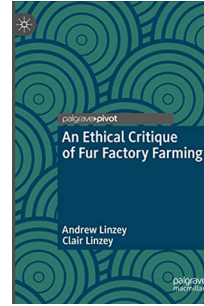


Book Review

Linzey, A., & Linzey, C.
An Ethical Critique of Fur Factory Farming.
Palgrave Macmillan.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10621-7>
pp. ix-100 with index.



Reviewed by, Stephen M. Vantassel, King's Evangelical Divinity School.

What duties do humans have toward non-human sentient creatures? That is the question that Professor Andrew Linzey, Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics¹, has sought to answer since his landmark publication, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment*, was published in 1976. Prof. Linzey along with his daughter, Dr. Clair Linzey, Deputy Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics² continue this research as editors of a new book series on animal ethics of which *An Ethical Critique of Fur Factory Farming* is a part (p. ix).

Fur farming, as the name suggests, is the practice of raising animals in captivity for the purpose of harvesting their pelts for commercial purposes, such as garments. Fur farming is different to fur trapping in that the latter practice involves capturing free-range furbearers in their natural habitats rather than utilizing animals raised under controlled conditions, such as a warehouse (p. 1).

The text is remarkably short, consisting of only 81 pages (size 8.5 x 5.15 inches) divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 and chapter 8 introduce and summarize the topic and arguments respectively. Chapter 2 surveys

the scope of the fur farming industry from an economic perspective along with a summary of the typical life of a furbearing animal housed in a fur farm. Chapter 3 engages key industry legislation and regulations, primarily in Europe, noting that the trend is toward banning the practice.

The heart of the book really begins in chapter 4 with the Linzeys evaluating 14 key arguments employed by proponents of fur farming. These arguments ranged from appeals to historical tradition, freedom of choice, inadequacy of contemporary opinion to guide morality, sustainability, the domestic status of the animals and the anti-fur movement flows from western values. The authors contend that all the arguments are logically questionable or outright fallacious (p. 19). While the authors correctly point out the weaknesses of many of the arguments, this reviewer thought some of the pro-fur arguments were redeemable. In chapter 5, the authors' critique "Welfur", the name identifying fur farming standards proffered by fur farming proponents to ensure humane treatment of the animals. Unsurprisingly, the Linzeys find the standards vague, insufficient and lacking real enforcement ability. In chapter 6, the Linzeys argue that fur farming endangers public health in several key ways. First, fur farm waste (e.g., excrement) pollutes water bodies. Second, continued exposure to the cruelty of fur farming causes psychological damage to fur farm workers

1. <https://www.oxfordanimaethics.com/who-we-are/director/> visited 6 March 2023.
2. <https://www.oxfordanimaethics.com/who-we-are/deputy-director/> visited 13 March 2023.

leading to antisocial behavior (p. 61). Finally, fur farms create conditions where zoonotic diseases can live, emerge, and spread, such as with COVID-19 (pp. 62ff).

Chapter 7 discusses the ethical reasons why fur farming is morally indefensible. The authors reach back to the tired arguments namely that animals are innocent and that they suffer both pain and deprivation. The authors briefly use all three moral theories (deontological, utilitarian and virtue, which in the book is treated as theological). Fur farming, it is claimed, fails to be supportable by any of the ethical theories.

Unfortunately, *An Ethical Critique of Fur Factory Farming* has several key weaknesses. The weaknesses fall into three categories, namely charitableness, argumentation, and theological engagement. I will address each in turn.

I found that the Linzeys lacked charitableness with their opponents³, by which I mean that frequently they failed to steel man their opponents' arguments (p. 41). For example, the Linzeys argue that the desire to ban fur farming is grounded in the same morality as banning cock fighting and bull baiting, namely, to stop cruelty (pp. 24-5). But that argument assumes that fur farmers believe their actions are analogous to cock fighting and bull baiting. Is fur farming morally equivalent to cock fighting? Is it not possible that a fur farmer could oppose cock fighting because in that activity the suffering caused by two birds fighting to injure and/or kill each other is the goal of the activity whereas with fur farming, the goal is not suffering but obtaining fur? One may find the difference between the two activities minimal, as I guess the Linzeys would, but delving into

3. The Linzeys do assert that they do not think that all fur farmers are necessarily cruel (p.71), but how this compares with the alleged psychological damage sustained by fur farmers is not explained (pp. 61f).

a deeper explanation as to why the distinction lacks moral significance would have made a more compelling case. Too often the tone and type of arguments used by the Linzeys struck me more as made by people who have not deeply endeavored to see the world from the perspective of the pro-fur farming side.

Another instance of this lack of charity can be seen straight away in the book's title, which uses the term "factory" as in, fur factory farming. The use of the pejorative "factory" with its Dickens' and Marxist baggage, automatically condemns the opposing side. Is the use of inflammatory words helpful in convincing opponents to consider your point of view? Why not use the phrase, intensive fur farming? Ultimately, I wonder if the authors have supported fur farming if it wasn't intensive? I think not (cf. p.35).

