The "Peaceable Disposition" of Animals: William Bartram on the Moral Sensibility of Brute Creation

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The Philadelphia Quaker William Bartram (1739–1823) is generally recognized as one of America's most eminent and influential naturalists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He is credited with the first known drawing of the Venus Flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*) as well as scores of other sketches of flora and fauna. Along with his father John (1699–1777), he was responsible for classifying and saving from extinction the Franklin Tree (*Franklinia alatamaha*), a shrub which disappeared from the wild in the early nineteenth century. It was largely through his prompting that Jefferson commissioned the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Louisiana territory. (Jefferson wanted Bartram to accompany the survey, but the latter begged off for reasons of age and infirmity.) Moreover, Bartram's *Travels* (1791) provided pioneering and astoundingly accurate descriptions of southeastern reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, and geological formations. Although it was the only book Bartram ever published, the *Travels* immediately earned him an international reputation in the scientific community of his time. Its lyrical descriptions of natural beauty also made it a stylistic prototype for later naturalist travelogues, and served as a major inspiration for British and European romanticism as well as American transcendentalism. In the words of one twentieth-century commentator, Bartram's *Travels* was "the first combination of accurate observation, aesthetic appreciation and philosophical interest in the realm of natural history literature."

What is not usually appreciated, however, is that Bartram was much more than a painstakingly precise observer of natural phenomena and a talented stylist. He was also a pioneering environmentalist. The *Travels* is filled with evidence of his ecological concerns. He laments, for example, the desolation of Georgian and Floridian savannas by indigo and cotton planters who indulge in destructively short-sighted slash-and-burn agricultural techniques. He is horrified at the human disregard for animal life and well-being exemplified in the wasteful bloodsport so popular among his contemporaries. And he warns his readers that continual abuse of land and domestic species will ultimately lead to economic disaster as well as moral corruption. Bartram, then, anticipated many of the ecological concerns which so preoccupy the twentieth-century mind. Like many environmentalists today, he insisted that the "sovereign" position of humans in
the natural order demands a proportionately high degree of ecological responsibility as well as a nonchauvinistic attitude towards animal life. His constant fear was that humans would continue to ignore their environmental responsibilities; his constant hope was that his apprehensions would prove mistaken. As he says in one of the *Travels*’ most poignant passages:

And, O sovereign Lord! since it has pleased thee to endue man with power and pre-eminence here on earth, and establish his dominion over all creatures, may we look up to thee, that our understanding may be so illuminated with wisdom, and our hearts warmed and animated with a due sense of charity, that we may be enabled to do thy will, and perform our duty towards those submitted to our service and protection, and be merciful to them, even as we hope for mercy.

Thus may we be worthy of the dignity and superiority of the high and distinguished station in which thou hast placed us here on earth.\(^{11}\)

Although Bartram was interested in a broad range of environmentalist issues—land ethic, ecologically sound agriculture, the impact of "civilization" on wilderness areas—his special focus was upon the well-being of brute creation, or animals. Throughout his long life Bartram was a devoted student of animal behavior. His ethological descriptions were scrupulously objective, but always complemented by moral reflections which pointed to an obvious love of and ethical concern for the subjects of his scientific investigations. In a century noted for its indifference to animal welfare, Bartram's solicitude must have generated puzzlement at times and scorn at others.\(^ {12}\) That he was aware of the perceived peculiarity of this concern is indicated by his curiously self-conscious confession in the *Travels* that "within the circle of my acquaintance, I am known to be an advocate or vindicator of the benevolent and peaceable disposition of animal creation in general."\(^ {13}\) There was good reason for his defensiveness. The *Travels* portrait of the rattlesnake as an unjustly maligned reptile whose true disposition is "generous" and "magnanimous,"\(^ {14}\) or its description of the wolf as a benevolent, nonrapacious creature,\(^ {15}\) still prompt as much amused incredulity from Bartram's twentieth-century readers as they did from his own contemporaries. As a consequence, Bartram's remarks on the moral sensibility of animals are frequently written off even today as the sentimentalities of a naive romantic who indulged in gratuitously anthropomorphic descriptions of animal behavior.

This evaluation is as mistaken as it is unfair. Although at times Bartram's references to animals wax poetic, his insistence that brute creation displays ethical sensibility and hence legitimately possesses moral standing rests upon solid philosophical reasoning and empirical observation. The specifics of this argument are only suggested in the *Travels*, and their omission does render his descriptions of animal behavior somewhat fanciful at times. But Bartram also wrote (although never published) a more systematic account of his position
which serves as an invaluable resource for making sense of his postulation of moral sensibility in animals. An examination of this manuscript reveals two interesting features of Bartram's animal ethic. First, it shows there are affinities between his position and the "benevolence towards brute creation" attitude characteristic of reformed American Quakerism in the eighteenth century. More importantly, the manuscript provides a philosophical justification for the moral consideration of animals advocated but inadequately defended by Bartram's Quaker contemporaries. Friends such as John Churchman (1705-1775), Anthony Benezet (1713-1784) and John Woolman (1721-1772) tended to base their proto-ecological and ethical concerns for the well-being of animals upon what they perceived as the human duty to cultivate humility in the service of God. Bartram,
however, grounds his position in a defense of the rights of animals to moral treatment by humans. Additionally, while his Quaker contemporaries tended to make their case by appealing to a thoroughgoing theocentrism, Bartram’s argument rests upon a rational analysis of empirical data which avoids theological speculation. As a result, it provides the nonsectarian justification for the ethical treatment of animals which reformist Friends failed to develop.

