

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

conditions. A person working to improve animal welfare in Mexico told me that when a man was admonished for overloading a donkey, his reply was, 'I suffer too'.

The book does mention the minority in favour of gentler training methods across the ages – but for the most part, they were lone voices in the wilderness. Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, written in 1877, was instrumental in starting to change attitudes; and Charles Darwin recognized that his horse tired in much the same way as a person.

Today, however, people's attitudes are really changing – although there are still those who think that brutality is effective. It is one of the reasons for the popularity of trainers such as Monty Roberts, although his methods have been used for years by many of the old, good, trainers. Richardson includes a brief description of Monty Roberts' training methods in the last chapter of his book. However, the book would have been enhanced by adding more information on how Monty Roberts and other trainers such as Ray Hunt and Tom Dorrance actually do their training. In tapes, I have observed that Monty, and many other good trainers, induce the horse to move around the circular pen by standing just behind its point of balance as it moves and using their body position to increase or decrease the horse's flight zone. The same principle, capitalizing on innate anti-predator behaviour, also works with cattle handling: staring at them and facing them increases their flight distance, whereas they will approach if you turn your back. Horses and cattle will face and watch anything that is either novel or threatening. Novelty, which scares an animal if suddenly thrust upon it, becomes attractive when it can be voluntarily approached – horses join Monty Roberts when he turns his back or lowers his head and becomes less threatening. His methods work, although even he sometimes misunderstands the horses' true motivation.

Richardson has completed a meticulous review of ancient horse breaking methods – but he fails to discuss the abuses occurring today across all levels of class and education. While the ancients may have openly used cruel methods because they did not know better, cruelty today is often deliberately hidden from sight in barns and/or less obvious. In the USA for example, some unethical show trainers force quarter horses to hold their heads low at shows by tethering them so that their front feet are slightly lifted: after many hours in this position, the horse is simply too tired to raise its head when on show. The author should have mentioned and condemned such welfare and training abuses.

I also missed a discussion of the influence of genetics in training. Overselection for single traits – such as speed in racehorses, or coloration in paint horses – is already causing behavioural problems. Some paint horses are now so nervous that they are difficult to train even with the most modern methods.

Overall, the book is very well researched and provides a detailed history of man's relationship with horses. It will intrigue all who are interested in the history of animal welfare issues relating to horses and may also be useful to animal welfare officers investigating cases of abuse by horse trainers. The main shortcomings of the book are that it provides almost no insight into horse behaviour; and the author appears detached from the suffering caused by the brutal training methods he describes. When my assistant read this book he commented: 'I am concerned that rough trainers might try some of the cruel methods which are illustrated in this book'.

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