The book's second problem lies in its argumentation. The Linzeys did not define key terms and concepts to ensure that meanings are clear⁴. For example, what exactly constitutes "cruelty"? This question is not a cheap debate trick, such as is done with those who wonder what constitutes pornography. Rather the definition lies at the crux of the debate in that all kinds of human activity involves and causes animals to experience pain and even death. If the standard for fur farming is zero injuries (p.45), is that reasonable? I do not think so and I was left with the impression that even if a fur farm could raise mink with a zero-injury score (which is doubtful), the Linzeys would still oppose it because of the privations caused by fur farming. Likewise, the authors frequently mention that fur is unnecessary or a luxury item (pp.22, 25). Presumably they said this to

4. Let me list a few of the terms that need substantial unpacking and explanation: "well taken care of" p. 34; "humane slaughter" p. 36; abusive practices p. 39; and unnecessary suffering p. 74.

diminish the value of fur and therefore lower the evidence needed to undermine arguments in favor of fur farming. But what about other “luxury” items or activities whose development or use result in harm to animals? Are they to be banned as well? If not, why not? For example, most airline passengers have no idea of the number of birds being hazed and/or killed⁵ to prevent catastrophic bird strikes.⁶ Does this make airline travel a cruel act? Why or why not? The Linzeys should have explored the inner workings of their claim. Simply repeating the point that fur farmed animals suffer does not help readers develop criteria for evaluating when suffering is justified or not. Andrew Linzey’s director page shows a picture of him carrying what I presume to be his pet dog. How does Linzey distinguish the true feelings and desires of the dog as opposed to the behavior of an animal that suffers from Stockholm Syndrome?⁷

Another aspect of the Linzeys’ problematic argumentation centered on their use of evidence and standards of even handedness. For example,

5. Begier, M. J., Dolbeer, R. A., & Washburn, J. E. (2021). Protecting the Flying Public and Minimizing Economic Losses within the Aviation Industry: Assistance provided by USDA-Wildlife Services to reduce Wildlife Hazards to Aviation Fiscal Year 2020. Washington, D.C.: U.S Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services Retrieved from https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/wildlife_damage/fsc-ws-assist-aviation-fy20.pdf
6. Dolbeer, R. A., Begier, M. J., Miller, P. R., Weller, J. R., & Anderson, A. L. (2022). Wildlife Strikes to Civil Aircraft in the United States, 1990-2021. (Serial Report Number 28). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Aviation Administration & U.S. Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services Retrieved from <https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/2022-07/Wildlife-Strike-Report-1990-2021.pdf> Study states that in 2021, there were 15,556 strikes reported in the U.S. system.
7. I wish to thank Wes Jamison for this notion.

the authors claim that mink live in the wild for 10-12 years but in a fur farm only 6 months (p.55). The implication being that fur farming deprives mink from the chance of living a full life. While the Linzeys did not specify whether they were referring to American (*Neovison vison*, formerly *Mustela vison*) or the endangered European mink (*Mustela lutreola*)⁸, the fact is neither live that long in the wild.⁹

Finally, the Linzeys’ appeal to theology in general and to Christianity in particular, had all the weaknesses of the flattening effects of ecumenicalism. I would concede that the authors were likely not trying to make a detailed theological case for their view. However, the selective, and I would suggest highly biased, use of theology was particularly goading. For example, they appeal to Matthew 25:40 as our model for treating our fellow humans and by extension the animal kingdom. But how does that accord with Jesus’ anti-animal behavior in allowing pigs to be demonized (Mark 5:13) and ultimately drown without any evidence of concern for the pigs’ welfare? Or what about the miracle of the fishes where Jesus allowed fish to be harvested in abundance just to prove a point (Luke 5:6)? Are those the activities of a

8. Maran, T., Podra, M., Polma, M., & Macdonald, D. W. 2009. The survival of captive-born animals in restoration programmes - Case study of the endangered European mink *Mustela lutreola*. *Biological Conservation* 142:1685-1692. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2009.03.003> and *The Mammal Society*. (2023). *American Mink - Neovison vison*. Mammal Society. Retrieved 9 March from <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-american-mink/>
9. Lariviere, S. 1999. *Mustela vison*. *Mammalian Species* 608:1-9. In regard to European mink, I found a site that said the species had been known to live for 120 months (i.e. 10 years). But that is a potential number in the wild that only a small number of animals would ever achieve. EOL. 2023. *Mustela lutreola* (Linnaeus 1761). <https://www.eol.org/pages/311519> visited March 9, 2023.

man who sees his role as a “servant species” to creation (p. 75)? Religions do suggest kindness toward animal creatures but that is only the context of clearly distinguishing that humans are ontologically and morally distinct from animals. Humans can do things to animals that they can’t do to humans because animals and humans are morally different in significant ways. I found it particularly intriguing that in all the arguments used by the Linzeys they never once compared our treatment of the unborn as a moral cudgel against our bad treatment of animals.¹⁰ This is quite odd given that the unborn is sentient and is morally innocent and vulnerable (cf. pp. 69ff). I would suggest that this oversight, if not deliberate, stemmed from the Linzeys’ inadequate appreciation for the dignity of humanity or the sinlessness of Christ.

In sum, this book is a quick introduction to the arguments that animal activists have against fur farming and likely other consumptive activities involving animals. The Linzeys should be commended for discussing the issue of fur farming. Those interested in living a moral life, and Christians in particular, should reflect on the moral implications of their careers, be it theirs or others. As I argued in my own book, *Dominion over Wildlife? An Environmental-Theology of Human-Wildlife Relations*, animals do have moral status. They are not simply inanimate objects. However, the arguments and content of the book are not for scholars looking for a deeper discussion that recognized all the data and perspectives in a fair and forthright manner.

10. The Linzeys frequently employed arguments appealing to progressive moral evolution as when they said suggested the arguments in favor of fur farming were morally comparable to those used to support subordination of women, slavery, and racial inferiority p.20.