

You are no less human than me

Thought for the Day

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Fox-hunting is back in the news south of the border, but I must confess that the new proposals leave me pretty cold. It's not that I have any brief for 'the unspeakable in pursuit of uneatable', but neither do I subscribe to what some see as a 'class war' against hooray henries on horseback. I'm just puzzled: it seems that the Scottish ban has resulted in many more foxes being killed, because they can outrun a dog, but not a bullet. So what have the campaigners achieved?

Of course we should not subject animals to unnecessary suffering – but that's our duty as human beings, not the animal's right. We regard it as an act of humanity to give a suffering animal a painless death, not its right to have a painful life prolonged – and that fact is enough to establish the moral distance between humans and animals.

In other words, the traditional Jewish teaching that "whoever saves a life is as if they have saved the whole world" – so that all other obligations should be set aside to save life – is species-specific. And those who do not see this are on a slippery slope.

These issues were highlighted for me last week by a different debate – about kosher and halal meat. When a supposedly respectable celebrity columnist can suggest that if "Jews and Muslims don't like it here ... they should contribute to ... reverse migration", then we should not be surprised that this gave the green light to even more objectionable views.

It may be that the unco guid never have a thought of which they might be ashamed. But for us normal folk, part of being civilised is knowing what to have the shame to keep to ourselves. How much more so those whose opinions supposedly deserve public attention?

And as for 'reverse migration', reflect on this: How many of us in Scotland are *not* members of a minority or *not* of immigrant stock? Perhaps my family has been here longer than Mr Ali's, and perhaps Mrs O'Malley's longer than mine. But that doesn't give us the right to despise one other.

Human rights are indivisible – we all have them all by virtue of being human, and we must all respect them all by virtue of being human – and you are no less human than me.