

BOOK REVIEW

Animals Make Us Human

Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals. 2009. Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Boston New York. 342 pp. Hardback – ISBN: 978-0-15-101489-7. \$26.00

For anyone who claims to love animals and has spent any amount of time observing their behavior, this book is essential. Although none of the ideas presented herein are startling or revolutionary, the way in which they are presented, in straightforward, simple language, yet backed by solid scientific observation and research, could very well change the way that ordinary people relate to the animals they keep as pets and use for food.

The initial chapter, “What do animals need?” presents the findings of the British-government commissioned study on intensive animal production (big farms raising large numbers of animals for slaughter). The study concluded that animals had needs in the areas of both physical welfare (freedom from hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, injury or disease) and mental welfare (freedom to express normal behavior and freedom from fear or distress). In this book, Grandin is largely focused on defining and describing the mental welfare needs of animals in terms of their core emotions. These core or “Blue-ribbon emotions,” as she calls them, are defined by neuroscientists as those that “generate well-organized behavior sequences that can be evoked by localized electrical stimulation of the brain.” These emotions can be negative, such as, RAGE, FEAR, and PANIC, or they can be positive, such as, SEEKING, “the basic impulse to search, investigate, and make sense of the environment.”

The book continues with chapters on dogs, cats, horses, cows, pigs, chickens and other poultry, wildlife, zoos, and an afterword entitled: “Why do I Still Work for the Industry.” Dr. Grandin is, after all, an acclaimed professor of Animal Science, best known for her work designing slaughterhouses that minimize stress on the animals being processed.

Each of her animal models looks at the dominant emotions in terms of natural behavior, such as social characteristics: dogs are hyper-social, cats less so; horses are herbivorous prey animals prone to fleeing, and cows are herbivorous prey animals prone to bunching together for safety. Some species thrive well in large groups (cows), other in small groups of “familiar individuals” (horses and pigs). Dogs and pigs have a high need for SEEKING, while novelty can send a horse into PANIC. For each group of animals, Grandin describes methods of husbandry (and transport and slaughter where appropriate) that minimize the negative emotions of RAGE, FEAR, and PANIC, while providing just enough novelty to trigger the positive emotion of SEEKING.

As a long time observer of reptilian behavior in artificial conditions. I'm thoroughly convinced that neuroscientists could evoke those same “well-organized behavior sequences” in iguanas and other reptiles. Like horses, they are herbivorous prey animals prone to fleeing; like dogs, I see them developing dominance hierarchies when kept in unnatural groupings and I see them thriving in groups of familiar individuals; and, like pigs, they have a need for novelty (especially *Cyclura*) to stimulate SEEKING.

Because they are so prone to fear, I have always seen my job (beyond providing for the iguanas' physical welfare) as providing them with an environment in which FEAR is minimized and in which they can become acclimated to life in captivity (which is far from natural for them!). Arboreal Green Iguanas need a high perch from which to scan for predators, whereas terrestrial Spiny-tailed Iguanas need a slightly raised spot on the ground. Both need a safe place to which they can flee in the face of perceived danger. If unable to flee, they respond with PANIC.

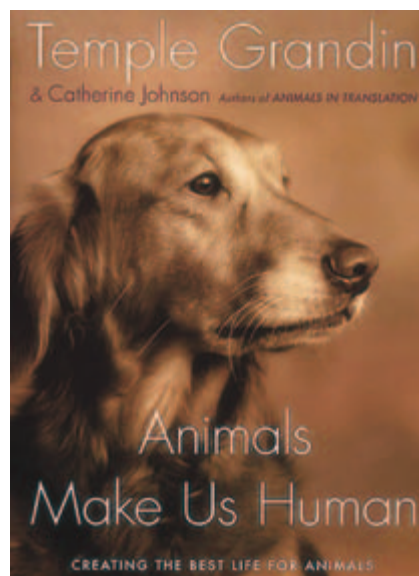
Rock Iguanas (*Cyclura*) need large amounts of space in order to engage in the natural behavior of exploring their environment (SEEKING). They need to discover “safe” spots (whether in a drawer, on a shelf in a coat closet, or behind a dresser). Keeping them confined in too small a space will often provoke RAGE.

In her chapter on wildlife, Grandin expounds on the necessity for good fieldwork in order to protect wildlife and manage complex environmental systems. We can only understand the needs of animals and establish conservation goals by observing their behavior at first hand and seeing how they interact with their environment. Ever the behaviorist, Grandin points out that you

“can't pass laws against human nature” and that conservation needs to be economically valuable to the local human populations.

Animals Make Us Human is written in very down-to-earth language and any scientific terms are well explained; this volume is meant to appeal to a broad audience. For me, Grandin is an example of the best kind of scientist. Her observations are detailed and thorough, her methods rigorously scientific, and her conclusions logical. Yet she never loses touch with her love and compassion for her subjects, whether they are dogs, cats, sheep, or pigs. Understanding the behavior of our fellow creatures can only help us see the horse or chicken in our own behavior. The quality of life we offer our animals (in captivity and in the wild) is indeed an indication of our own humanity.

AJ Gutman



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