
Humans, Horses, and Hybrids

On Rights, Welfare, and Masculinity in Equestrian Sports

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Abstract

The fact that horses play an essential role for equestrian sports raises rather specific ethical concerns. Questions like what should be morally permissible to do to (non-consenting) nonhumans for the sake of human interests become urgent. Is it not an example of (animal) rights violation to force nonhumans taking part of sport? However, in this article I argue, from a radical egalitarian point of view, that it is possible to defend the existence of equestrian sports, but not unconditionally. I suggest that it is the masculinity norms in the sports culture that compromise the already complicated relationship between humans and animals, and therefore become an obstacle for the vision of equality between humans and nonhumans.

Key words: animal rights, animal welfare, equestrian sports, gender equality, masculinity, interspecies egalitarianism, hybrids, ethics

Introduction

Animals are “entertaining”. This is a well-founded truth in our culture, and the “theatres” in which we – as humans – can *look* at animals for our amusement are many.

We go to zoos to look at them; we enter the circus to watch them make astonishing tricks; some of them even become movie stars.

If we do not watch animals entertaining us at zoos and circuses, we may visit more “authentic” environments, such as national parks and safari routes to watch and even hunt so called wild animals, sometimes described as “untamed” and “dangerous” animals. And if we do not want to “risk our lives”, we can watch them on TV.

All of these examples contain a continuing separation from the animals. The message is that animals are essentially different from us. They are *the Others*.

Needless to say, the separation of humans and non-humans can be manifested in many ways – for example through sports. And one of the prevailing sports we find in equestrian sports.

Without doubt, equestrian sports play a significant role in the big and growing sports industry, not least for commercial reasons. Successful horses may bring in great amounts of prize money, and after their careers they very often become valuable subjects in the breeding industry. This particular commerce is fuelled by another industry: the betting industry. Big money runs through the economic system, money that can be seen as serving everyone in society, simply based on the fact that tax money from the betting industry land in the state’s pocket. In other words, many people and entire states have strong interests to feed the equestrian sports industry.

But there are other values to consider as well, for example, the value of gender equality. Equestrian sports are one of few sports where men and women compete against each other on equal terms. But not only that: Equestrian sports also hold a potentiality for equality between humans and non-humans, based on the fact that there is a co-operative dimension imbedded in many equestrian sports disciplines.

But – can we be certain that this means that the rights and welfare of the horses are sufficiently met?

In this article, I will argue from a radical egalitarian point of view that it is possible to defend the existence of equestrian sports, but not without dismantling the masculinity norms that to this day govern modern

sports culture. The premise of this article is based on the understanding of sport as a phenomenon founded in masculinity. I will suggest that it is masculinity norms that compromise the already complicated relationship between humans and animals, and therefore become an obstacle for a utopian idea of equality between humans and non-humans. This utopian suggestion can be described in several ways. One way of describing it, is to use a mythological figure from Greek mythology.

According to Greek mythology there once was a group of creatures called the Centaurs, described as half-human, half-animal. A Centaur had a torso of a human joined at the waist to the horse's withers. This mythological creature does not just give us a symbolic hint of the leaky distinction between humans and animals; it also holds a moral message: there is no essential distinction between humans and animals.

Here I will argue in favour of what I will call the hybrid view. This particular view derives from an interspecies (or, non-species to be more accurate) radical egalitarian point of view. This view, I will suggest, implies a necessary breakdown of the masculinity ideology that today governs competitive sport, including equestrian sports. As part of the argumentation I will presuppose that masculinity and sport are intertwined concepts and therefore cannot be separated from each other, and that the masculinity ideology often enforces the rather harsh view on animals in sport in general.

I will begin the discussion from a much more general point of view, though; more exactly, in the question of animals' status as rights holders in the world of sport.

Arguments for and against the use of animals in sport

Animal sports can mean different things. In fact, there are three categories of animal sports:

1. Sports in which humans use animals in pursuit of athletic excellence (equestrian events, horse racing, polo, certain rodeo events)
2. Sports in which humans pit themselves against animals in tests of athletic skill (hunting, fishing, bull fighting)
3. Sports in which animals are pitted against other animals in contests of deadly combat or in contests to assess superior animal athletic

prowess (cock fighting, dog racing). (Morgan and Meier, 1995, p. 373).