In what follows, I examine Bartram’s argument for the moral sensibility of brute creation. First I discuss early American Quakerism’s theocentric doctrine of benevolence towards brute creation, argue that its roots are traceable to Quietist influences as well as eighteenth century reformist ones, and indicate the arguments generally employed in its defense. Then I compare that model to the one Bartram defends in his unpublished treatise and argue that the latter is the less parochial of the two. An examination of Bartram’s animal ethic not only sheds light upon a largely ignored facet of his intellectual legacy, it also contributes to our understanding of the roots of American ecological concerns.

QUIETISM, REFORMATION, AND QUAKER ECOLOGY

Eighteenth century American Quakerism was characterized in part by its absorption of the Continental Quietist tradition. This is not to suggest that Quakerism had no affinities with Quietism prior to the eighteenth century. Robert Barclay’s seventeenth century *Apology* was one of the primary authorities for Quakerism’s focus upon the cultivation of the “inner plantation.” But the nascent Quietism of American Quakerism only fully emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century when translations of Continental Quietist writers arrived on the scene.17

The Quietist movement often has been interpreted as a species of mysticism which stressed withdrawal from the world and advocated passivity as the only appropriate spiritual recourse. This assessment, however, is fundamentally mistaken. While it is true that Quietism espoused inwardness, it is incorrect to infer that it likewise encouraged withdrawal from the world. As Rufus Jones points out, Quietist doctrine was not a “religion of lotus-eaters” which insisted on the renunciation of action. Instead, it focused on the “right way to initiate action.”18

Quietism’s basic theological assumption was the doctrine of absolute human depravity. The fall of the race, as expressed through the Genesis story of the expulsion from Paradise, necessarily resulted in the total inability of humans to overcome by their own efforts the inherited taint of corruption. Regardless of how noble the intent, how altruistic the motivation, no action which originated from mere “creaturely” endeavor was either ethically commendable or spiritually pure. But this did not imply that humans should withdraw from activity and complacently sit on their hands. Instead, Quietism enjoined them to subdue the creature within by renouncing prideful confidence in their own abilities to win
salvation, and then eschew egoistic attempts at self-direction. This quieting of egoistic striving and overweening self-reliance hopefully would disabuse the creaturely nature of its intoxication with self. Once emptied, it became a receptacle for the infusion of the divine will. In the words of Madame Guyon, one of the Continental Quietists avidly read by colonial Quakers, "the soul, by death to herself, passes into her Divine Object. . . . God gradually makes her lose herself in him, and communicates to her his qualities, drawing her away from everything she has of her own." An individual who successfully quieted the creature and heeded the divine movement could, without any logical contradiction, perform in the world. The crucial difference was that he or she then acted as a vehicle of God, not as an inherently corrupt and egoistic creature. Since the source of motivation was purified by the divine infusion, the actions that followed were free of the taint of human depravity.

One of the primary reasons Quakerism so readily endorsed Quietist doctrine was that it struck a sympathetic chord with Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678). This work, described by an eighteenth century Anglican as "the glory and Alcoran of Friends" and considered essential reading by colonial Quakers, agreed with later Quietism's doctrine of absolute human depravity. But individual salvation was possible, according to Barclay, because of the presence and operation of God's spirit within the "natural" person. Each human, notwithstanding the taint of inherited sin, is imbued with a "seed" or "light" of God which coexists but does not originate with creaturely nature. Instead, it is a gift divinely bestowed upon members of the race which, if received, and not resisted, works the salvation of all, even of those who are ignorant of the death and sufferings of Christ, and Adam's fall." The admonition against resisting the divine light is, within the context of the present discussion, crucial. Humans should prepare themselves for its illumination by "standing and waiting," emptying themselves of creaturely passions such as self-will and pride that block receptivity to divine grace. Once infused with God's merciful light, their natural corruption is washed away and their actions, although performed in the world, are no longer of the world.

Clearly, then, there were parallels between the religious tenets of traditional Quakerism and Quietism. But it was not until after the middle of the eighteenth century that colonial Quakerism systematically and concretely adapted itself to the two positions' shared emphasis upon inwardness. Part of the explanation for this new direction, as already indicated, was the proliferation of Quietist texts among American Friends. But another reason, as Frederick Tolles points out, was the Quaker community's reaction to what it uneasily saw as its increasing preoccupation with cultivation of the "outward plantation." It feared that its pursuit of worldly position and wealth had caused it to become as "salt which hath lost its savour." As the British minister William Reckitt put it, "the [Quaker] elders . . . are too much in the outward court, which is trodden by the Gentiles, or such as are in the spirit of the world." Consequently, a reformist retreat from
concentration upon the "outward" creaturely nature, and an institutional refo-
focusing on the "inner" illuminated one, characterized late eighteenth century
American Quakerism, particularly in the Philadelphia area where the political and
commercial success of the community of Friends was most obvious.

