

BOOK REVIEWS

Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain Since 1800

Hilda Kean (1998). Reaktion Books: London. 272pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, 11 Rathbone Place, London W1P 1DE, UK (ISBN 1861890141). Price £19.95.

It is well documented that examining the past can tell us a great deal about our present and our future. This is certainly true when analysing compassion for animals and the development of the now highly organized and very well-supported animal welfare groups. Opening and reading *Animal Rights* is a pleasant surprise. From the title, one might expect to read another contribution to the complex and somewhat sterile argument regarding whether animals can be attributed with 'rights'. In fact, and this is both praise and criticism, the book is not about 'rights' as such at all. This is a criticism in as much as the title is misleading to potential readers, but *Animal Rights* is deserving of praise as it is in fact a detailed and very well-researched examination of the driving forces behind developing concern for animal welfare in the UK from the end of the 18th century to the present day.

Chapter 1 examines late-18th century attitudes to animals – their portrayal in art, use in vivisection – and the changing political values which led to a number of attempts to introduce animal protection legislation around the turn of the 18th/19th century. This chapter also introduces a theme which recurs throughout the book, namely the importance of *seeing* animal suffering as a catalyst for changing individual views. Disturbing sights, such as bull-baiting and the cruel driving of animals to markets such as Smithfield Market in London, are shown by the author as arousing the consciences of those who witnessed such events. This has significance in more recent times. Who can deny that the furore over the transportation of live animals to the Continent is fuelled by the *spectacle* of such cruel practices, even when greater cruelty exists on farms out of sight?

Chapter 2 further explores the importance of witnessing cruelty in the development of the animal liberation movement. The links between compassion for humans and compassion for animals are examined, as is the place of concerns for animal welfare in drawing women from their previously traditional place in the home. It has a continuous theme, of sight and spectacle, at its core – whereas other chapters in the book adopt a more chronological approach. This leads to some jumping around from one subject or species to another but once the author's intention is grasped it makes sense and is not of concern. What begins to emerge is a fascinating chronology of changing attitudes which makes one reflect and compare this historical picture with current attitudes and events involving animals – such as the continuing use of animals in experimentation, concern over slaughter techniques and the hunting debate.

Chapter 3 chronicles the arrival of new animals and causes for concern in the mid-19th century, primarily in London after the close of Smithfield Market. We are informed that the growth of 'industries reliant on dead animals' such as the fur trade made it 'impossible to escape from the stench of dead animals'. The increase in the popularity of dogs as pets and popular myths of animal 'heroism' are contrasted with the sight of them being used as draught animals on the streets. This chapter also charts the emerging depiction of animals as friends and companions as opposed to episodes such as the beating of animals to death by policemen in response to fears over rabies.

Chapter 4 examines growing concern over the most passionately disputed area of scientific experimentation involving animals. The place of women such as Francis Power Cobbe in attacking the vivisectionists, using now-familiar shock tactics, is examined. Graphic language was used to press home the point: 'the smooth cool man of science...stands by that torture trough'. This chapter also returns to the theme of links with human suffering: '...a

poor woman dying of consumption is subject to violent shaking so that the surgeon might hear the liquid in her chest...how much worse could be the pain inflicted on an even more vulnerable animal, behind the closed doors of the laboratory?’

Whereas Chapter 4 exposes the cruelty of men in the vivisector’s laboratory, Chapter 5 depicts the less direct cruelty of women in buying the fruits of the fur trade. This examination of the attitudes of the sexes towards animals is another continuing theme throughout the book. Juxtaposed with an examination of the involvement of both the sexes in cruel practices relating to animals, are stories revealing the humanity and courage of those who became involved in the animal liberation movement. In modern times it requires persistence and passion from those involved in animal welfare to continue to raise concerns as to how we should improve animal welfare. *Animal Rights* shows that in the political and social climate of the 19th century this must have required extraordinary courage and rectitude.

Throughout the book comparisons are drawn with other political and social movements, such as the fight for women’s suffrage and the fight against the *Contagious Diseases Act* which involved the compulsory medical examination of women and the improvement of the lives of children. We also see parallels, with the recent scares over BSE and the safety of meat products reflected in 19th century concerns over contaminated meat which led many to become vegetarian.