It seems obvious that the examples above contain different moral standings dependent on which sport we are focusing on. Most of us would consider for example bull fighting as deeply immoral, whereas most consider equestrian sports as morally acceptable. The reason behind the differences is self-evident: bulls in bull fighting are being deliberately killed; in fact, it is the *goal* of the sport to kill the bull at the end of the show. In equestrian sports, it is not the goal of the sport to kill or in other ways harm the animals. Quite the contrary, to some extent humans and animals have to cooperate in order to be successful in equestrian sports. Therefore, it is easy to argue that there is a great moral difference between these two categories of animal sports.

Nonetheless, comparatively uncontroversial sports such as equestrian sports may still encourage certain behaviours that put animals at risk. Almost every week one can read about horses being harmed in the name of sport. It can be horses that have been harmed by doping or by illegal training methods; it can be horses that have been whipped during training or competition, and so on; or horses that simply die at the race track.

Of course, most participants within these sports would claim that such examples are exceptions. They would say that the majority of trainers, owners, coachmen, show-jumpers and jockeys take good care of their horses. Besides, every competition is supposed to be supervised by veterinaries. But should we be satisfied with that? Perhaps it all depends on how we understand the concept of caretaking. On what level can we say that horses are cared for? Or, what is the minimum level for morally accepting events where non-consenting animals are an essential part “of the game”? Where to draw the line? Is it sufficient to ban certain training methods, or to lean on anti-doping regulations? If we think that is sufficient, we still have to ask if we really can trust the supervising veterinaries at the race tracks. They may have other interests than the welfare of the horses at heart. In other words, it is not obvious that we should trust the persons involved in equestrian sports when we analyse the ethics of these sports.

Horses can be harmed in many ways; these can be narrowed down to two general groups of harm: (i) horses can be *literally* harmed, and by that I mean physically and mentally harmed, and (ii) they can be *symboli-*

cally harmed, in that they are being subjected as a species for humans to use and perhaps even exploit for the benefit of human interests.

But what if we consider animals in sport as athletes among other athletes? Would that change anything? Probably not, for the simple reason that “animal athletes” differ from most other athletes in at least one respect: They have not chosen to become athletes; they are being forced by humans to become athletes.

In fact, animals are much in the same relatively powerless position in relation to humans as children are in relation to adults. And hardly anyone would seriously argue that we ought to force children to become athletes. At the same time, when it comes to relations between adult humans and subjected categories – such as *children* and *animals* – unequal power distributions may sometimes serve the interest of the subjected groups, and sometimes not. It is as simple as that.

However, there are also important differences between adult humans’ relationship to children, on one hand, and humans’ relationship to animals, on the other. For example, children need adult humans in order to survive, animals generally do not. But as soon as humans have elected to care for animals’ welfare, they have a moral responsibility towards animals to consider. Ideally, this means that adult humans should take the *animals’ best interests* into consideration when decisions are made that concern the animals, in the same way as adult humans ideally take *children’s best interest* into consideration when adults make decisions that concern children.

We may find the arbitrariness in the mentioned relationships unsatisfying, solely based on the fact that children as well as animals are in vulnerable positions. This stresses the question whether it is in the animals’ interest to be a part of the sports world. Evidently, also “animal athletes” are in a vulnerable position towards humans. Many humans have strong interests in keeping this situation intact, not only owners, trainers, and (human) athletes, but also punters, and governments (who gain tax incomes from the betting industry). And, as claimed, the animals do not have the possibility to give their consent to be part of this industry.

At this point, I have established that (1) animals in sports are by definition coerced to be part of sports, and (2) they are subjected to arbitrary decisions made by humans. That is: animals in sports are subordinated to humans. Mostly, though, this is not a deep moral problem *per se*, given that the animals are well treated and are met with respect.

Nonetheless, it is still a possibility that animals in sport have rights that are being violated solely by making them parts of a competitive sports environment. However, if we claim that, we also have to accept that animal rights exist in the first place. But do they?

The value of animal rights

Do animals, horses included, have rights? The question is crucial. According to the American philosopher Tom Regan they do. In his famous book *The Case for Animal Rights* (2004), he argues in favour of a strong rights-based principle.

