

Book Reviews

Animal Welfare in Australia: Politics and Philosophy

PJ Chen (2016). Published by Sydney University Press, Fisher Library, The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia. 406 pages Paperback (ISBN: 9781743324738). Price A\$40.00.

In this era of post-truth politics, it is more important than ever that those advocating for changes in areas of policy, including animal welfare, are well-informed about the processes and influences that shape policy. The past decade has seen considerable upheaval and disruption in animal welfare policy in Australia, and this dense yet hugely informative book is an excellent analysis of the factors that have influenced these changes, from the perspective of a political scientist who has, in the course of his research, developed a deep understanding of the animal protection movement in this country.

Chen says that the inspiration for writing this book was the 2011 suspension of live cattle exports to Indonesia, which resulted from both the ABC Four Corners exposé, *A Bloody Business*, and the major joint campaign by RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia. As an insider in that campaign, I am impressed by the way in which he has unpicked the elements of the policy environment of the time and placed these events within a historical and ethical context. This insight is important to all of us interested in improving animal welfare: as Chen points out, “understanding the norms and practices of those who deliver policy... is critical to understanding the capacity to realise and implement policy change”.

The book is in three parts, beginning with an historical background of the development of human-animal relations in Australia over time, which Chen concludes has politics at its core, and includes a summary of the main currents of thought about the ethics of these relations. The foundation for the way in which modern Australians relate to other animals was, of course, the colonisation of the continent in 1788 by European settlers, who not only brought with them many exotic species (most of which are now regarded as highly invasive pests) but also their attitudes towards them. As the landscape became increasingly turned over to animal agriculture, the production, consumption and export of animal products became key to the economic and social fabric of the nation. At the same time, the animal protection movement in Australia developed with European influences, with the establishment of the RSPCA and anti-vivisection movement mirroring the social reforms taking place in Britain, albeit a few decades later. More recently, in what Chen describes as a “second wave” of animal protectionism, the publication of Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* prompted the creation of an animal rights-based movement which promoted a more radical approach to challenging our treatment of animals.

In the second part of the book, Chen shifts his focus to a broader view of current attitudes to animals and how

popular media responds to and shapes these attitudes. This includes an overview of the policy domain in which animal welfare issues are discussed and addressed; one of loose networks of governance where a consistent and cohesive national approach is difficult to achieve. While maintaining a strong basis in the literature, Chen draws on three methodologies in his approach: over 60 in-depth structured interviews with policy process participants and activists; a systematic analysis of newspaper coverage of animal issues, supported by a more focused examination of free-to-air television content, and the representation of animals and animal farming in supermarkets; and three separate surveys of individuals with an interest in animal protection. It is the responses to the in-depth interviews that, interspersed in the academic content, serve to illustrate many of the book’s findings. Quotes serve as a useful way of reinforcing a point, but my one criticism of the way this approach is used is that a wider array of responses around key issues would have strengthened the book. Elsewhere, Chen makes clear that, when it comes to animal welfare, Australia is made up of not one, but “a complex set of nested publics, overlapping but distinct”, and that conversations about our treatment of animals are rarely, if ever, straightforward, reinforcing the need to present more of these individual viewpoints throughout the book.

Chen’s analysis of media commentary on animal welfare finds that reporting tends to be idiosyncratic and erratic, adding to this state of complexity and confusion. Apart from during the crisis of 2011, when a number of generalist and political reporters developed a good understanding of the live export trade and its regulation, journalists have not covered animal welfare stories regularly enough to develop their expertise in this area. Most stories focus on crime — such as individual cruelty cases, and seizures of animals — rarely taking the opportunity to engage in a wider debate about animal welfare policy. In this way, journalists tend to rely heavily on information provided to them by others, which is often presented in a way that reinforces an episodic framing of animal issues.

The third part of the book is broken down into an examination of the three key groups of policy actors in this domain: animal protection organisations and activists, the animal-using industry, and political and administrative policy elites (the ultimate decision-makers). Chen touches on a number of influencers, and tensions in the animal protection movement, that shape the way different organisations work, such as the increasing bureaucratisation of large, established NGOs such as the RSPCA, and the pressure that maintaining status and popular acceptance exerts on tempering the overall approach of the organisation in advocating for change. That there are tensions between proponents of animal welfare, animal rights and abolitionists, should not come as a surprise to any informed reader, but Chen also examines the way in which such groups must balance the benefits of collaboration (to achieve greater impact in areas

where aims align) against the need to maintain a distinct identity if they are to have ongoing relevance to policy-makers and the public. I found this section the most interesting in terms of its ideas and insights into policy-making but there were times when the writing and terminology used were a little impenetrable. Some more discussion of how the Australian federal system of government stymies progress in animal welfare would also have been helpful. The need for eight separate jurisdictions, all in different stages of the political cycle, to agree on anything, means that in an already messy policy environment, ending inhumane practices, such as the use of battery cages for layer hens, in a uniform manner is all but impossible.

