Animals & Human Society: Changing Perspectives

Edited by Aubrey Manning and James Serpell (1994). Routledge: London. 224pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE, UK (ISBN 0 415 09155 1) Price £35.

This book is based on a conference held under the auspices of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1991. Although there has been a considerable delay between the conference and the publication, I believe that it has been worth waiting for. The book consists of chapters from authors working in a variety of disciplines and traces changes in our attitudes to animals, from the ancient world and pre-domestication through to the present day and across different cultures.

The first chapter, by Tim Ingold, reviews the relationship between hunter–gatherer communities and the animals they hunted, but also how these relationships have been portrayed by anthropologists. Ingold goes on to discuss how attitudes to animals changed as humans moved from a hunter–gatherer to a pastoralist existence. He sees the hunter–gatherer relationship with animals as one of trust whereas the pastoralist relationship is thought more concerned with domination. His conclusion is that western separation of humanity from nature has been the cause of many ecological and welfare problems, and suggests that we can learn from the respect towards animals and the environment shown by hunter–gatherer communities. Juliet Clutton-Brock continues with this view in her chapter on the behavioural aspects of the process of domestication. She examines biological reasons why certain species were domesticated and others not. In considering the change in our attitudes to domesticated animals she notes that as the number of domesticated animals owned becomes large (ie in modern farming systems) then the individual identity of the animal becomes lost, which inevitably influences the way in which we treat each one.

Calvin Schwabe reviews human attitudes to animals in the ancient world. Certain animal species were seen to share important characteristics with humans, but in exaggerated forms, which inspired admiration or fear. The most culturally and historically significant of these shared attributes were those representing power or domination and libido or fertility, and bovine images became particularly important. It is interesting to note that kings, certain gods and heavenly bodies were perceived as bulls rather than bulls being regarded as gods. Thus, the bull was the main point of reference for many aspects of society. Moving on in time, Esther Cohen considers medieval perceptions of animals. She suggests that domestic animals were relatively scarce in early medieval times but their numbers increased in the later Middle Ages. These animals were not confined to rural areas but also lived in the greatest urban centres, being essential to the domestic economy. The learned view of animals in Western cultures of this time was based upon the biblical story of creation. Man was seen as the crown of creation, destined to rule over nature and use it for his own ends. Humanity was measured by its distance from the animal world and the lower a person sank, the closer they were to the animals. This chapter contains an interesting discussion on animals as bearers of guilt and how those animals who reversed the perceived order of nature by harming a human, could not be excused from punishment on the grounds that they lacked reason and intent.

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The next two chapters by Andreas-Holger Maehle (Chapter 5) and Harriet Ritvo (Chapter 6), trace change in the human–animal relationship from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century. During this time there was a general view in Western culture that man had basic rights over animals because of God's grant of dominion. However, this period saw a gradual change in human attitudes to animals, although initially only in the educated elite. The change during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries paved the way for the rise of the humane movement in the nineteenth century, and the increased enforcement of new animal protection laws. However, even with these new laws, attitudes of the general population were slow to change, and popular amusement at the time still included cock-fighting and the baiting of wild animals.

Whilst the previous chapters review historical attitudes to animals, the remaining four consider different aspects of current attitudes. James Serpell and Elizabeth Paul consider changes in attitude to pet ownership. They also present some empirical evidence to suggest that pet ownership during childhood is positively correlated with concern for animals in general, and with the practise of some form of ethical food avoidance (eg veganism, vegetarianism or avoidance of certain animal products eg veal). Childhood pet ownership was also correlated with membership of animal welfare organizations. A strong relationship was also noted between childhood ownership of dogs or cats, and positive adult attitudes to other species. As the authors suggest, this does not necessarily show cause and effect. Some children may be more animal-oriented than others; this in early life manifests itself in their relationship with pets and later as sympathetic attitudes to all wildlife. However, these data agree with other cultural and historical comparisons which suggest that pet-keeping is associated with more humane and respectful attitudes to animals, and highlight the potential benefits of pets in humane education.

Arnold Arluke's chapter discusses one of the conflicts seen in our current relationship with animals, with his study of emotion management by workers in animal shelters. Shelter workers generally described themselves as 'animal lovers', yet had to work in an area where euthanasia of unwanted animals was practised. His work shows how learning to cope with this conflict was a more complex process than had previously been assumed. New workers at shelters initially had problems in coping with their emotions, but with time this tension was replaced with a more manageable version of the conflict. However, they did not become immune to the situation, and all workers, including those with many years of experience, felt uneasy about euthanasia at certain times.

Stephen Kellert's chapter examines attitudes to and knowledge of wildlife in Japan, Germany and the United States. The work took place over a ten-year period (1979-1989) and involved questionnaires and surveys of adults in each country. The author admits to limitations in the research procedures which limit the ability to generalize the results, however the data suggest some broad conclusions. An encouraging result for the future was the finding of significantly greater wildlife appreciation, interest and concern for animal welfare among younger and better educated respondents in the American and German samples. There were interesting differences between countries, but the majority of respondents in each country expressed considerable appreciation of and affection for particular animal species, although this was often restricted to species with strong aesthetic, cultural and historic associations.

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Kellert suggests that whilst such attitudes have been useful in the past for generating public support for wildlife conservation, they are perhaps inadequate for future needs since the majority of future animal extinction will affect largely unknown invertebrates.

In the final chapter of the book, Mary Midgley reviews issues raised in the other chapters and suggests that the very presence of this book shows how progress has been made in serious scholarly inquiry into human–animal interactions. I agree with this point, although from reading the previous chapters, one is left with the impression that modern debates regarding our use of animals have made little progress since the issues were first considered many centuries ago.

In summary, this book will appeal to anybody with an academic interest in human–animal interactions. It may also be of interest to the more general reader, although the style of some chapters makes them a little difficult to read in places. However, the wealth of information contained within this book makes it well worth persevering.

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NORINA: A Norwegian Inventory of Audiovisuals

Edited by Karina Smith, Adrian Smith and Richard Fosse (1992-1994). Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine: Oslo. Available in Filemaker Pro for use on MacIntosh or as a stand-alone version for the IBM compatible with Windows. Obtainable with manual (*c* 77pp) from Professor Adrian Smith, Laboratory Animal Unit, Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine, PO Box 8146, Dep 0033 Oslo 1, Norway. Price NOK950; US$150 (NOK4,750 for networks with up to 30 workstations). A free demonstration floppy diskette written in Filemaker Pro is also available.

Published by laboratory animal veterinarians at the Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine and the Haukeland Hospital in Bergen, Norway, NORINA lists audiovisuals and other media useful in teaching the life sciences. Written entirely in English, its primary purpose is to offer an overview of possible alternatives or supplements to the use of animals in student teaching at all levels, from school to university and postgraduate level. The first version of NORINA consists of 1,322 entries and includes citations to computer programs, interactive videos, CD-ROMs, films, biokits and more traditional teaching aids such as books, slide series, 3D models and classroom charts. It also lists contact persons, organizations which are developing or using audiovisuals at their institutions and suppliers of audiovisuals. Entries in the database have been collected from all over the world, but are generally from North America and Europe, with a few entries from Australia.

NORINA is written in Filemaker Pro, originally for MacIntosh, and is now also available for IBM Windows. Both the original Mac version and the demonstration diskette require Filemaker Pro software. The version used for this review was the stand-alone IBM version that requires no other software. From correspondence with the creators, it appears that this version works more slowly and a little less elegantly than the MacIntosh plus Filemaker Pro version. Consequently purchasers of the IBM version are offered a Filemaker Pro version at the cost of shipping so that they may input it into a local, personalized database.

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