But what does it mean to have rights? The classical liberal understanding of the concept of rights is that only humans have rights. Advocates of animal rights, such as Tom Regan, want to widen the circle so that also non-human species can be included in the faculty of moral rights holders.

Having moral standing, Regan argues, does not depend on the ability to make moral decisions or having the capacity to reason in rational terms about oneself and others. Based on this, Regan suggests that not only humans but also non-humans should be considered to possess what he calls *inherent value*.

This does not mean that he cannot see any difference between humans and non-humans when it comes to moral rights. But he distinguishes between two kinds of moral rights holders: one regarding *moral agents* and one regarding what he calls *moral patients*.

In line with this distinction, humans are moral agents, whereas non-humans, and especially mammals, are moral patients.

Moral agents, Regan argues, have moral responsibilities for which they can be accountable, while moral patients are (or, should be) protected by rights, but without being held responsible or accountable for how they act. In other words, you do not have to be a moral agent in order to have moral standing. According to Regan it is sufficient that you have passed what he calls *the subject-of-a-life criterion*, a concept he describes in the following way:

To be the subject-of-a-life, in the sense in which this expression will be used, involves more than merely being alive and more than merely being conscious. (Regan 2004, p. 243)

And he continues:

[I]ndividuals are subjects-of-a-life if they have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independent of their being the object of anyone else's interests. (Ibid.)

To some extent, Regan's statement may seem rather radical; perhaps too radical. Some have also questioned the empirical ground for some of the factors that need to be satisfied in order to fulfil the subject-of-a-life criterion. The Swedish philosopher Torbjörn Tännsjö is one of these critics. He wonders if it is really true that all mammals pass the test, and he argues: "It strikes me as very implausible that most mammals have 'a sense of the future, including their own future'" (Tännsjö 2010, p. 40). Of course, one can claim that Tännsjö makes a good point. On the other hand, it does not seem clear whether every single one of the factors have to be satisfied. Moreover, one can argue that the strength of these factors varies. Perhaps certain animals have stronger preferences for living well than many humans, even if the given individual animal has not been "thinking" about it in the way that individual humans might have. We cannot know that. It is not even obvious that it is relevant to talk about the concept of future in this way, but focusing on what the moral obligations might be for humans to have towards animals.

According to Regan, humans – as moral agents – have moral obligations to prevent violations of the rights of animals. Animals do not have the same obligations. This means, for instance, that if animals harm each other, for example when a wolf attacks a sheep, we do not have a moral obligation to rescue the sheep, because when this scenario occurs, no violation of rights has been taking place. But what does the rights view mean with respect to equestrian sports? Perhaps we should consider equestrian sports as a violation of animal rights. As a matter of fact, it is not an unreasonable thought.

First of all: There is no such thing as voluntariness for horses in sport. The horses' possibility to resist being a part of sport is strongly limited, if at all existing. If humans believe that a certain horse would be a perfect competitor, humans will force him or her to the race track. On the other hand, this argument falls back on a rather narrow interpretation of the concept of voluntariness. Some may say that trained people can "read"

horses simply by looking on how the horses behave. Some may even say that horses are, in fact, able to resist. In some respect it is an understandable argument. Consider, for example, a horse in show-jumping who refuses to jump an obstacle. Or, consider a horse who bluntly refuses to take part of the sport altogether, that is a horse who is “difficult” to work with. These examples can very well be interpreted as examples of animal resistance, but it is not a resistance against being forced to take part of the sport as much as a resistance against being forced to act in a certain way. No matter what, one *could* understand the animals’ behaviour in this respect as a form of (unintentional) act of resistance, and therefore as “evidence” for the argument that animals *do* have a choice within the individual animals’ cognitive and perceptual limits. On the other hand, this argument can be an example of wishful thinking. By that I mean that humans may have an interest to rationalise the oppression of animals by arguing that animals – simply based on how they respond to force or to other oppressive actions – can “talk back” and refuse to take part in the human spectacle. I believe this is a critical way to argue, though. I do not think we should underestimate the strong interests of rationalising human behaviour for the sake of fulfilling human preferences on behalf of the interests of other species. But what if the very existence of horses depends on the existence of sports? Would that change the rights view in any relevant way?