This is not to imply that the mid-century reformation of colonial Quakerism
was prompted solely by Quietist concerns, but only that it was partially
influenced by them. Jack Marietta points out that reformist Friends of this period
also desired to underscore the traditional reputation of Quakerism as a spiritually
pure movement by reinvigorating its fidelity to a strict ethical code that con-
demned individual transgressions such as sexual and sectarian delinquencies. But
it must be kept in mind that the moral rejuvenation called for by reformist Quak-
ers by and large revolved around sectarian concerns over salvation and spiritual
purity. Although some colonial Friends were familiar with the works of secular
nonQuaker ethicists (the works of Addison, Steele, Pope and Wollaston, for
instance, were often found in Quaker libraries), reformist zeal did not reflect the
ideals of the liberal Enlightenment so much as the duties of Christian disciple-
ship.25 As Marietta observes,

It is clear that [the Quaker reformists] did not subscribe to a liberal
understanding of human nature and society such as their contempo-
rary Benjamin Franklin epitomized. . . . To attribute to eighteenth cen-
tury Quakers [such] liberal attitudes . . . is to err by overlooking what
they themselves said and did. They, in fact, showed no significant
desire to free men and women of restrictions upon their behavior and
character in the expectation that enlightenment, progress, and felicity
would result. They preached strict guidance for youths, discipline for
adults, conformity and community, vocational education only, and
they belittled scores of liberal, centrifugal interests in their people and
church. They extolled Christian works above other virtues.26

In short, although Enlightenment ethical rationalism probably played a lim-
ited role in the emergence of mid-eighteenth century Quaker reformism, sectar-
ian interests as well as Quietist influences were the major causal influences. This
reformist movement in turn prepared the way, as Donald Brooks Kelley has mas-
terfully argued, for the emergence of a uniquely Quaker ecological sensibility.27
Included within that new sensibility was a renewed interest in the moral treat-
ment of animals.

The reform of colonial Quakerism sparked by Quietist influences and the
desire for sectarian retrenchment and ethical orthodoxy took seriously the
injunction to renounce creaturely pride and self-will. Mindful of the need to
"heed the inner light," reformist Quakers exhorted one another to acknowledge
their fallen nature and prepare for divine infusion through the cultivation of
humility and submission. A necessary condition for this receptive humility was
the acknowledgement that all persons, regardless of color, creed, or social rank,
were equally imbued with the spirit of God. Potentiality for salvation was universal, possessed even by those, as Barclay said, who were “ignorant of the death and suffering of Christ.” Philadelphia Friends translated this spiritual equality into the responsibility to “deal gently,” in a humble, compassionate and benevolent manner, with all humans. This led in turn, as Kelley points out, to their embracing “all suffering humanity, finding accelerating compassion for blacks, Indians, and the poor, as well as religious service for Quaker women within the Society of Friends.” To deal benevolently with all of God’s children, irrespective of their station in life, was not only to follow in the footsteps of Christ. It was also to guard oneself against the temptation of self-aggrandizement and worldly pride.

It was a short step from this emphasis upon compassion for God’s “lesser people” to the espousal of benevolence for brute creation. The justification for this extension was twofold. First, the more humility one cultivated, the more one extirpated creaturely arrogance. Humbledness in one’s relations with animals, which traditionally were seen as self-evidently inferior to humans, was therefore good training for the ultimate reception of divine grace. Second, and more significantly, benevolence to brute creation was a manifestation of one’s proper attitude and duty to the deity. The assumption was that God permeated the entire reach of reality, breathing life into every member of the organic order. To show compassion, reverence and love for all life, then, was to honor God, because all life reflected God’s presence. John Woolman expressed this sentiment in one of his journal entries when he said

I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator and learn to exercise true justice and goodness, not only toward all men but also toward the brute creatures; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world; that as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensitive creatures, to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by his life, or by life derived from him, was a contradiction in itself.

In like fashion, Anthony Benezet exhorted Quaker school children to show compassion for brute creation because “He who made us, made the bird and fish.” In harming animals through cruel play or arrogant indifference, he cautioned, youngsters ran the risk of setting “thy Maker’s handy work at nought.” And John Churchman urged his fellows towards universal benevolence by calling upon them to subordinate themselves to “the Lambs Nature in Every Respect and not shake hands with that Nature that would tear and destroy nor in any shape Voluntarily Contribute to the Prince of Blood.”
These and similar sentiments, increasingly popular with American Friends in the second half of the eighteenth century, reflected the growth of an ecological sensibility immediately sparked by both Quietism and the reform movement. This sensibility stressed a benevolence towards all of God's reality—lesser peoples, animals and creation in general—as a duty incumbent upon humans desirous of honoring God through their worldly activities. This spiritual imperative gradually gave rise to an environmental vision of universal harmony between humans and nature in which divinely inspired love and compassion would overcome intolerance, species-chauvinism and utilitarian abuse of land. The ideal, notably captured by the Quaker artist Edward Hicks (1784-1849) in his "The Peaceable Kingdom," became one of the predominant leitmotifs in late eighteenth/early nineteenth century Quaker thought, and exerted immense influence not only within Quaker circles but also upon non-Quaker attitudes towards nature.

