
Book Reviews

RICHARD SORABJI

Animal Minds and Human Morals

Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1993, 267 pp.

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Animal Minds and Human Morals is an important book providing a much-needed historical dimension to recent discussions on the ethics of nonhuman animal use. While several authors have already described the historical basis of the modern controversy in the writings of medieval, Renaissance and Early Modern philosophers and theologians, Sorabji takes us back a stage further to the very roots of this whole debate in classical antiquity.

He compares and contrasts the views of the different philosophical schools, from the early Presocratics to the late Neoplatonists, regarding the issue of animal “mentality,” and traces their subsequent impact on the development of Judaeo-Christian, and hence modern, ideas. According to Sorabji’s thesis, modern Europe derived its philosophical position on animals and their treatment primarily from Aristotle and various Stoic philosophers who (though from very different perspectives) denied “reason” and “belief” to animals, and hence excluded them from moral consideration. This tradition was transmitted via the writings of Augustine, and later Thomas Aquinas, who appear to have selectively ignored contrasting, “pro-animal” arguments, such as those expounded by Aristotle’s own student and successor, Theophrastus, and the later Neoplatonist, Porphyry. Sorabji does not speculate at length as to why the “anti-animal” perspective eventually prevailed, although he certainly hints that the popularity of meat-eating, hunting and animal sacrifice were not unimportant considerations.

Toward the end of the book, Sorabji notes some striking similarities between the ancient and modern discussions of animals’ mental abilities. For example, on the subject of animals’ powers of speech it appears that the ancients – like modern students of so-called “ape language” – eventually concluded that animals could use meaningful signs (semantics) but that they lacked syntax. He also notes some equally striking differences, however, in the kinds of ethical theories which have emerged from these discussions. It surprised me, for instance, to learn that the

classical scholars never employed the concept of “rights” even in relation to human morality, let alone with respect to the treatment of animals. The early controversy surrounding the moral status of animals revolved entirely around the question of animal “rationality” rather than any discussion about rights. I was even more surprised to discover that the issue of pain and suffering never entered into the early debates. The moral arguments focused exclusively on whether or not it was appropriate for humans to kill and eat animals. Whether they suffered or not in the process appears to have been largely immaterial. Despite these apparent gaps in the ancient debate, Sorabji evidently does not have a high regard for any of the current philosophical proponents of animal rights or liberation. In his concluding chapter, he dismisses the rival ethical theories of Singer and Regan as being essentially “one-dimensional” and advocates the detailed study of “morally relevant” differences between human and nonhuman, including “possible relationships to us.” However, this tantalizing proposal is couched in such vague terms that I finished the book without a clear sense of philosophical direction.

Finally, although it has much to commend it, this book is not an easy read. Anyone, apart from a philosopher of mind, is likely to find the first few chapters extremely heavy going since Sorabji makes few concessions to the uninitiated. The discussion of the different classical schools of thought on such issues as animal perception, reason, belief, appearance, thought, memory, assent, and so on, is so densely written, and so devoid of clarifying examples, that this reviewer remains perplexed concerning the nature, or even the gist, of some of the early philosophical arguments. Nevertheless, it is worth persevering. *Animal Minds and Human Morals* fills an important hole in the literature on human-animal interactions. It will serve as a key source book for those researching the history of Western ideas about animals for many years to come.

COLIN SPENCER

The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism
 London: Fourth Estate, 1993. xiii, 402 pp. £20.00

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Is the desire to eat meat innate or learned? Most who give up meat say they never want to eat it again. A few, like myself, live in a state of constant craving. Yet meat

seems to be bad for our health. In China, where meat consumption is rising, so is cardiovascular disease. If there is such a thing as addiction to meat, and I believe there is, then it is as bad for us as most other addictions.

Surveys in Britain in 1988 and 1990 found that many vegetarians said they had given up eating meat for health reasons (76%) but concern over cruelty to animals was very close behind (75%). All over the Westernized world meat-eating is on the decline while in the developing world it is rising rapidly. Is this because people spontaneously desire meat and eat it as soon as they can afford to do so, or is it because meat-eating is regarded as a mark of affluence or prestige – or, ironically, of Western “civilization”?