The value of existence and economy

The fact that horses are forced can be seen as a major moral problem for equestrian sports in general. But let us not jump to conclusions. Perhaps there are other values that may overrule the rights aspect of the issue. Consider, for example, the fact that most successful racehorses (measured by the amount of money they bring to owners and punters) have been *bred* in order to become racehorses. Here, one can consider the arguments the American philosopher Donald Scherer has articulated in defence of using animals in sport:

- 1 the present uses of the animals are justified because they are better for the animals than the alternative, namely non-existence, or that
- 2 breeding an animal for a purpose gives the breeders (transferable) rights over what they have bred. (Scherer 1995, p. 351).

Let us now confront these two arguments. Are they valid? Are they sustainable and strong?

The first argument, to begin with, says that existence is a better alternative than non-existence. Whether this is true or not can (of course) be difficult to say anything certain about. It all depends on how the grounds for existence occur. So, what does it mean to say that existence is better than non-existence?

Is it ever possible to proclaim a fixed welfare level and say that above this level, we have reason to choose existence over non-existence? Probably not. Humans, as well as non-humans, are not static entities in this respect. Our preferences can evidently change over time. Or, to use an example from Scherer, most humans who live what one could call miserable lives (that is, lives with a very low welfare level), do not commit suicide, but some do. An objectively low welfare level does not have to be the cause of the suicide, though. Otherwise, humans who “have it all” would not be committing suicide, but some of them do. Of course, this does not mean that objective welfare levels (based on things such as income, social services, and social security systems, etcetera) are irrelevant for individual welfare levels; it only means that it is not obvious that there is a causal connection between objective welfare and subjective welfare. The point here though, is that it should not be considered as a general truth that non-existence is always better than living what many would consider lives of misery.

If we now return to the animal sports issue, Scherer argues:

[S]ince the lives of these animals [that is, animals in sport] are (arguably) worth living despite what misery human beings inflict, human beings are entitled to treat these animals, within that limit, as they please, since they would not exist at all save for human beings bringing about their existence. (Ibid, p. 352)

Now, the obvious objection to this is to say that it opens a gate towards legitimizing immoral behaviours. For instance, if the owner of a horse harms, abuses or neglects his or her horse, he or she could always say that it is better to exist than not to exist, even if it means a life in misery for the horse. This is not the case, though, Scherer argues. In fact, his response to that objection is clear: “One’s behaviour is not acceptable merely because it leaves others with a life better than death.” (Ibid.) That is a fairly good response. But as a general principle it does not say much about the acceptable *welfare level* of the particular existence of the horse.

Even regarding horses that would not have existed without being bred into the sports industry, and even if these horses are not neglected by their owners in any meaningful sense of the word, it does not mean that the humans have maximized the welfare of the particular animals. But perhaps they should, for the simple reason that they have a moral responsibility to the animals, simply based on the fact that they are the owners of them. This is one objection to Scherer's argument. On the other hand, I must confess that my objection begs the question regarding the issue of *moral responsibility*.

So, what exactly is the moral responsibility of the humans in this case? Do the breeders have an owner's right to the animal they have brought into existence? Scherer claims that they do. And he uses an analogy with the creation of artefacts.

For example, consider an artist who paints a picture. In doing that, she has to use certain materials. She works the material into a picture, and she mixes her labour with the painting material. When she has finished painting the picture, she has the right to do whatever she wants with it (as long as she does not harm others with it; she is not allowed to use the painting as a weapon, for example). She can try to sell it, she can put it on her own wall, and she can destroy it, if she wants to do that. This is rather uncontroversial. But a painted picture is a "dead" object; horses (and other animals) are not. But does it mean that animals are self-owned?

Even if the creative process behind a painting and a racehorse differ from each other, we cannot escape the fact that both of these examples can be put in the context of ownership rights. According to the very same philosophy of ownership, human beings – so we have been taught – are self-owned and cannot be owned by others without violating human rights. But when it comes to ownership regarding animals, there are other rules in motion. When it comes to animals and the animal reproduction industry, we have no problem saying that they – that is, the animals – are properties, and that the only thing that matters is *how* the property is treated. But what if there is a connection between the view that animals can be owned (much as human slaves once upon a time) and the interest of animal welfare? What if violation of animal rights has an impact on how we value animal welfare?

