

3. History of the Movement

Introduction

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Introduction

There is an historical evolution in the change of attitudes towards animals in each country and region of the world. There are also different stages of development of the animal movement, and the different approaches adopted can influence the speed and progress of these. The study of this is vital to the understanding of the development of the movement, and our contribution to this development.

This background note will concentrate on the early development of the movement, especially in the UK, which has the longest history for the protection of animals. However, many of its themes are paralleled in the history of the movements in other countries. We simply do not have the research to include a wide geographical area in this study (for which we apologise). We do, however, recommend that every animal protectionist fighting for social change for animals researches the history of their own national movement.

After studying animal protection history, we can learn that the movement cannot be isolated from social change, politics, culture and economics. In fact, the development of the animal protection movement is strongly connected to these wider environmental factors.

Brief History of the Movement

Concern for animal suffering can be found in Hindu thought, and the Buddhist idea of compassion is a universal one, extending to animals as well as humans, but Western traditions are very different. Their intellectual roots lie in Ancient Greece and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Neither is kind to those not of our species.

Modern scholars have found historical evidence of humane attitudes towards animals in England from 1500 to 1800. In early modern England it was conventional to regard the world as made for man and all other species as subordinate to his interests. However, people lived closely with animals, for example the keeping of pets was widespread and became a normal feature for the family as early as 1700.

In the 18th century, many social reformers, writers and poets started to express their sympathy towards animals and criticised cruelty to, and exploitation of, animals. These included the political philosopher Jeremy Bentham, whose most notable claim (in 18th century) states: “the right question for animals is not ‘Can they reason?’ ‘Can they talk?’, ‘but *can they suffer?*’” These questions provide the fundamental concepts for animal welfare.

To Jeremy Bentham, in particular, belongs the high honour of first asserting the rights of animals with authority and persistence. “The legislator,” he wrote, “ought to interdict everything which may serve to lead to cruelty”. Some 200 years ago he was already making far-reaching comments such as: -

“The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate.”

The humanitarian reformer Henry Salt (1851-1939) also played a leading role. His classical book entitled ‘Animals’ Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress’, published in 1892, included most of the current animal rights theories and concepts. A scholar, and then a master at Eton College, Salt was a friend of Shaw, Gandhi and William Morris.

Human-animal relationships have changed through agricultural development, economic growth, urban expansion and political changes. The 19th century industrialisation stimulated changes in attitudes towards the natural world and also affected the urbanisation of social life, particularly in Britain. With the industrialisation of society, people gradually lost contact and affinity with animals, as traditional ways of keeping and depending on animals declined. Intensive farming methods were introduced after the 2nd World War, which moved many animals from free-range, outdoor keeping into the sheds of the factory farm. This divorced people from animals. Food animals were reared out of sight, packaged and processed, and purchased through supermarkets.

The decline in working animals led to people developing a closer relationship with their pets or ‘companion animals’. Moreover, the development of a new urban middle class also led to a new perception of animals arising from a new perception of children in the family. The increased attention and protection for children made people recognise the value of other living creatures whose mentality, in some ways, was very similar to children’s. The changing social situation also helped to spread a new moral vision and to create and sustain anthropomorphism. The various social reform movements in the 1960s e.g. peace, women’s rights, new age and anti-nuclear movements also helped to evoke the rhetorical changes of the animal protection movement at the time.

Through different periods, the uses and abuses of animals by humans have provoked animal protectionists and legislation to respond in defence of animals. In 1781, the first law relating to animals was passed for the scrutiny of the treatment of cattle in Smithfield market. In 1786, legislation requiring a license to slaughter was passed. Several years later the primary bill to safeguard animals’ life was read in the British Parliament in 1800 and attempted to stop bull baiting. Although the bill was not passed, changes in the law entered the new political agenda and gave rise to moral sensibilities toward animals.

In 1822, the first legislation ‘Martin’s Act’ for the protection of animals was passed. This focussed mainly on cattle and horses. Two years later, in 1824, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (which became the Royal SPCA in 1840) was established. The society focused especially on enforcement of the law, with prosecutions where appropriate. In 1835, the Act was amended and expanded to protect all domestic animals, such as dogs and cats, against meaningless cruelty.