These are some of the questions raised rather than answered by Colin Spencer. His main emphasis is upon the history of vegetarianism from the days of ancient Egypt to modern times. In an excellent account of ideas, he shows that a vegetable diet usually has been part of something bigger in religious or political terms. Preoccupations about diet, far from being modern phenomena, have nearly always been features of human life, being accentuated when economic conditions have allowed a degree of choice in what we eat.

Spencer is confident that meat-eating appears quite late in the evolution of humankind and even suggests that our Pliocene forebears would have consciously declined killing for food. Sadly, by the time agriculture appears in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean regions some ten thousand years ago, human culture is already steeped in animal blood.

Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, Pythagoras and Buddha, all born in the sixth century B.C., are the first of many outstanding individuals known to have followed a vegetarian diet. It seems they did so principally because they believed in transmigration of the soul. Buddha, however, also taught compassion for all sentient life.

Some 500 years later, another trio of thinkers, Seneca, Ovid and Plutarch, all near contemporaries of Jesus, also followed vegetarianism, the last two chiefly for reasons of compassion. Indeed, Plutarch specifically rejected metempsychosis. A pity, then, that Plato and Aristotle, far more specieist in their philosophies, should have come to dominate the development of Western thought. Perhaps Jesus, too, was a vegetarian, but his philosophy of love was to be warped and proselytized by less compassionate men – Paul, Augustine and Aquinas; sexists and specieists all.

Throughout the history of vegetarianism until the present day, we see the same four main motives – compassion for animals, a concern for health, asceticism (purity) and a belief in metempsychosis.

Spencer suggests that the dominant culture of Europe so easily could have gone another way. Instead of Pauline/Aquinan Christianity we could have had Manicheism (a kindly and vegetarian asceticism), Neoplatonism (which owed more to Pythagoras than to Plato) or some synthesis of ideas. The fact that most sects which subsequently came to be regarded as heresies by orthodox Christianity happened also to be vegetarian meant, so Spencer implies, that vegetarianism itself came to be seen as a subversive practice. To this day vegetarians are ridiculed by guilt-ridden carnivores.

What, then, is the origin of the specieism of Judaeo-Christianity? Spencer's account raises the possibility in my mind that the specieism of the Israelites may have been, in part, a reaction against the animal-obsessed culture of their Egyptian masters.

This is a well-written and intelligent book. Strangely, Spencer does not cite many of the works of the modern animal rights movement which sometimes cover similar ground. Nevertheless, his sources range from ancient to modern and across many disciplines giving the finished work a richness and depth that is a delight to delve into.

AUBREY MANNING AND JAMES SERPELL (Eds.)

Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives

New York/London: Routledge, 1994. 199 pp.

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Edited collections, especially those constructed from papers presented at academic meetings, are a mixed bag, at best. Drawn from a recent conference sponsored by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the selections in *Animals and Human Society* are, on the whole, far better than may be found in most similar works. The authors and editors are extensively experienced in the field of human-animal relationships and should be familiar to the readers of this journal.

Following a brief introduction by the editors, the first offering by Ingold does an excellent job in setting the stage for what follows as he discusses how the cultural movement from hunting animals to domesticating them has shaped human views of both animals and the natural world. Hunter-gatherers, he maintains, have an alliance with nature in which their relationship to animals is based on mutuality and

respect. With the development of pastoralism humans move from *collecting* animals to defining them as products or pieces of property, a change which entails constructing a dichotomy between nature and society. While hunter-gatherers see nature as a phenomenon of which they are an integral part, herding peoples regard it as a thing to be conquered. Consequently, while hunters see their relationships with animals as grounded upon *trust*, herdsmen define their associations with non-human others as requiring *domination*.

The following two papers continue Ingold's focus on the process of domestication. Clutton-Brock offers an anthropological discussion of how controlled breeding transforms animals into cultural artifacts while Schwabe presents an historical account of the various modes of relationship with both "wild" and "tame" animals in ancient Egypt and other Old World civilizations.

Cohen continues by offering an historical discussion of the place of animals in medieval Europe with emphasis on how animals were seen as symbolizing human qualities such as courage, pride, and gluttony. She then moves to a succinct account of the involvement of animals in public rituals during the Middle Ages and their anthropomorphized designation as appropriate subjects of legal constraint and punishment.

