



Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution: The Historical Status of Animals

Rod Preece

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
In this provocative inquiry into the status of animals in human society from the fifth century BC to the present, Rod Preece provides a wholly new perspective on the human–animal relationship.

Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution traces the historical status of animals in western civilization, and shows that current scholarship in this area is seriously deficient. Preece particularly contests the customary claims: that the Christian doctrine has denied immortality to animals, with the corresponding implication that they were thereby denied ethical consideration; that there was a near universal belief animals were intended for human use, with the corresponding implication that they were not ends in themselves, and were thus not entitled to ethical consideration; that Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution had a profoundly positive impact on the way in which nonhuman animals were regarded and treated; and that the idea of the “happy beast” was merely a trope to condemn humans for their hubris and was not at all a sincere attempt to raise the status of animals.

In contrast to prevailing intellectual opinion, Preece argues that a significant number of early Christians were vegetarian; that control of nature was often undertaken not at the expense of animals but, in part, out of exasperation at their tribulations; that the Cartesian conception of animals as automata was largely rejected, especially in the English-speaking world; that Darwin’s theory of natural selection had no appreciable influence on the status of animals; and, finally, that “theriophily” – the notion of animal superiority over humans – was given greater credence than is commonly recognized.

Rod Preece believes that our ethical responsibilities to animals are ill served by the current simplistic and misleading conception of the historical record, and with this book, attempts a significant re-thinking of the human–animal perspective. *Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution* will be required reading for those from animal scientists to animal philosophers to animal rights activists who have an interest in the history and philosophy of animal ethics.

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