Although the SPCA condemned vivisection in 1824 as an abuse of animals, legislation was not introduced until 1876. An ‘act to amend the law relating to cruelty to animals’, the first of its kind in the world, regulated a licensing procedure and general inspection of

animal experiments. After this act was passed, research involving animals required legal control for over 110 years in the UK. In 1986, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act replaced the original legislation of 1876, but animal experiments still continued. Under the new law, places where animal experiments were conducted required ‘Certificates of designation’, which were issued by the Secretary of State and also needed to have a specific person responsible for the care of the animals.

The first American animal protection organization, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, was established in 1866. By 1900, several hundred other animal protection organizations had formed in America.

In 1860, the Battersea Dogs’ Home was established by Mr. Mary Tealby, the first woman to found a British animal welfare organisation. The organisation was the first place to provide a home for stray dogs, in order to end their miserable lives on the streets. When the British people started to recognise the relationship between themselves and dogs and cats, with increased concern for animals’ lives, another cruelty issue emerging in the public forum – animal experiments.

Since 1875, vivisection was viewed as a new form of cruelty towards animals. From the 1870s, mammals, particularly dogs and cats, were used by vivisectors instead of reptiles, which were used during the 1830s & 1840s. During the 1870s, groups focused on anti-vivisection were set up, e.g. British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection and National Anti-Vivisection Society. The BUAV was formed by Frances Power Cobbe in 1898 after she resigned from the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) because it adopted a policy to adopt improvement measures along the way to the abolition of vivisection (whereas Cobbe and her supporters believed that with determination vivisection could be abolished within four years).

Then in 1906, the ‘Brown Dog Affair’ took place. Two Swedish students who studied medicine at King’s and University College exposed shocking experiments procedures on animals by medical institutions. The statue of a brown dog was set up by the International Anti-Vivisection Council and erected in Battersea Park, London. It was a memorial symbol for animals vivisected in laboratories. A year later, 100 medical students tried to remove the statue, but local citizens successfully defended it. Although the statue disappeared in 1910, there was a protest against vivisection in Trafalgar Square that several thousand people attended in same year. The incident successfully gained much more publicity for the anti-vivisection cause, and also stimulated considerable discussion in the media at the time.

During the First and Second World War years, the movement was not very active. Richard Ryder, a UK scholar, claims that the history of social reform suggests that war had a cauterising effect upon conscience. Towards the 1950s & 60s, the cruelty of factory farming of ‘food animals’ was revealed to the public and shocked the world. Ruth Harrison’s seminal book ‘Animal Machines’, which was published in 1964, was instrumental in fuelling the debate and increasing both public and government awareness. In 1967, Peter Roberts founded Compassion in World Farming to protest against the abuse of farm animals.

However, at the level of legislation and official administration, little changed in practice. The hope of campaigners turned into disappointment and frustration at the institutional and policy system. During the 1970s, public recognition of animal rights increased, as the idea of stopping animal exploitation was raised. Activists become disenchanted by the

failure of the government to take humane, effective action on animal issues. The highly influential book by Peter Singer 'Animal Liberation' is said to have motivated activists at such a time and led to increased mobilisation of the movement. Public demonstrations, protests, and petitions were organised. The release and removal of animals from laboratories or factory farms, sabotage of hunting, laboratories and breed establishments, have continued since the 1970s. However, those events have provided a controversial topic to magnify public awareness of the animal rights issue.

From the 1970s, the movement for non-human species also started to split into two categories - animal welfare and animal rights. Those who believe in animal rights believe in an animal's natural right to life. They seek to establish basic rights for animals and stop the use/exploitation of animals by humans. Those who believe in animal welfare tend to accept human use of animals, providing that use is humane. Both welfare and rights groups often refer to themselves as animal protection organisations. For more background on this debate, see Part 2 of Module 2.

And finally, after 80 years of campaigning, the ban on hunting with dogs was passed in the British Parliament. From February 2005 hunting with dogs will be illegal in England.