Compelling as this ideal may have been, it lacked strong philosophical justification, particularly in regard to its attitude toward brute creation. There are at least two obvious problems with it. In the first place, the assumption that God's presence is manifest throughout all of reality—including brute creation—is based not so much upon argumentation as theological stipulation. Friends such as Benezet and Woolman assumed that the divine permeated nature because nature was created by the divine and hence exhibited, albeit in an imperfect way, Godly qualities. True, many of them—particularly Woolman—then attempted to spell out the empirical tokens of God's presence in creation in general and the animal kingdom in particular, but such observations, founded as they were upon the apriori theological postulation of God's ubiquitous permeation of the natural world, are question-begging. It is one thing to collect empirical data and infer generalizations from them. It is quite another to stipulate a generalization and then read the data through it. But given the theological and sectarian ontological assumptions of Friends such as Benezet, Churchman and Woolman, the latter method was the one most often employed.

Even more problematically, Quietist/reformist Quakerism's regard for the benevolent treatment of animals tended to rest upon the notion of human obligations to God instead of on any quality in animals themselves which logically elicits such treatment. In extending benevolence to brute creation, one fulfills one's responsibilities to honor God and cultivate the inner plantation. One treats animals compassionately, in other words, not because they have a right to such consideration, but rather because such behavior shows proper reverence to God. There was, in short, little attempt on the part of reformed Quakerism to ground the doctrine of benevolence to brute creation by arguing for the inclusion of animals within the moral community—that class of beings which themselves possess moral sensibility and ethical standing and hence deserve moral consideration by other members of the class. As a result, the injunction to treat animals humanely reduces, in contemporary language, to one of "supererogation."
takes seriously the well-being of animals not because they are entitled to such concern, but because its bestowal is charitable, promotive of humility and (at least in the Quaker context) pleasing to God. Strictly speaking, there is no intrinsic obligation to treat animals ethically, because they have no intrinsic right to such treatment. There is only an obligation to honor God, and one of the ways to do that is to show consideration for brute creation. In a curious way, then, the Quietist emphasis upon compassion to brute creation leaves animals out of the picture. Benevolent and compassionate treatment of them is virtuous only insofar as it reflects a fulfillment of the human obligation to revere God. Animals are the intermediaries through which this virtuous behavior is directed. They are not the locus of it. Ultimately, therefore, benevolence towards brute creation is good because it honors God, not because it promotes the well-being of animals. The corollary of this position is that inhumane treatment of animals is wicked not because it is a violation of their right to moral consideration (since they have no such right), but because it is a violation of God's unconditional right to human adoration. In harming animals we do not sin against them so much as against God through them. In the final analysis, reformist Friends such as Woolman, Churchman, and Benezet, who advocated the humane treatment of animals as an integral aspect of their emerging ecological sensibility, did so on the basis of a thoroughgoing and sectarian theocentrism. Their ultimate concern was the human cultivation of attributes which focused attention upon God, not animal well-being per se. True, a regard for animals was considered virtuous, but only because it fulfilled human obligations to the divine. It was Bartram, a Friend sympathetic with the spirit of reformed Quakerism's emphasis upon benevolence to brute creation, who supplied the first systematic and nontheocentric justification for this attitude. In refocussing attention from God-directed obligations to an analysis of the intrinsic rights of animals to moral consideration, he avoided the sectarianism of reformed Quakerism's attitude towards animal well-being and provided it with a firmer philosophical basis.

ANIMAL RATIONALITY AND MORAL SENSIBILITY

Bartram's Quaker contemporaries, I have argued, based their exhortations for the humane treatment of animals upon theocentric grounds. From a methodological perspective, this meant that their models were apriori, speculative, and theological in character. Notwithstanding the traditional Quaker rejection of over-intellectual philosophizing in favor of attention to the lessons of experience, Friends such as Benezet and Churchman, who stressed benevolence towards brute creation, justified their positions more often than not on theological doctrine instead of observations of nature and inductive generalization. They began with the speculative assumption that God created and hence permeated the natural order, and then inferred that concrete worship of God entailed reverence for
his physical handiwork. Their methodological approach, in short, was nonempirical. They posited speculative principles about the nature of reality from which they deduced specific propositions that claimed to be descriptive of obligations, virtuous behavior, and so on.