The value of animal welfare

As shown, the issue of animal rights raises many intriguing questions. Many of them are related to the issue of animal welfare. It is one thing that animals are bred for the sake of being athletes, another thing how their welfare needs are being met in that particular role.

If Tom Regan, as claimed earlier, focuses on the rights issue, other advocates of animal rights focus on other aspects. The Australian philosopher Peter Singer, for example, supports animal rights by using utilitarian arguments.

According to the classical understanding of utilitarianism, we should maximize happiness. In its most simple meaning this could mean that it would be morally permissible to breed racehorses *en masse*, and perhaps even treat them with cruelty, if it would serve the total amount of happiness in the world. I guess most would consider this to be too demanding and morally counter-intuitive in reality. Therefore, many modern utilitarians favour so called *preference utilitarianism*, which simply suggests that we ought to weigh preferences against each other, and favour the strongest preferences, including the preferences of animals.

The idea of including the preferences of animals in the weighing process can be traced back to the “founding father” of modern utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). In a famous passage, Bentham writes:

It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the velocity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or a dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? Nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*? (Bentham 2002, ch. XVII).

Along with Bentham, I think most of us would say that animals can suffer and feel pleasure. Why would we believe differently? Do we have any good reason for doing that? Animals in pain behave in much the same way as humans in pain, and we also know that especially mammals and birds have nervous systems very much like humans; so for good reasons we can assume that animals can suffer from pain, as Peter Singer claims in his famous book *Animal Liberation* (2002, p. 11).

However, even if it is a scientific fact that animals can suffer from pain, it does not imply that we should treat them in the same way as we treat humans. From an interspecies egalitarian point of view, it means that we should act in such a way that we do not inflict pain on non-humans. But perhaps not only that; we may also have a moral obligation to actively *promote* animal welfare. If we follow what Singer calls *the principle of equal consideration*, we may have to act in different ways in order to secure and promote animal welfare. He writes:

It is an implication of this principle of equality that our concern for others and our readiness to consider their interests ought not to depend on what they are like or on what abilities they may possess. Precisely what our concern or consideration requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do: concern for the well-being of children growing up in America would require that we teach them to read; concern for the well-being of pigs may require no more than we leave them with other pigs in a place where there is adequate food and room to run freely. But the basic element – the taking into account of the interests of the being, whatever those interests may be – must, according to the principle of equality, be extended to all beings, black or white, masculine or feminine, human or non-human. (Ibid., p. 5).

What can be made from this when we consider equestrian sports? Can anyone guarantee that the principle of animal welfare is met in equestrian sports? I believe it depends on how we choose to understand the human role in the making of animal welfare.

The problem is that it is humans who define the concept of animal welfare. Animals are subordinated to humans in that sense, and even if we think that we can guarantee the welfare of the animals, this may also be an interpretation derived from a self-given power position. Thereby, we can always claim that animals are subordinated to humans and can never be equals in a relevant meaning of the word. In fact, from the welfare argument, it does not seem evident that horses should never be a part of sports. Suppose we say (for good or bad reasons) that a given horse would be better-off if she becomes an “animal athlete”. Consider, for example, the following example:

Horse H is owned by owner O, who treats H with cruelty. Trainer T knows that he can buy H and later turn H into a racehorse that may win races. According to T’s economical calculation, T will benefit from the transaction. So will H. Everyone benefits from this transaction. H will

be better-off being a racehorse than not being a racehorse, according to the premises of this example.

Of course, one can object to this argument by saying that this is not a typical case. But not only that, one can argue that it is still a form of animal exploitation. In other words, H becomes exploited by T for the simple reason that H doesn't have the cognitive possibility to give consent to the situation. And this exploitation may continue after the career as an athlete is over. Because if H become successful, she will most likely be used for breeding, which usually means being *forced to artificial insemination* (so called "rape rack"), which in turn may be seen as a form of sexual exploitation of animals and therefore morally wrong.

In short, even if individual horses can benefit from being racehorses, it does not imply that we should support horse racing as such. In fact, even if the individual horse may benefit from being a racehorse on welfare grounds, there may be other aspects to consider that may compromise the issue. The aspects I am thinking of are related to another important element of all these, that is, the issue regarding sport masculinity.

