



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 13 *Fall 1984*

Article 3

10-1-1984

A Hundred Years of Health Care for Animals and Man

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A HUNDRED YEARS OF HEALTH CARE FOR ANIMALS AND MAN

by Sheldon Hackney

At this special convocation marking one hundred years of veterinary medicine at Penn, we look back over a century of progress in service to animals—beasts of burden and livestock, pets and sporting animals. We are delighted to be gathered at the University Museum where the magnificent exhibition *Man and Animals* has been mounted for the occasion. Past achievements and current medical advances are here presented in the unique context of prehistoric remains of domestic animals and ancient artifacts from the Museum, all of them attesting to the thousands of years during which people and beasts have been living, working, and changing together.

To speak only of the past century: Great changes have come about at the University of Pennsylvania since both the Museum and the School of Veterinary Medicine were founded in the 1880s. In veterinary medicine, an enormous amount of ground has been covered in recent decades, and for very good reason. Even though the establishment of the first clinics in the fall of 1884 represented a great stride forward in the medical attention given to animals, therapy and techniques and knowledge about their special needs still lagged far behind the treatment for human patients at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania next door. Some rudimentary awareness of antisepsis was recorded by Thomas Eakins when he painted his famous *Agnew Clinic* in 1889, depicting the Penn surgeon operating in a white coat. In animal surgery, on the other hand, antisepsis was instituted well within living memory—to be precise, after the arrival at the Veterinary School of Mark Allam, who, as Dean, initiated the move to catch up with the higher medical standards of human treatment. In the usual way, society's treatment of its animals lags behind its concern for humanitarian reforms. It can also be something of a measure of the degree of its advancement and civilization.

This is borne out by the fact that, in Western society, voluntary organizations concerned with the welfare of animals became known as "humane societies." Man's humanity to animals is thus a strong indication of a society's humanity in general. It is true that the Egyptians embalmed large numbers of cats, and a few animals in the Bible were even admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven; but, on the whole, for most of mankind's history, the human struggle with the forces and the scourges of nature has left little leisure for a caring concern for his fellow animals.

In ancient times, the differences between man and animals were underscored: According to Judaeo-Christian teaching, man ranks "a little lower than the angels" and rightfully holds dominion over the animal world. Only in the last century did Darwin establish that the human race

was, on the contrary, perhaps only a little higher than the other living things with whom it shares its ancestry. More recently, advances in biochemistry and physiology have tended to confirm that unity, with new evidence indicating that all of life's processes are constructed on the same chemical reactions.

Recent improvements in health care for both humans and animals have come about because of these commonalities between man and animal at the molecular level: all the knowledge that has been acquired, including a number of stellar discoveries responsible for saving lives by the thousands, has only been won as a result of research and testing done with animals. Pasteur's discovery of vaccination, and his experiments in inoculating rabid dogs, resulted in development of a treatment for human rabies. Unlike polio, which has become a rarity since the vaccine was developed, rabies is currently a threat in the Mid-Atlantic area, to which Pennsylvania belongs. This dreaded disease rightfully strikes terror into the hearts of the population. While it has not been possible to eradicate this wildlife-carried scourge, the vaccine developed through experiments with animals makes it possible to protect domestic pets through immunization, and this is also the best hope for preventing fatal attacks on humans.

The fact is, whether new drugs and procedures have combated tuberculosis and diabetes, saved "blue babies," or provided information on the cause of infantile respiratory distress syndrome, virtually every treatment on which society depends has involved prior research and testing on animals.

Nevertheless, the successes of modern medicine, which have saved countless lives and untold suffering, are apparently less easy to keep before the public consciousness than the lurid misrepresentations that a small but virulent minority of those concerned with animal rights has resorted to. Individual scientists, here at Penn and elsewhere, have been subjected to libels and threats of

At the October 15 Convocation honoring the School of Veterinary Medicine, the President opened the ceremonies with the following address to the assembled faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the School.

violence. In criminal break-ins, animals that are maintained under strictly inspected conditions, meeting high standards for the sake of good science as well as humane values, have been harmed by untrained handling. Years of research, conducted by men and women who recognize the moral and legal obligations of their work, have been wasted, along with the lives of precious subject animals—and all because of the immoral, illegal actions of a few misguided people who prefer simple explanations to complex questions, and distorted accusations to rational discourse. Such wanton violence does a disservice to fair-minded people, researchers and supporters of animal welfare alike, as well as to our interdependent society of people and animals.

The propaganda of this small self-serving group loses credibility when it accuses the Veterinary School here of engaging in sadistic research, an absurd charge against a School that has, on the contrary, done so much to improve the lot of animals. But exaggeration is par for the course to those whose purpose is ultimately to block all research involving the use of animals. Thus a small, arrogant group is seeking, through terrorist intimidation, to impose its will on society—a society that has determined that continuing to maintain and improve the health of humans and animals is a worthy goal. As for the fact that medical centers are the object of attack: It is easier to misrepresent the individual researcher as a monster than to face up to the complex choices that must be made by society.

The question is, finally, not one of animal rights but rather of human duties towards animals. As a community, we at the University of Pennsylvania act according to our firm belief that we have duties towards animals. As much-needed research continues to be performed in a search for the cause of cancer, or infantile respiratory distress syndrome, or multiple sclerosis, or of new therapies for the treatment of high blood pressure, stroke, and mental disease, or orthopedic procedures for the benefit of accident victims (or racehorses) experimental protocols must be screened at the highest levels, and reviewed by bodies that include researchers and members of the general public. Where there is no alternative for obtaining information, we must insure that experimental animals are tended by a qualified veterinarian and treated according to the highest standards, and that their use involves a minimum of conscious suffering. Against a backdrop of strict humane and ethical controls, the School of Veterinary Medicine looks forward to providing its diverse patients with the highest levels of care, all predicated on the advances taking place in its labs, and in quality laboratories everywhere, for the present good of society and for the knowledge from which future generations of people and animals will continue to benefit.