Bartram's methodology, on the other hand, was more empiricist and less theological. He was too much the natural philosopher to rest content with speculation that was not firmly grounded upon observation and classification of experienceable phenomena. Moreover, his years of patient scrutiny of animal behavior provided him with a wealth of ethological data that far surpassed that of most of his Quaker contemporaries. It is consequently no surprise that his unpublished treatise's argument for the moral sensibility of brute creation rests upon a comparison of observable animal and human behavior. It is only after an
examination of the empirical data that he allows himself to speculate about its meaning. From first to last, his inductive generalizations are generated from a painstaking observation of natural phenomena which deliberately eschews appeals to aprioristic theological assumptions.

This is not to deny that Bartram accepted certain basic ontological assumptions about the nature of reality. He seems to have been influenced by the Enlightenment notion of natural law, in both the physical and normative realms. His father, John, owned a volume of the Spectator essays, and it is probable that William was familiar with the mild deism defended in them by Addison and Steele. Moreover, although no great reader, William clearly had first hand acquaintance with Pope's Essay on Man. (In his treatise, the only direct quotation is Pope's "The proper study of mankind is man.") Finally, although William seems to have died in good standing with the Society of Friends, his father had been disowned in 1758 by the Darby Friends Meeting for his deistic denial of Christ's divinity. It is not unlikely that William picked up, at least to a certain extent, the elements of his father's deistic tendencies.

It is arguable, then, that Bartram "read" his empirical data through the eyes of Enlightenment rationalism tempered by a Quaker-influenced rejection of mechanism. But notwithstanding the probable presence of this theoretical worldview, it is clear that his reflections on the ethical standing of brute creation rely more heavily upon empirical observation and philosophical reflection than the theocentric perspectives of his more orthodox Quaker contemporaries. His inferences, like all inductive conclusions, may with some degree of accuracy be seen as circular, reflecting as they do the ontological presumptions upon which they are grounded. But the distinctive mark of Bartram's generalizations about the moral sensibility of animals is that they stem from a philosophical, not a theological, foundation. Furthermore, they incorporate a greater wealth of empirical data than do the reflections of Benezet, Churchman, or even Woolman. This does not, of course, necessarily make them more correct. It does, however, reveal them to be less sectarian.

Bartram begins his analysis by agreeing with the traditional assumption that human beings are endowed with intelligence and hence capable of intelligent, purposeful behavior. The faculty which serves as the source of this capacity is reason, or "intelligent and rational powers." Introspection tells us that the general role of reason is to "decide upon" or evaluate "every operation or motion of the sensations, passions and affections." But the rational faculty in turn has three specific functions. From a logical perspective, it enables humans to distinguish between false and true propositions and invalid or valid arguments: "it is the business of the mind . . . to watch and observe [its] observations and movements." From a pragmatic or social perspective, reason functionally serves as a necessary condition for the linguistic communication of ideas, the education of the young, and the creation of arts and inventions. Finally, from an ethical perspective, reason functions to discern virtue from vice, good from evil. It warns
against the "passions or affections" by which "the mind is often seduced," thereby prompting humans to ameliorate their behavior with "temperance and mediocrity" (i.e., moderation). It is not the case, however, that humans always heed the rational injunction of their moral sensibility. As Ovid said in the *Metamorphoses*, we often see the better but pursue the worse. Self-indulgent failure or stubborn refusal to heed the normative dictates of moral reason leads to behavior which "disgraces the mind and vitiates the heart." Both experience and reason teach us the dangers of indulging in unbridled passions. They are self-destructive as well as harmful to the well-being of other rational agents. Consequently, given the fact that an intemperate abuse of our passions and affections can harm others, we owe it to all members of the moral community to act in such a way as to avoid harming them. Although Bartram fails to spell out fully his justification for this latter claim, the logical direction of his argument suggests something like the following. Experience tells us that rational creatures harm themselves when they act irrationally. Such self-harm is destructive of the individual's well-being. It follows, then, that the rational agent will avoid such disruptive behavior. Moreover, the rational agent will realize that what is harmful to him or herself is likewise harmful to other rational agents. Consequently, just as a rational person recognizes a prudential obligation to refrain from behavior which harms him or herself, so he or she likewise recognizes an ethical obligation to refrain from harming other individuals who are similar in nature—that is, those beings likewise endowed with rational moral awareness. This implies that rational agents have an intrinsic right to moral consideration.

It should be noted that Bartram has based his entire argument up to this point on generalizations drawn from the data of introspection and empirical observation. He argues that human behavior points to the existence of a faculty of reason, and that one of the functions of reason is moral awareness. Moreover, he derives a justification of moral obligation from the consistent inference that what is ethically appropriate for one rational agent is appropriate for all rational agents. It makes little sense to argue that certain actions are in my best interests as a rational agent if I deny their value for others similarly endowed with reason. Since I have a prudential obligation to promote my own flourishing, then, I have an obligation to promote the flourishing of others in my moral community, and they have a right to expect that of me. And membership in that moral community is determined by whether or not an individual possesses a rational faculty.

But what about brute creation? Is there any evidence that it is endowed with intelligent and moral reason—the necessary conditions for moral sensibility—and hence possesses the same right to ethical consideration as other members of the moral community?