In recent years, Germany has amended its national constitution to protect 'the natural foundations of life' for people and animals. In 1992, Switzerland acknowledged that animals were 'beings' through a constitutional amendment. The changes of the status of animals in the legal system in these two countries have served as milestones for the protection of animal movement in history.

As can be seen in the resource on legislation, the European Union has been an enormous factor in carrying forward animal welfare advances throughout Europe. It has also amended its constitution to include animal welfare – requiring European Institutions to take account of animal welfare when considering legislation in the areas of research, transport, agriculture and the internal market. This was originally introduced as a Protocol to its founding Treaty back in 1997. Another major influence in Europe has been the Council of Europe, which, despite being established in 1949 as the bastion of human rights in Europe, subsequently included animal welfare in its sphere of activities.

Colonial influences led to the set up of many SPCA-type organisations in regions such as Asia, South America and Africa. Some of these were set up even several decades ago, and the majority of groups mainly tackled issues concerning dogs and cats. Many founders for these groups were expatriates. Nowadays, however, local people run many of these organisations. Also, more and more other new organisations are being set up by local people to tackle a wide range of animal protection issues these days.

In the last few decades, many groups in Europe and North America have started to shift their campaign focus from their country to abroad. Various international campaigns such as fur, whaling, sealing, bear farming, bushmeat and dog eating issues were started - with the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) leading the field in the coordination of international campaigns. Different animal protection organisations in different countries worked together through joint efforts and collective lobby activities for specific international campaigns, and many countries that were new to the animal protection movement gained awareness and started to develop their own animal protection agendas. Collaborative campaigning/lobbying in the EU often took the form of EU-wide coalitions, which worked on agreed priority campaigns together.

Although philosophers through the ages have discussed the place of animals in the world order, the animal protection movement is a fairly recent occurrence in history – particularly when seen in the context of 3,000 years of Western civilisation. And many countries may not have a long 200-year old history like Britain in defending animals. However there are more and more individuals and groups who are enthusiastic and dynamic and have started to cultivate the ground and sow the seeds for the foundation of animal protection movement globally.

Further Resources

🔗 Web Sites

Animal Rights History

<http://www.animalrightshistory.org/>

A brief history of British animal welfare

<http://www.all-creatures.org/ca/ark-188history.html>

Ethics and the New Liberation Movement

<http://animal-rights-library.com/texts-m/singer01.htm>

History Of Animal Shelters And Protection Societies

<http://petcaretips.net/history-aspca.html>

Animalink: A Quick Introduction to the Animal Welfare Movement (Canada)

<http://www.animalink.ab.ca/LivingWithAnimals/indexanimalprotection.htm>

Books

Animal Rights: History and Scope of a Radical Social Movement

By: Harold D. Guither

Publisher: Southern Illinois University Press

ISBN: 0809321998

Animal Rights Considered in Relation to Social Progress

By: Henry S. Salt

<http://www.animal-rights-library.com/texts-c/salt01.htm>

HSUS: Protecting All Animals: A Fifty-Year History of The Humane Society of the United States

<http://www.hsus.org/ace/20480>

Animal Century

By: Mark Gold

Publisher: Jon Carpenter

ISBN: 1897766432

Animal Rights

By: Hilda Keen

Publisher: Reaktion Books Ltd

ISBN: 1861890141

The Animal Revolution

By: Richard D. Ryder
Publisher: Blackwell Publishers
ISBN: 0631152393

All Heaven in a Rage

By: E. S Turner
Publisher: Joseph
ISBN: B0000CMA4T

Campaigning Against Cruelty: The Hundred-Year History of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection

By: Emma Hopley
Publisher: BUAV, London
ISBN: 1870356160

Compassion is the Bugler: Struggle for Animal Rights

By: Clive Hollands
Publisher: Macdonald Publishers
ISBN: 0904265358

History of the Humane Movement

By: C D Niven
Publisher: Johnson Publishers
ISBN: 0853070288

The Animal Rights Movement in America

By: Lawrence Finsen and Susan Finsen.
Publisher: New York, Twayne
ISBN: 0805738843

The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers and Vivisection in Edwardian England

By: Coral Lansbury
Publisher: University of Wisconsin Press
ISBN: 0299102505