



Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature

Douglas K. Candland

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In this provocative book, Douglas Candland shows that as we begin to understand the way animals and non-speaking humans "think," we hold up a mirror of sorts to our own mental world, and gain profound insights into human nature.

Weaving together diaries, contemporary newspaper accounts, and his own enlightening commentary, Candland brings to life a series of extraordinary stories. He begins with a look at past efforts to civilize feral children. We meet Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron, now famous as the subject of a Truffaut film; Kaspar Hauser, raised in a cell, civilized, and then assassinated; and the Wolf Girls of India, found early this century huddled among wolf pups in a forest den (they were originally believed to be ghosts by superstitious villagers, who nearly shot them as they were being captured). In each case, it was hoped that the study of these children would help clarify the age-old nature/nurture debate, but, as Candland shows, so much of the information "revealed" was really only a projection of beliefs previously held by the investigating scientists. Candland then turns to "clever animals." We learn how the investigation of "Clever Hans," the German horse who could calculate square roots, proved to be a first step in the direction of behaviorism (researchers found that Hans was being tipped off by the subtle and unwitting body language of his owner and other observers, who would bend almost imperceptibly at the waist with every hoof beat, and stand erect when the correct count was reached). And Candland discusses the many attempts to communicate with our closest neighbor, the apes. We read of Richard Lynch Garner's 1892 experiment living with chimpanzees in Gabon (he taught one to say the French word "feu"), and of Gua, raised by W.N. and L.A. Kellogg alongside their own son Donald, and of the latest successes of teaching sign language to such precocious apes as Sarah, Sherman, Austin, and Koko. Throughout, Candland illuminates the boldest and most intriguing efforts yet to extend our world to that of our fellow creatures. And he shows that, in the end, our effort to "make contact" is a reflection of the way in which we as a species create and order our universe.

Humans have long shown a wish to connect with the silent minds around them. In assembling and interpreting the compelling tales in this book, Candland offers us a new understanding not only of the animal kingdom, but of the very nature of humanity, and our place in the great chain of being.

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