Next, Maehle provides a wide-ranging discussion of the philosophical groundings of human-animal relationships from the early 17th to the mid-19th centuries. This interesting, detailed, and highly organized piece analyzes perspectives on animals' possession of souls, their ability to feel pain, and their capacity to reason. He provides numerous illustrations of the implications of defining animals as either automatons or rational beings for their legal rights, handling as experimental objects, and treatment as domesticated creatures. Ritvo continues with a rather stiffly styled presentation of the taxonomic system into which animals were placed in 19th-century Britain.

In the seventh selection Serpell and Paul revisit much of the ground already covered as they discuss shifting perspectives on animals in the movement from hunting and gathering to pastoral culture and views of animals popular during the 19th century. The authors conclude by briefly presenting their recent research with university students focused on the impact of companion animals on peoples' feelings toward animals.

The following two papers are the only discussions in the collection primarily based on empirically-derived data and present a striking illustration of the contrast between the two major general research approaches within the social sciences.

Arluke uses ethnographic data to ground a rich and moving description of the means whereby animal shelter workers deal with the conflict between their personal regard for animals and their central occupational obligation to euthanize large numbers of cats and dogs. Shelter workers manage the emotions inherent in this “caring-killing” paradox, Arluke maintains, by relegating certain shelter animals into a pet-like status, emphasizing the care provided while the animals are confined or the compassion and skill with which they are eventually put to death, finding ways of postponing euthanasia, and placing blame on human companions for contributing to the oversupply of companion animals far outstripping demand, and for regarding companion animals as objects that can be disposed of with little or no remorse. Kellert’s paper, in contrast, continues the research task on which he has labored for almost two decades – to categorize the attitudes and knowledge of various peoples with regard to wildlife. His conventional presentation employs survey data to compare the views of Japanese, German, and American respondents as they fit into his well-known typology of orientations (Naturalistic, Humanistic, Aesthetic, and so on).

The volume concludes with a summary discussion by Midgley. While going somewhat overboard in calling the book a “triumph,” she rightly focuses on the key theme that runs through this collection. *Ambivalence* is central to our understanding of and importantly constrains our relationships with animals.

DOUGLAS KEITH CANDLAND

Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature

New York: Oxford, 1993, xx, 411 pp. \$30.00

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If we could ever accurately describe human nature, it might include the use of signs and language. It might also include efforts to communicate with beings on the borders of humanity, especially nonhuman species but also human beings lacking full socialization. In a marvelous idea for a book, Douglas Keith Candland has examined some of the most famous of these efforts over the last several hundred years, in an effort not only to probe human nature but also to uncover many of the roots of modern psychology.

Feral Children and Clever Animals is best when presenting these stories. We learn about Kasper Hauser, a young man who appeared in Nuremberg in 1828, repeating something that sounded like “I want to be a horseman as my father is.” When he was murdered five years later, theories abounded about his being a possible successor to the ruler of Baden, raised in secrecy and isolation to keep him out of the way. Then there is Clever Hans, the German horse (two horses, actually) who could tap his hooves in answer to mathematical and other questions. He turned out to be responding to subtle and unintentional bodily cues from his trainer and other human observers. We also encounter the many chimpanzees and gorillas who have learned sign language and computer symbols as means of communication, such as Washoe and Koko. Most of the stories are familiar, but Candland provides interesting details and commentary.

The failure of this long book lies in the analysis accompanying the anecdotes. Candland repeatedly states that the ways in which the children and animals are studied tells us more about the investigators than their subjects, yet he does not hesitate to label certain research questions as wrong (implying that others are right, regardless of intellectual context). He tells us that these experiments and observations raise important questions, but he rarely answers them, or even tells us what the implications are. The reader is intrigued – yes, these are important issues – but disappointed.

Even Candland’s conclusions are merely suggestive. He says that the reader should have learned something about the differences between physical and behavioral science, the relationship of experimenter to subject, the strengths and weaknesses of laboratories versus natural settings for research, experiential versus innate knowledge, and the limits of constructing a great chain of being. But he leaves it to the reader to figure out exactly what conclusions to draw. The author, in the end, has little to say about human nature.

Occasional excursions also address the roots of several schools of psychology: behaviorism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and the measurement of mental abilities. Here too, the stories are revealing: about the origins of the idea of a learning curve, for example, or the progressive aspects of a behaviorism that was opposed to arguments for the hereditary sources of knowledge. But there is no tight argument about these traditions or their relationship to feral children and clever animals.

This book is similar to many of the cases it describes: a great opportunity squandered.