Review of 'Feral Children and Clever Animals'

Lionel Tiger

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Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature
Douglas Keith Candland
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"Is human behavior more instinctively or more environmentally determined?" This elemental question is asked over and over again even after it appears to be answered. The remorseless and unchanging persistence of the question despite mountains of data and acres of literature may even reveal a kind of Levi-Straussian design defect in the human cognitive mechanism, one that prefers the dichotomous and that makes it uncommonly difficult to accept synthetic answers to queries that can readily generate an either-or response. A great virtue of Candland's careful and detailed exposition of the history of exploration of human nature is that he shows how ancient this quest is and how long-standing the fulminations pro and con about the biology of human behavior.

His tools for this analysis are straightforward and involve analyses within a philosophical context of a collection of famous historical cases in which the issues of nature and environment were clarified by the very simplicity of the cases themselves. These include several of the more dramatic and celebrated so-called feral children. One was the "wild boy of Aveyron," Victor, the ward of Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard of Paris (who, Candland reminds us, was responsible for the idea of Braille language). Others were Kaspar Hauser of Germany and the "wolf-children"—a pair of girls of Midnapore in India discovered amidst an ethnographic mishmash of tales of wolves, ghosts, and "a whiteant mound as high as a two-story building." Candland's discussion of these cases and several others focuses very usefully on the philosophical and latterly social scientific assumptions of the earnest and enthusiastic controversies they stimulated.

He then turns to the somewhat more modem psychological environment that produced the spate of examples of animals seemingly able to think, calculate, and the like. These include the celebrated Clever Hans, the horse that, it turned out, was able to discern levels of tension in his handler's face and body, which caused him to cease stamping his hoof at a number that was the appropriate answer to a simple mathematical question. We also learn of human Hans, who was frightened of horses, stimulated Freud's analytical attentions, and appears to have led Peter Shaffer to write *Equus.* We are told of another horse, Lady Wonder of a farm in Virginia, who could nuzzle a bizarre typewriter and thus reveal the whereabouts of missing children. No less an authority on ur-natural matters than J. B. Rhine interviewed the animal and concluded it was telepathic. However, he dis-concluded this within a year when the horse was retested, got an F, and Rhine decided she had lost her telepathic power.

The next firm step in analysis of the Great Chain of Mental Being proposes the significance of the various studies of nonhuman primate language, ranging from those of Yerkes to the unduly forgotten Gamer of West Africa, who decided to study pri-

mates undisturbed by placing *himself* in a cage, to the more readily known dramas of Gua, Koko, Washoe, and in a particularly absorbing account, Herbert Terrace's Nim Chimpsky. Nim was part of the Columbia University system and did sufficiently astute work there to suggest to Terrace and his associates that Nim could use something like language. But then on reanalysis, Terrace realized that Nim was essentially responding to the cues of his human handlers—perhaps like most students—and was not in fact generating clear language. On the other hand, Nim enjoyed strong and discerning affective links with his people, and it is impossible to examine this case without acknowledging the extraordinary sophistication and durability of chimpanzee sociality. And if they don't do good language, so what?

Throughout these examples are woven the threads of the underlying philosophical movements in biosocial science, from Aristotle to Darwin, from Skinnerian behaviorism to Lorenzian ethology, from William James to Freud to the Premacks and many others. Candland helpfully distinguishes biosocial science, which presupposes variation in its subject matter, from physical science, which assumes the invariance of the natural substances it surveys. He makes a calm if somewhat overlong case for the classical nature of contemporary intellectual controversy, and has surely provided a kind of definitive map of an important intellectual neighborhood. His intelligent book can be usefully folded into the current agenda of the neurophysiological sciences and linguistics. Its relevance to scholars of the biology of politics is not direct. But since usually the most important thing to know about a human group is what it takes for granted, it is worthwhile to have clarified the issues Candland addresses. They are embedded parsimoniously in much of what biopolitical scholars find intriguing.

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