Sport masculinity, gender equality, and symbolic values

Equestrian sports do not exist in an ideological vacuum. Equestrian sports are a product of a culture defined by masculinity norms, a gender ideology where animals easily become victims.

I will now continue the discussion by linking the rights view and welfare view to the masculinity ideology. First a few words on *sport masculinity* in general.

I believe we have no reasons not to think that sport plays a significant role in everyday constructions of gender stereotypes. Or, as the gender theorist R.W. Connell describes it:

In historically recent times, sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture. Sport provides a continuous display of men's bodies in motion. Elaborate and carefully monitored rules bring these bodies into stylized contests with each other. In these contests a combination of superior force (provided by size, fitness, teamwork) and superior skill (provided by planning, practice and intuition) will enable one side to win. (Connell, 1995, p. 54).

The kind of masculinity Connell describes gives us a picture of the gender hierarchy that every man and woman has to relate to, and that also excludes women from sport. Connell says:

The institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in the bodily performances. Thus men's greater sporting prowess has become a theme of backlash against feminism. It serves as symbolic proof of men's superiority and right to rule. (Ibid.)

I believe Connell's statement is relevant also for equestrian sports, simply in that the argument aims at, and concerns, general gender norms regarding *sport culture*. At the same time, when it comes to equestrian sports, we also have to consider not only relations between men and women but also relations between humans and non-humans, where the non-humans are used as tools in the construction of the masculinity norms of sport.

As I have stated above, animals do not have much of a chance in their contact with humans. And even *if* horses are better off being a part of sports than not being part of it, they may be symbolically harmed, at least if we de-individualize the horses and only see them as "anonymous" members of a certain species. Symbolically, equestrian sports may be considered as an example of humans' self-righteous dominion over other species. That should be seen as a moral problem in itself, I think, not least because it holds a threat. The actual symbolic subordination of the horses can easily be put into actual practice. In other words, the symbolic value is not harmless; it says something about the unequal relationship between humans and non-humans.

At the same time, equestrian sports can be said to represent one of the most egalitarian sports when it comes to gender, at least superficially.

As one of few sports where gender is not supposed to be relevant for the outcome of the competitions, equestrian sports plays an important, and to some extent radical, role in a gender conservative sports world. In other words, *there are* good and strong arguments for suggesting that gender equality can be enforced thanks to equestrian sports. But in a broader meaning, the gender equality argument is rather weak, and for two reasons:

- i Gender equality does not undermine the masculinity ideology upon which all sports are built; and

- ii Gender equality should not automatically overrule the preferences of animals, not least considering the fact that animals are being forced to be part of sport; it simply does not seem fair that animals should pay the price for human (in)equality.

One should not underestimate the value of gender equality. The fact that the status of women's sports have increased over the last decade is of great importance for how we understand gender constructions overall. In this respect, I truly believe that sport has played an important role for women's liberation, as an arena for feminist struggle. This can be described in many ways. For example, for women who are "masculine" or have interests that are not traditionally feminine, sports can be a place for (personal) liberation and self-realization, which in turn may change how we understand gender constructions overall. Still, this does not mean that the gender constructed *sports ideology* changes in its core. Sport still is a masculine arena.

The (sport) masculinity ideology has great impact also when it comes to the animal issue. When animals (by force) enter the sports world they are forced into a humanly defined masculinity. They are being controlled and dominated, and therefore they become mere means in the masculine construction of symbolic power. In fact, this is what competitive elite sports is all about: symbolic wars between individuals, nations and/or teams. Moreover, sports have always been educational as well. Many sports, and especially team sports (such as football, rugby and ice hockey), have been used as means in order to mould boys into men, and this in turn can be seen as a sign of how sports culture is very much like military culture. In this particular context, harming and abusing animals have often been considered as fruitful methods in the making of "real men", especially through so called blood sports, such as hunting and fishing (Ryder, 2000, p. 235).

This kind of gender construction contains an internal purpose, and that is to distance men from women as well as from non-humans. The most extreme form of this is of course, as mentioned, blood sports (such as hunting and other sports where killing plays an essential part of the sport). But the masculine ideology behind blood sports can be traced to "milder" forms of sports as well, such as equestrian sports.