Bartram clearly thinks so, and once again bases his conclusion upon generalizations drawn from empirical observation. Although humans obviously are not privy to the introspective life of brute creation, a close examination of overt animal behavior reveals activities which suggest the rational functions apparent in
human behavior. Since animals behave in ways similar to humans, and since the latter are obviously rational, Bartram concludes that animals likewise must be rational. His justification for extending the domain of reason to include animals, then, is one of analogous inference, as he clearly states in his unpublished treatise:

Now since we have no certain knowledge that animals below the order of mankind have no intellectual powers, and that we suppose all metaphysical knowledge is attained by analogy ...[,] if we examine and compare those actions and movements of animals which they have in common with us, we find little or no difference[,] why, then, have we not every reason to believe that those actions and movements are excited and proceed from the same motives or cause?

For Bartram, there is abundant evidence to support the analogy between humans and brute creation. In the first place, animals appear to behave in purposeful, creative ways. They are capable of activities which display utility as well as beauty and orderliness.

We must confess that some animals possess arts or systems of modification in ingenuity beyond the power of human art scarcely to imitate, much less equal or excel, namely the combs, honey and wax of bees, the webs and nests of spiders, the husks or cells of the innumerable tribes and species of Madreporites, corals, sea sponges, etc., besides innumerable other instances of the arts and operations of animals, which might require large volumes only to enumerate.

True, animal ingenuity is incapable of matching many of the creative endeavors of humankind, but this only points to a difference in physiological and anatomical, not rational, abilities. Indeed, when looked at from a nonanthropocentric perspective, one could just as easily claim that humans lack the ingenuity to match animal creativity:

I will agree that it is impossible that any animal will or can weave a piece of brocade, make a complete ship, a watch or clock, mariner’s compass, iron or steel, a sewing needle no larger the eyelash and small as a hair which shall contain eleven others, one within another. [But] it is equally impossible for man to make a spider’s web, a honeycomb with wax or honey, after the manners of the Apis mellifica, a Madreporite or sea sponge, etc.

Bartram’s point is clear: if it is an unwarranted inference to suppose humans non-rational because of their inability to duplicate the creative acts of brute creation, it is likewise illegitimate to deny reason to animals because they are incapable of inventing human artifacts such as brocade or compasses. Both groups behavior-
ally demonstrate, albeit in species-specific and hence different ways, evidence of intelligence.

Similarly, other analogies can be drawn which point to intelligent reason in brute creation. Like humans, animals "tutor and educate their offspring," teaching them how to defend themselves and procure food. They display adaptability in their responses to the environment, "altering or modifying their manners and arts according to circumstances." They can be taught by humans in "an infinite variety of instances." Moreover, they appear to possess the ability to communicate: "every animal hath a language, both by words or sounds perfectly articu-
late, and actions which is perfectly understood, apparently without error or mis-
take by every individual, both old and young, of the tribe or race."

In addition to their apparently intelligent ability to invent, act purposively,
communicate, teach, learn and adapt, animals also display overt evidence of
moral reason. In the Travels, for example, Bartram reports that a newly orphaned
bear cub “approached the dead body [of its slain mother], smelled, and pawed it,
and appearing in agony, fell to weeping and looking upwards, then towards us,
and cried like a child.” Bartram was so affected by this scene that he concluded
that the hunter who shot the cub’s mother was guilty of “cruel murder.” Moreover,
he records with obvious wonder the peaceable co-existence of animals who
are natural predators (such as alligators and trout, or trout and bream), amazed
that “the consciousness of each others’ safety, or some other latent cause, should
so absolutely alter their conduct, for here is not the least attempt made to injure
or disturb one another.” In one of the few articles he published during his life-
time, Bartram describes a pet crow named Tom as a bird of “happy tempera-
tment,” “tractable and benevolent, docile and humble,” whose “good qualities . . .
were greatly in favour, for they procured him friends.” And we have already
seen his reference to the rattlesnake as generous, and his description of the wolf
as magnanimous, estimations based upon his numerous observations that neither
of these two animals ordinarily displayed the vicious or spiteful nature com-
monly attributed to them. These and other instances of animal behavior which
appear to indicate moral sensibility lead, Bartram thinks, to one conclusion: “if
we examine minutely the morality or manners of animals and compare them with
those nations of the human race . . .[,] we shall find but little difference between
their manners and the animal creation in general.”

