

*Tierschutz im Kaiserreich. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Vereinswesens.* By Miriam Zerbel. 'Münchener Studien zur neueren und neuesten Geschichte', Bd. 4. Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 1993. 204 pp. DM 25.

An animal's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness first became an issue in the late eighteenth century. As Jeremy Bentham famously put it: 'The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But can they suffer?' When the first pieces of animal-welfare legislation were introduced in nineteenth-century Europe, however, the motivation was practical rather than ethical. Only when cruelty to animals threatened public order and decency was the law prepared to intervene. Paragraph 360 of the 1871 Imperial Criminal Code, for instance, threatened fines or imprisonment for those who 'maliciously or brutally maltreat animals in public or in a way that would cause offence'. As Zerbel's book shows, this fundamentally anthropocentric view of animal welfare was to a large extent shared by the first *Tierschutzvereine*, whose members saw their engagement as an exercise in human compassion, providing the young with moral education and plenty of character-building activity.

Zerbel traces the organizational history of two such animal-welfare societies up to World War One: the 'Münchener Thierschutz-Verein' (MTSV), founded in 1842 and with branches throughout Bavaria; and the 'Verband deutscher Thierschutz-Vereine', an umbrella organization founded in 1884 by 72 of the Empire's 148 animal welfare societies. The MTSV membership, which hovered around the 10,000 mark, was by no means confined to the educated middle classes and local *Honoratioren*: it encouraged women members and had a low subscription fee to attract the less well-off. At the same time, however, its management committee was dominated by the aristocracy and it always had a member of the Bavarian royal family as its Chairman or Honorary President. Much of the MTSV's activity was concentrated on the abattoir: seeking to improve both the means of animal transport and the methods of slaughter, as well as to bar youths from abattoir work altogether. The MTSV was vociferous in its opposition to cock fighting and also funded a veterinary service for the poor.

More than 100,000 Germans were members of animal-welfare organizations by the turn of the century, but *Vereine* like the MTSV became increasingly divided, as ethical *Tierschützer* began to question the anthropocentric assumptions of the nineteenth century. The issue which provided the focus for dissenters, and which had already divided animal-welfare activists in Great Britain, was vivisection. The emotionally charged debate on the rights and wrongs of animal experimentation proceeded in Germany along familiar lines, but Zerbel's book also dwells on an issue which with hindsight has a particular resonance in Germany: the ritual slaughter (*schuchten*) of animals to provide *kosher* meat for practising Jews. Animal activists were divided on whether this method of slaughter was cruel or not, but those who put animal rights before religious freedom soon found their campaigns attracting support from anti-semitic politicians, eager to pursue a very different agenda.

Zerbel's book provides a concise—at times rather cursory—survey of animal-welfare activism in Imperial Germany. It has to be said that it does not contribute greatly to our understanding of organizational life in the *Kaiserreich*, but as a fresh contribution to a specific and often neglected field, it will nevertheless be welcomed by researchers.