To dominate and control *animals* (or to hunt and kill animals, or to breed what may become "winning" animals) can, in fact, be seen as a hyper-masculine form of modern sport. Perhaps it is all about a desire to

control what is usually defined as “nature”, whether it is the nature in humans or the nature placed outside the human body. And sports are much about taming and thereby taking control over the nature in humans. Idealists may even say that controlling is a way of celebrating humanity.

Because of the unfortunate constructional link between the concepts of “nature” and “animal”, animals become tools for controlling nature, and by controlling nature humans can see themselves as much more important and valuable forms of living beings than members of other species.

In short, using living, and non-consenting, individuals for sport spectacles can be seen as an example of human arrogance, fuelled by the masculine ideology within modern sports culture. In this respect, gender equality seems to be a rather weak weapon. Fortunately, there are other, and more radical, views to consider.

The hybrid argument

In her famous essay “A Cyborg Manifesto”, the American philosopher and feminist writer Donna Haraway argues that humans and animals not only live in a symbiotic relationship; the boundaries between these two entities are in fact dissolved. In using the concept of cyborg, traditionally defined as a hybrid of organic life and technological systems, Haraway constructs an image in which humans and animals can be joined together as companions. She argues:

By the late twentieth century [...], the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks – language, tool use, social behavior, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such separation; indeed, many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures. Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture. Biology and evolutionary theory over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced modern organisms as objects of knowledge and reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle or professional disputes between life and social science. [...] The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signalling a walling off of people

from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleurably tight coupling. (Haraway, 1991, p. 152).

Haraway's theory is thought-provoking. By using the concept of the cyborg, she aims at very specific distinctions in human thought, represented in popular Cartesian dualisms. She challenges common distinctions such as the male/female distinction, the nature/culture distinction and the human/animal distinction. In challenging the Cartesian dualisms, she also indirectly challenges the work of many animal rights theorists as well, simply because many of the most popular animal rights theories are based on anthropocentric views, and therefore logically reflect the ideas and ideologies that lie behind animal exploitation. So, why not change views altogether, and approach animals as social constructions. This may also mean that animals can take pleasure in the relationships with human beings. In fact, one can argue that many animals are better-off held in captivity than they would have been living in the free; not least already domesticated animals such as dogs and cats.

What we're faced with here is an ideological "conflict" between the animals' rights to be "free" and the animals' rights to high welfare levels. Sometimes these two aspects go hand in hand, but sometimes they do not.

However, irrespective of how we choose between these two (broadly formulated) aspects, they both rely on the presumption that animals are not more "natural" than humans. Animals too are social constructions. This line of argument is not the only one when it comes to the issue of the social making of animals. In a more abstract sense humans *construct* animals based on *conceptions* of how we *want* to understand animals (and nature) and thereby make quite loose distinctions between "wild" animals and "domesticated" animals, or between "dangerous" animals and "harmless" animals, and so on. "Wild" animals are often considered to be a (latent) threat to humans and their "domesticated" animals, and "domesticated" are often seen as more human-like than other animals.

A hybrid theory suggests something else. A hybrid theory suggests a dismantling of these common distinctions and conceptions, in short, a dismantling of the constructed boundaries of species, and logically a critique of perceiving "humans" and "animals" as belonging to completely different categories.

As I mentioned in the introduction, it can be useful to utilize Greek mythology as a metaphor for this philosophy. In the Greek mythology

we find the Centaurs. This image may very well play a role in terms of ethics in equestrian sports.

To begin with, a Centaur is a figure described as half-human, half-animal. The torso of the human part is joined at the waist to the horse's withers. In other words, there is no relevant distinction between the human and the horse, they are the same body (and mind), and they cannot exist without one another. What we have here is a new species, albeit a mythological one.

Now, suppose we leave the anthropocentric view behind, and accept the existence of such a figure. What would it mean in terms of ethics? For one thing, one can argue that animals would not be subjected to the arbitrariness of human action, for the simple reason that there would not be any distinction between humans and animals. Also, it would mean that humans look at themselves as a part of the kingdom of animals, deeply connected to animals, and also interrelated to the welfare of animals. All of a sudden, it would not be possible to harm animals without harming oneself. Thereby, it would not be morally possible neither to objectify animals for sports nor other events where we today exploit what is supposed to be inferior creatures. Looking at animals in this way would also lead us away from the disturbing consequences of romanticizing animals. In this light, to speak about and actively support *animal rights* and *animal welfare* is not *that* radical, even if it serves an important political purpose.