Chen's final conclusions have salient implications for all the groups of policy actors he identifies. The first, that history shapes contemporary public policy in animal welfare, might strike other political commentators as obvious, but to those of us working directly in animal protection, it is often hard to take the necessary step back or find the opportunity for reflection that permits a long-term view of our current place in history. The second is more concerning — that as a policy area, animal welfare is characterised by *dissensus*, not consensus, between and within the political elite and the Australian public. Chen points out that, while this is not unique to animal welfare as a policy domain, it “makes for a volatile political climate”. Both groups “lack a unified and coherent political philosophy” regarding animal welfare, with political elites tending to see public interest in animal welfare as cyclical. This perceived public inconstancy acts as a disincentive for progress, especially when the economic costs of improved animal welfare outlast the benefits in terms of increased political capital. In such a situation, policy-makers are understandably reluctant to engage unless forced to do so, and activists and animal protection organisations have tried other ways to achieve change. For example, in terms of the farm animals, by directing consumer preferences through formal industry partnerships (such as the RSPCA's Approved Farming Scheme), through direct action or through social media activism promoting vegan and vegetarian diets.

While Australians still eat more meat than most other nationalities, and their concerns over the treatment of animals are centred far more on their pets than on the animals that produce their food, Chen advises us that the direction of change is one of increasing compassion. With this comes an attendant expectation that animal-based industries and the retailers of their products will address the concerns of consumers through improved practices and better transparency of production methods. Leaving change to market forces may work for a while, but governments cannot sit on the policy fence forever. Chen warns that “political non-decision making is not sustainable when it comes to animal welfare”. Unless governments put in place the necessary structures to enable them to make informed and considered decisions on animal welfare policy, crises such as the controversial 2011 live cattle export ban and the 2015 exposure of live baiting on greyhound racing tracks

will continue, and we will continue to see politicians lurch into hasty and often rash decision-making, and face an inevitable backlash from those with a strong financial interest in maintaining the *status quo*.

Being able to view events from a range of perspectives inevitably leads to better decision-making, and this book provides an excellent means for those involved in animal welfare policy to do just that. Armed with a better understanding of how and why Australia has arrived at its present policy vacuum, the reader is left feeling that it is up to the policy actors described in this book to find a way out of it.

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A New Basis for Animal Ethics: Telos and Common Sense

BE Rollin (2016). Published by University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri 65211, USA. 208 pages Hardback (ISBN: 978-0-8262-2101-8). Price US\$40.00.

I wrote the following for the book jacket after my first reading: “Possibly the most important book on animal welfare written to date. In exquisite chapter after chapter, Rollin presents the philosophical background *telos*, why it matters, and demonstrates with stories, anecdotes, and data why common sense is an important basis for understanding animals, their needs, and their wants.

Rollin has the ability to speak to each reader as if s/he is the only person he is talking to. He is a remarkable talent and brilliant teacher. *A New Basis for Animal Ethics: Telos and Common Sense* is a great read, a must read”.

In the Introduction, Rollin introduces us to moments of ‘wow’ as experienced through personal philosophical examples. I must admit, when I finished reading the book, my experience was very much ‘wow’. As the title — *A New Basis of Animal Ethics* — suggests, exploring animal ethics through *telos* and common sense provides new insights and understanding of animals, whether they are farm, companion, research, or wild animals.

The first half of the book deals with the animal mind and explains the concept of *telos* (from the Greek for *end* or *purpose*). The second explores common sense as applied to animal welfare.

Is there a need for a new animal ethic? In the first chapter, this question is answered in the affirmative, and I fully agree. As society has matured our relationship to animals has changed. Service and companion animals have become part of the family, whereas research and food animals have been distanced from us and are considered units or non-sentient things. I think of the story of the child that is asked where his hamburger comes from, and the answer is, “The supermarket”.

One important observation that Rollin makes is that change is gradual, and he describes in detail how society distinguishes between social, personal, and professional