Chapter 6 chronicles the animal liberation movement entering the new century and trying to keep up the momentum of animal welfare improvements – the growth of direct action and undercover operations by people such as Louise Lind of Hageby who worked in a laboratory and then recorded (in lurid detail) experiments on cats and dogs. This chapter also reveals conflicting attitudes of some Royalty – in that Queen Victoria supported hunting yet was opposed to vivisection.

Chapter 7 illustrates the complex relationship between humans and animals in wartime, such as the compassion shown by soldiers to their horses in sharp contrast to the butchery of the First World War. The writer also suggests that after the war the ‘all-embracing approach to the plight of people and animals would no longer exist’. This is true today, where we see single-issue pressure groups which are focused on animal suffering alone.

Chapters 8 and 9 bring us up to date with an overview of the headline issues relating to animal welfare from after the First World War to the present day. This includes the exponential growth in the number of pressure groups, continuing cruelty in circuses and rodeos, the plight of pit ponies, opposition to hunting, the challenges raised by factory farming and the recent involvement of the middle classes with regard to the transportation of animals.

This is not a book which draws conclusions on the development of the animal liberation movement. There are no direct messages for those involved in animal welfare as to what they might learn which could be applied to today’s campaigns. Rather, the author settles for a descriptive style which inevitably draws the reader into making comparisons with the issues of modern times. The motivation for people to become involved in the animal liberation movement is shown to have been undoubtedly driven by the same factors – the sight and spectacle of the suffering of animals, a compassion for one’s fellow creatures and a deep-rooted sense of injustice – across 200 years.

Animal Rights will both fascinate and stir the emotions of those who read it. It is well illustrated with reproductions of photographs and paintings of human and animal interaction. For anyone with a concern for animal welfare it is a captivating examination of the roots of the animal liberation movement. For those who are not involved in the movement it cannot

fail to draw one to thinking about the issues involved: 'While some have only eyes for themselves, others do indeed see the world around them with eyes of compassion.'

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The Horse Breakers

Clive Richardson (1998). J A Allen & Co: London. 274pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, 1 Lower Grosvenor Place, Buckingham Palace Rd, London SW1W 0EL, UK (ISBN 0851317227). Price £18.95.

The history of horse training from the ancient Greeks until modern times is, by and large, the history of man's cruelty to horses. Over the centuries the degree of rough treatment either increased or decreased, but a true understanding of humane horse training methods is only just beginning to emerge. *The Horse Breakers* provides a detailed history of all these training methods and an insight into the 'problems' they were meant to resolve. While reading this book I was horrified by the accounts provided by the author of barbaric training and breaking measures – and also of the difficulties people had with vicious horses which often killed and injured them.

The book gives a good account of the, often brutal, attitudes to horses. For example, John Lawrence's advice to owners in his 1810 *Philosophical Practical Treatise on Horses* was to 'knock him in the head with all speed before he causes an accident'. In response it seems, the horses could be almost as savage – Lawrence also describes a horse which tore out a boy's entrails and throughout the book there are references to horses savagely biting people. Attitudes to breaking horses in Britain in the 1800s are encapsulated by Henry Hall Dixon's statement: 'In Ireland as in England, the accepted modes of taming a determined colt, or a vicious horse, are either by resolute rider with whip and spur, and violent lungings, or by starving, physic [laxative] and sleepless nights'. The animal was simply exhausted and beaten into submission.

Until recently, the true motivation of the horses' 'vicious' behaviour was not recognized. Neither the ancient trainers – nor Clive Richardson in his account of training methods – discussed the question of why the horses were so vicious.

The horses were vicious because they were scared. In my own research on training horses and cattle, I have found that many people, including some trainers, fail to recognize that aggressive behaviours are motivated by fear – and that punishing such behaviour will only further scare an animal and make the situation worse. Wild horses survive by fleeing predators, with fear motivating this response. When a horse is abused and cannot flee, however, it may respond by biting and kicking, particularly if it has a genetically nervous temperament. In nervous, flighty horses, most behavioural problems during training are caused by fear. This is a completely different situation from the true dominance aggression which motivates, say, horses fighting over a feed trough. For success in training, trainers must understand the animals' true motivations.

Richardson makes the interesting observation that training and breaking was often at its most brutal when performed by less-educated people. Certainly the training and breaking methods he describes for the classical Greeks were gentler than those employed during the Middle Ages when some of the most brutal techniques are reported. Also, in general, treatment was (and is) more brutal when the people involved live(d) under hardship