On the basis of empirical generalizations and analogous inference, then, Bar-
tram reasons that brute creation exhibits evidence of possessing both intelligent
and moral reason. But reason, he previously argued, is the necessary condition
for moral sensibility and membership within the moral community. Conse-
quently, animals are bona fide members of that community, and accordingly
deserve ethical consideration by other members because they have a right to it by
virtue of their nature. Humans should treat them compassionately not only
because such treatment is pleasing to God (as Bartram’s Quaker contemporaries
tended to argue), but because the rational character of animals logically demands
it. Concern for the well-being of brute creation is not supererogatory. Instead, it
is a duty, inasmuch as animals, like humans, possess intelligence and moral sensi-
bility. In arguing this way, Bartram provided the logical justification for eighth-
teenth century Quakerism’s doctrine of benevolence towards brute creation
which Benezet, Woolman, Churchman, and other ecologically-minded Friends
failed to formulate. Their theocentric analyses tended to be based upon sectarian
assumptions about the nature of reality and God. Bartram’s model, on the other
hand, attempted to justify humane treatment of animals on a nonsectarian, philo-
sophical basis.
CONCLUSION

It would be inappropriate here to analyze the philosophical merits or weaknesses of Bartram's argument for the inclusion of animals within the moral community. Obviously, he makes several claims which might profitably be examined from a strictly philosophical perspective—for instance, his assumption that reason is a necessary condition for moral standing, his failure to specify whether animals and humans have equal rights to moral consideration, and his confidence that ethological observations actually provide tokens of moral sensibility (intellectual and moral reason) in brute creation. This discussion, however, has focused on a comparison of the differences between Bartram's and reformed Quakerism's defences of benevolence towards animals.

It is clear that Bartram's position reflects the ethical concern of reformist Quaker ecological sensibility of his time. But it is equally apparent that he departs from that sensibility in both method and focus of attention. He moves the center of analysis away from human obligations to God to human responsibility to animals. He avoids the sectarian apriorisms of Quakerism's theocentrism and offers as a substitute a defense of the intrinsic right of animals to ethical treatment founded upon careful empirical observation and logical analysis. In doing so, he supplied a nondoctrinal apology for the values characteristic of the emerging environmentalism of late eighteenth century American Quakerism. He also anticipated subsequent attempts to ground the ethical treatment of animals upon a consideration of the nature of rights and deserts, without regard to species.56

It is an intriguing but futile exercise to imagine the influence on early American ecological sensibilities Bartram's manuscript reflections might have exerted had they been published during his lifetime. But an analysis of them today clearly reveals that the Travels' sometimes romantic advocacy of the moral sensibility of animals is based upon a cogent (if at times somewhat clumsy) philosophical defense of animal rationality. That alone is enough to earn Bartram a prominent place among early American environmentalist thinkers.

Notes

I am grateful to Chan Coulter, Charles Gatfelter, Robert Jackson, and an anonymous reader for their helpful reflections on earlier versions of this article. J. William Frost's comments were especially insightful.

4. Travels through North & South Carolina,
Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the extensive territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the country of the Chactaws; containing an account of the soil and natural productions of these regions, together with observations on the manners of the Indians (Philadelphia: James & James, 1791). Throughout this article, I use the Penguin edition (1988), hereafter cited as Travels and followed by page numbers.


10. Travels, 38, 102, 159.

11. Travels, 103.


13. Travels, 222.

14. Travels, 221; see also 171, 188, 225.

15. Travels, 144-145.

16. Bartram’s untitled manuscript is in Volume I of the Bartram Papers of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia). Written in a close script, studded with erasures and corrections, it occupies five pages, or approximately 4000 words. The treatise appears to have been written on the backs of old letters; the marks of red sealing wax are still observable. There is no indication of the manuscript’s date. But since it includes discussions of Bartram’s experiences with southeastern Indian tribes, it must have been written sometime after 1773, when he began the three-and-a-half year journey described in the Travels. There is no other extant manuscript or piece of correspondence in the collection which discusses at such length and with such detail Bartram’s animal ethic.

For purposes of citation, I have consecutively numbered the treatise’s 42 paragraphs. References to it are hereafter cited as Treatise, followed by appropriate paragraph numbers. I have updated Bartram’s eighteenth century spelling and use of upper cases and occasionally supplied missing punctuation, but have taken no other liberties with the text.

It should be noted that Bartram’s treatise is not concerned solely with moral sensibility in brute creation. Instead, it is a general statement of his entire philosophy of nature, of which his reflections about the ethical rights of animals comprise only a part. I am currently working on a critical edition of the treatise, which I hope to publish shortly. For a more comprehensive analysis of the treatise’s contents, see Kerry S. Walters, “The Creator’s Boundless Palace: William Bartram’s Philosophy of Nature,” Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy, in press.

17. The most prominent translator of Continental Quietist works was the Quaker preacher James Gough (1712-1780). His translations,
which were the primary sources read by English-speaking Quakers, include The Life of Lady Guion, written by herself in French, now abridged and translated into English, etc. (Bristol: S. Farley, 1772), The Life of Armelle Nicholas (Bristol: S. Farley, 1772), and Select Lives of Foreigners, eminent in Piety (Bristol: S. Farley, 1773).


22. For a more detailed and documented analysis of Quietism’s influence upon colonial Quakerism, see Rufus Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism, Volume 1, especially chapters II and III. Jones’ case relies upon (but is not limited to) an examination of internal evidence. He argues that a careful examination of Quaker texts, especially Woolman’s, reveals a clear parallel between locutions favored by Quietist authors and those found in the writings of reformist Quakers.