Ethical conclusions, practical implications, and a utopian proposal

For all we know, we have reasons to be rather critical of the existence of equestrian sports (as well as other sports were animals are involved). But how to challenge the anthropocentric view that today forms our understanding of equestrian sports?

What we may need is a whole new set of analytical tools, tools that we can use in order to dismantle what I am inclined to call the fictional distinction between humans and non-humans. Perhaps it is a question of semantics. Do we really need to distinguish between the concepts of "humans" and "animals"? Is not the distinction in itself simply an illustration of a rather narrow-minded way of thinking?

What ethical conclusions are to be made from the argumentation in this article? Is it possible to say something concrete and action guiding on the basis of what's been discussed here? I like to believe it is.

A crucial point concerns the human/animal relationship. Whether we choose to take a rights view or a welfare view, or a combination of the two, we may have to draw the conclusion that it is morally difficult, if not impossible, to defend equestrian sports, based on the fact that we are dealing with a sports industry where horses always are inferior. But from a hybrid-theoretical point of view we may come to a different conclusion.

If we would consider that particular view seriously, it would most certainly mean that some of the disciplines of today would have to cease to exist, for example cross-jumping (because of the risk of serious physical harm), harness racing and horse racing (because of the accepted use of whipping), dressage (because of the degradation of animals in making them aesthetic artefacts).

Show jumping, on the other hand, seems to be more in a grey zone in this sense (based on the fact that the rider and the horse have to engage in more intimate teamwork). However, this does not mean that we escape the ideological problem imbedded in show jumping (and all the other disciplines): that equestrian sports are based on a masculine ideology, where it has become normalized to dominate and control animals in order to gain benefits on exploitative, and therefore unfair, grounds.

As I stated earlier, gender equality seems to be an all too blunt weapon for making sports culture de-masculinized. But that does not mean that nothing can be changed in this matter. Historically, we have seen a change of masculinity norms (both within and outside sports culture). Based on that, one can argue that something have changed also when it comes to equestrian sports. Consider, for example, the impact that popular "horse psychologists", such as Monty Roberts, the real-life "horse whisperer", have had on how to "break" (a word Roberts himself never would use) so called wild horses to become "tamed" enough to be racehorses (see, for example, Roberts 2009). In contrast to the "traditional" ways of training racehorses, Roberts argue for softer methods. No beating or whipping is "allowed". Instead, he argues, the trainer should communicate by *listening* to the horse.

It is not difficult to sympathize with Monty Roberts' view on this. But how should we understand it from an ideological point of view? Evidently, Roberts represent a different kind of masculinity than the tra-

ditional form, where brute violence is an accepted method to elicit compliance. But does that mean that he's an example of a new trend where "feminine" qualities challenge the traditional masculine values? I am not convinced of that. What we *can* say, I guess, is that he represents a "new" form of masculinity within sports culture, a form with roots in the ethics of care, which traditionally is connected to feminist philosophy (see for example Rachels, 2007; Tong, 1993). The connection between feminism and ethics of care contain certain internal pitfalls. The most obvious of these is that not only is ethics of care connected to women as a social group in general, but it is also supposed to be a "soft" theory relative to other theories of ethics. But I think one can say that the example of Monty Roberts' "whispering" in the ears of the horses shows that it can mean something else. Because, even if he, and others like him, uses a "softer touch" when he works with the horses, the goal is still to make racehorses of them. He "works" a certain "material" in order to force the horses into a rather harsh sports culture. Is that really something we should applaud? I am not sure of that, even if it is arguably better than beating the horses to success.

In this respect one can claim that the hybrid view on equestrian sports offers another view on the human/animal relationship, with or without sports – a view that may be essentially and fundamentally truer than what the anthropocentric view offer us.

The hybrid view suggests a totally different approach: An elimination of gender (that is, distinctions between men and women, and masculinity and femininity). But not only that, this particular view also offers an elimination of the distinction between humans and non-humans. This view can, of course, easily be linked to a radical egalitarian ideology which may seem utopian – but nonetheless worth striving for, not least for moral reasons.

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