

The Lie of Domestic Husbandry: Or, How One Species' Campaign To Dominate All Other Animals On Its Planet Is Good For You

IN THE Judeo-Christian tradition, the one with which most of us are familiar, it all started with one simple phrase: "Then God said, ' Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish and sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Gen. 1.1) And with that, man legislated his subjugation over every other species of life he has ever known. This one little phrase, written by God-knows-who but ascribed to Moses, has since informed every action towards animals that has since taken place in Western Civilization. And in fact, it only takes a cursory shift in perspective to see that the way humans treat animals is the exact same way we used to treat slaves. And though mankind has only recently come to the determination that the enslavement of people is morally wrong (with a few notable exceptions) we have not followed the logical conclusion that slavery towards any living thing is wrong. This permanent midnight of delusion rings false, fellow hominids. We are successful only at good storytelling.

Mankind domesticated animals thousands of years before a gathering of Jewish scholars compiled their oral law into the Torah. Animal husbandry is in fact one of the cornerstones of civilization, taking place alongside agriculture as the centrifugal force around

which cities were first built. And it's not like only Middle Easterners held the belief that human beings were a special species, separate and more equal than birds, pigs, ducks, and cows. In Africa, a creation myth goes that humans were baked in an oven by the gods, and then spread across the land. The people of Japan believe they are the children of their gods, and heir to everything on the earth, rocks and trees thrown in with fish and dragons in a package deal. What's funny about this whole lie (hilarious, except if you're sheep), is that DUH! IT'S MANKIND WHO TELLS IT! I mean, how can we really take seriously the idea that human beings are a more special species than any other kind of animal if in fact it was humans beings who first started telling it?

It's like George Bush walking up to you and telling you that the Supreme Court has decided in their infinite wisdom that he should be president. Except when you ask for verification he only says "They work in mysterious ways." It would be very hard to swallow that ridiculous load of crap. But look at how easy it is (like, an unqualified assumption) for us to continue to tell ourselves that the sporting slaughter, backbreaking labor, and cruel amusement we subject other creatures to is excusable because at least they're not human. Do you know how slavery started?

Slavery has been around as long as domestic husbandry, but it has been in a constant evolution towards eradication because the creatures enslaved could talk back, voice their beefs, and even organize and conspire toward rebellion. Today we say "Damn right,"

but Romans, for instance, couldn't understand why their fairly treated slaves would rebel against their captivity. They were well fed, amply clothed and sheltered – what was the problem? Today we say, "Captivity, jackass," but then we toss a bone outside to Rex, leashed up in the yard. About 200 years ago, a sea change took place in social science that was so comprehensive that historians don't even have a real name for it yet. Coinciding with Napoleon's romp across Europe and inspired by the images of French peasants dying on the barricades, it suddenly became cool among the intelligentsia to be down with the working class. This second wave of the Enlightenment soon abolished every major monarchy on the planet, started a chain of labor and peasant uprisings worldwide, and began a systematic abandonment of the institution of slavery. It was an amazing time. If you look at paintings of presidents back then, there is a dramatic shift in fashion between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson from aristocratic frills and finery to the somber workman's black of the common man.

So imagine being a chicken. One day donkey comes up to you and says that his god told him that donkeys were the ultimate species, and that you had better lay down on that chopping block because he wants to eat you. "Of course your god told you that, you jackass," you would tell him as you scampered the fuck away, 'YOU'RE HUNGRY!' But it doesn't make it the truth. It doesn't even make the donkey's god God. The donkey was just hungry. And

didn't wanna do any backbreaking work. And wanted a household companion to throw fucking scraps to.

Mankind's abominable treatment of animals occurs in three arenas: 1) chattel slavery, 2) the food industry, 3) and pet ownership. I will address each three succinctly and without blinders:

- The use of animals for labor coincided with our development of commercial agriculture. Once we needed to mass produce food, we enslaved millions of oxen and cows to plow our fields for us. We fed them sparsely, kept them locked up, and controlled their breeding habits. Now look at our former treatment of slaves in the American South. I defy you to find a difference. We measured their usefulness by their prowess as draught animals, irrespective of the usefulness of life itself, which all our holy books told us was sacred. The cruelest cut was the term "beast of burden." How humiliating for whomever was the proud Ox King.

- The food industry works on two levels. First, we pen them up in factories and force feed them till their unhealthily fat, then kill them quickly and mercilessly to package their meat and ship them to the cities. Next, we feed the flesh to our children and tell them it's food, even though there's plenty of good apples and cucumbers and wheat thriving abundantly. I'm a product of this mindset too. I feed flesh to my son and tell him it's food. He eats it because it's yummy. One day I fed him a soy patty and he ate it because it was yummy.

- Humans have been keeping pets for millennia. The funniest thing about pet ownership is that we tell ourselves that our pets would rather be living with us than hunting with their pack, living and loving as they choose. At least that must be what we're telling ourselves because we say that we love these animals. Read (or re-read) *Call of the Wild* by American poet/prophet Jack London. Dig the dichotomy of animal-human companionship

So now we've taught this lie to our sons and daughters and it has become the law of the land, generations living and dying breathing easy on the assumption that there is a different standard of cruelty when it is applied to any other species than man. We breathe easy because we have told ourselves we were given animals as gifts by God to do with as we pleased. Well of course we told ourselves that. If we hadn't, we'd have to deal with animals as neighbors on an equal footing on this vast planet and that opens up our existence to insecurity. And so we come up with concepts like the "food chain" and "survival of the fittest" to excuse our behavior. Lemme tell you 'bout a food chain:

It's pretty evident that every species on this earth has something to teach the others, no? Without watching bears, how did we learn how to catch fish? Without watching rabbits, how did we learn to forage for food? Well what if man's special purpose was actually to teach lions and sharks and hawks that there is another

way to subsist without murder? Like our big brains were meant to be used to enlighten the rest of the creatures of the earth. Instead of using cruel behavior by animals towards others smaller and weaker as an excuse to do the same, what if we set the standard, and initiated a new order of cooperation between species? And what if we are falling miserably derelict in our duty, eliciting divine head-shaking at our misappropriation of gifts? If we look at it that way, it could start a New Age of Man, with no fear of random cougar attacks or the merciless vengeance of landlorn sharks. We would know and animals would know that we were all in this together, and could even up the ante as far as interspecies learning is concerned.

Sound crazy? Of course it does, because that's exactly how the Lie has told you it sounds. But it doesn't make it not the truth. The truth is, we by no means have to look at it that way, we can continue on telling ourselves whatever we'd like to because we are *running* things up in here. In fact, you can ignore every word I've said, and probably should if you want to continue to be a part of normal human discourse. You can tell your kids it's just a story.