25. See, for example, Tolles’ Meeting House and Counting House, chapters 7–9, as well as his “Philadelphia’s First Scientist: James Logan,” Isis, XLVII (1956): 20–30 and James Logan and the Culture of Provincial America (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), chapter XII.


29. Phillips B. Moulton, ed., The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 28. It is interesting to compare this (and other) passages in Woolman where he suggests that we owe animals consideration as a sign of our adoration and veneration of God with this one from his A Plea for the Poor (chapter 2): “The Creator of the earth is the owner of it. He gave us being thereon, and our nature requires nourishment which is the produce of it. As he is kind and merciful, we as his creatures, while we live answerable to the design of our creation, we are so far entitled to a convenient subsistence that no man may justly deprive us of it.” Here Woolman clearly draws a distinction between the ethical natures of humans and animals. The former, if they live according to the divine plan, deserve moral consideration, at least when it comes to property rights. There is no indication, however, that animals likewise enjoy such intrinsic rights. Instead, as indicated by the passage quoted in the text, their claims to moral consideration are founded upon the human obligation to honor the deity.


31. Ibid., p. 103.

33. It might be suggested, as argued by one of this article's anonymous readers, that "one can maintain with equal logic that if God is manifest in all God's creation . . ., one treats animals well because they have intrinsic value and are not just one medium of theocentric worship." This construal, of course, runs counter to my argument that early Quaker ecological sensibilities regarded ethical treatment of animals as appropriate only because such responses honored God by cultivating humility. The caveat is reasonable but will not, I believe, hold up. Its conclusion rests upon the assumption that God's manifest permeation of creation posits an identity between God and nature, such that a veneration of the latter is precisely a veneration of the former. But colonial Quakers were not pantheists, and posited no such identity. The Divine is present in but ultimately distinct from nature. That which renders nature (including brute creation) worthy of respect is its reflection of God's presence. Consequently, nature (and brute creation) possess borrowed, not intrinsic, value.

34. John and William Bartram: Botanists and Explorers, p. 84.
35. Treatise, p. 41.
36. John Bartram’s letter of disownment is as follows: "Whereas by the prevalency of a report Concerning John Bartram (who had his birth and education amongst Friends and made profession with us from his youth, up to this time) viz that he disbelieved in the divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as being perfectly God as well as man, it became the tender Concern of Friends to enquire of him whether he had given occasion for such a report by believing and uttering as above, the which he did not deny but rather appear’d to vindicate, and Notwithstanding our earnest Labour of Love from time to time Cannot be prevailed with to decline such a belief and by publick testimony Clear our Society from the great reproach of being unsound in the Christian faith Wherefore fully believing in the Miraculous Conception birth, Miracles death, glorious Resurrection and Assention of our blessed lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ as recorded in holy writ; we can do no less for the Clearing of truth than give forth this testimony against such [marked out] dark notions and hereby declare the said John Bartram to be no member of our Christian Society Untill by Unfeigned repentance he renounces his Corrupt [marked out] opinions and witness forgiveness for the same the which we sincerely desire he may Given Forth by Our Monthly Meeting held at Darby the 1 day of the 2m 1758 and on behalf and by Order of the same. (Signed) Abram Bonsall." John’s letter of disownment is interesting insofar as its trenchant accusation that John’s apostacy has subjected the society to “the great reproach of being unsound in the Christian faith” reflects the zeal for sectarian correctness characteristic of reformist Quakerism. The letter of disownment is reproduced in Edmund and Dorothy Berkeley, The Life and Travels of John Bartram (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1982), p. 323.

37. In his Treatise (1, 2), for example, William argues that the deity is capable of "Arbitrarily or Independently" intervening in the natural order—a suggestion that is clearly incompatible with Enlightenment mechanism.
38. Treatise, 4, 16.
39. Treatise, 42.
40. Treatise, 41.
41. Treatise, 23.
42. Treatise, 23.
43. Treatise, 25, 26, 37.
44. Treatise, 42.
45. Treatise, 42.
46. Treatise, 32, 33, 34, 35.

47. Bartram's assumption that reason is a necessary condition for moral standing has, of course, a long history in the Western tradition. It was first formulated by Plato and Aristotle, and continued relatively undisputed until David Hume's criticism of it in the middle-eighteenth century. Hume's was a minority opinion, however, until nineteenth century
romanticism renewed the attack. Philosophers of Bartram's time, influenced by the Enlightenment's advocacy of reason and natural order, by and large accepted the tradition.

48. Treatise, 15.
49. Treatise, 24.
50. Treatise, 25.
51. Treatise, 27, 28. For more on animal language, see Treatise, 29 and Travels, 25.
52. Travels, 22.
53. Travels, 151.
55. Treatise, 21.
56. Twentieth century literature dealing with the philosophical issue of animal rights is encyclopedic in quantity. For representative voices in the debate, see the essays in Part IV, pp. 173-233, of Tom Regan and Peter Singer (Eds.), Animal Rights and Human Obligations (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976).