

The Humane Movement in New England

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Introduction:

Man's companion animals--primarily the dog, cat and horse--have been the subject of song, folklore, and myth of many different cultures for centuries. The noble steed, the faithful dog and the inscrutable cat are prominent figures in literature and art. They have cohabitated with man longer than most other animals. It is estimated that the dog, man's first domesticated animal, joined him over 10,000 years ago (Goldan, 1981). The horse and the cat were later acquisitions, both being domesticated around 5000 years ago (Seth-Smith 1979 and Cantin, 1976). However, people have been known to question whether or not the cat was actually ever domesticated at all, but instead, just hung around areas of human habitation because that is where the rodent population was densest! These three animals have performed a variety of functions for mankind which have grown and changed with time as man's needs have changed. The cat's most important function has always been, and still is today, controlling the small rodent population. The dog and the horse have performed a variety of functions for mankind ranging from pulling the world's plows to pleasure riding for horses and from leading the blind to livestock herding for dogs.

But it is only in recent times that many psychiatrists and other scientiest have been researching the less practical side of pet ownership--the role of the pet in mental and emotional development and health. Dr. Michael Fox suggests that

man first kept dogs not for any utilitarian reason, but instead to "...satisfy a very basic yet almost ineffable human need--simply to be close to animals." Supposedly it was not until much later that the dog became of practical importance as a hunting companion. Besides the role of companion, researchers have found that the family pet may play an important role in "...the healthy emotional development and socialization...of children, in facilitating human relationships, in helping the owners avoid...estrangement from their inner animal selves..." and even in encouraging owners to get outdoors and exercise (Fox, 1979).

This paper will attempt to gain insight into people's attitudes toward animals by looking at how they are treated. One way to do this is to look at how our society deals with selected problems involving the care of animals (also referred to as "humane" problems). Such an approach should provide valuable information about people's attitudes toward animals.

When looking at any problem involving the care of animals in this country, one cannot help but wonder at the number and variety of humane groups--here defined as private, charitable organizations which concern themselves with one or more animal problems--that operate in the United States today. As a framework of study, this paper will trace the history of this type of group from England in the 19th century to the United States today. To narrow the subject down to a manageable size for this type of paper, I chose to limit my study area to New

England. I believe that this region is large and diverse enough to provide material to make comparisons between different lifestyles--such as rural and urban--and to answer how these lifestyles may affect our attitudes toward animals.

The remainder of the paper will adhere to the following format:

1. A brief history of the humane movement in Great Britain and the United States will be given to set the stage for the discussion of specific animal problems today. Comparisons will be made between humane problems today and those at the inception of the humane movement, through which we can hopefully gain some insights as to why the movement started and what its successes and failures have been.

2. This will be followed by a review of the manner in which three selected animal problems--animal overpopulation, cruelty to animals, and the promotion of animal welfare--are dealt with in New England by private humane organizations, state and local lawmakers, and humane educators. Special emphasis will be given to the differences between methods used in each state.

3. Discussion will center on why these problems occur, especially how people's attitudes toward animals may cause these problems, and the effectiveness of measures now employed to combat these problems. New approaches to these problems or a redirection of funds and/or more emphasis on methods already in use, but not given much attention, will be suggested.

4. Finally, I will discuss the more general problem of animal welfare and the future of the companion animal in today's society.

This paper will deal only with the companion animals mentioned before--cats, dogs and horses. I chose these three animals for this study because they play a unique role in many people's lives. These animals are the only ones with which most people come into daily contact. This is not really the case for horses now, but it certainly was at the beginning of the humane movement.: They are the objects of much love and devotion. Their upkeep is a multi-billion dollar business in this country. In addition, promoting the welfare of these particular animals has received more money and attention from the humane movement itself, past and present, than any other three species taken together. If one were to study how the humane movement has dealt with farm animals or wildlife, one might come up with rather different conclusions about people's attitudes toward animals. It would be fascinating to compare the history of the humane movement involving all different types of animals--farm animals, companion animals and wildlife--but this would be beyond the scope of this paper.