off or Trading Off Animal Welfare?

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Introduction

8 February 2012. Australia's federal opposition leader, Tony Abbott, is reading to primary school children in Canberra.¹ The book is from the best-selling series by New Zealand author Lynley Dodd, featuring the adventures of a dog, Hairy Maclary, and his animal friends. The next day, 9 February 2012, a Sydney abattoir is closed down after video footage reveals 'gross animal mistreatment'.²

Although quite different, each of the above events represents an awareness that non-human animals share our capacity to experience pleasure and pain, a recognition that has implications for the way humans view and treat animals. These implications can be framed crudely in terms of a threefold choice: define the value of animals on a basis other than human utility, acknowledge but disregard animal sentience, or use animals as a resource in ways consistent with their welfare. The first of these options is increasingly the subject of discussion in contemporary Western society³ but faces the hurdle of a deeply ingrained cultural tradition. Dating back to Roman times⁴ and sanctioned by biblical teachings, the subordinate status of animals has been reinforced by

* The author would like to thank the editors for their helpful comments on a draft of this chapter.

1 Maley, J (2012) 'Pupils Score a Front-row Seat to Dog and Tony show', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February <www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/pupils-score-a-frontrow-seat-to-dog-and-tony-show-20120208-1rf03.html>.

2 Cannane, S (2012) 'Abattoir Shut Down Over Cruelty Concerns', *ABC News*, 10 February <www.abc.net.au/news/2012-02-09/abattoir-shut-down-over-cruelty-concerns/3821302>.

3 See, eg, Francione, G (2008) *Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation*, Columbia University Press, New York.

4 Cao, D with Sharman, K and White, S (2010) *Animal Law in Australia and New Zealand*, Lawbook Co, Sydney, pp 63-65.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.