"A very definite two paws up!" Dr. Ian Dunbar

The Culture Clash

A revolutionary new way of understanding the relationship between humans and domestic dogs

Jean Donaldson
Jean Donaldson is the founder of The Academy for Dog Trainers, which has over 500 graduates practicing pet dog behavior counseling worldwide. www.academyfordogtrainers.com

The most thought-provoking book ever written on dog behavior and training

Generations of dogs have been labeled training-lemons for requiring actual motivation when all along they were perfectly normal. Numerous other completely and utterly normal dogs have been branded as canine misfits simply because they grew up to act like dogs. Barking, chewing, sniffing, licking, jumping up and occasionally, (just like people), having arguments, is as normal and natural for dogs as wagging tails and burying bones. However, all dogs need be taught how to modify their normal and natural behaviors to adjust to human culture. Sadly, all too often, when the dog’s way of life conflicts with human rules and standards, many dogs are discarded and summarily put to death. That’s quite the Culture Clash.

"Simply, the best dog book I have ever read! The Culture Clash is utterly unique, fascinating to the extreme and literally overflowing with oodles of useful, how-to information. Jean Donaldson’s refreshing new perspective on the relationship between people and dogs has redefined the state of the art of dog-friendly dog training."

Dr. Ian Dunbar, Founder of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers

Published by
The Academy for Dog Trainers
www.academyfordogtrainers.com
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Foreword

The Culture Clash is special. Jean Donaldson’s first book is quite simply the very best dog book I have ever read. It is utterly unique, fascinating to the extreme, and literally overflowing with oodles of information that is so new it virtually redefines the state of the art in dog behavior and training. Written in Jean’s informal yet precise lecture style, the book races along on par with a good thriller. In fact, I read the manuscript of the first edition three times in a row before the book was even published. The long-awaited arrival of a second edition has given me the delightful excuse to read The Culture Clash for a sixth time. The second edition is substantially revised and expanded (with an extra eleven thousand words). And, the second edition is even better and much more thought-provoking than the first.

The Culture Clash depicts dogs as they really are—stripped of their Hollywood fluff, with their inimitably existentialist “right-now, can I eat it, chew it, urinate on it, what’s in it for me?” philosophy. Jean’s tremendous affection for dogs shines through at all times, as does her keen insight into the dog’s mind. Relentlessly she champions the dog’s point of view, always showing concern for their education and well being.

The Culture Clash joins a very distinctive group of dog training classics and it runs at the head of the pack. The Culture Clash has a refreshingly original perspective and always cuts to the chase—no if’s and no but’s—here’s the story—educate your dog! Without a doubt, Jean’s book is the hottest doggy item on the market—the quintessential book for dog owners and dog trainers alike—a very definite two paws up! Do yourself and your dogs a big favor: give it a read. And let’s look forward to many more books by Jean Donaldson.

Ian Dunbar
Berkeley, California
8th June 2005
CHAPTER ONE

Getting the Dog’s Perspective

A book published in the early 1990s refers to the “moral code” of dogs. It became a bestseller. It seems that most people still buy into the Walt Disney dog: he is Very Intelligent, has morals, is capable of planning revenge, solves complex problems, and understands the value of the artifacts in Walt’s home. Nobody wants B.F. Skinner’s dog: the input-output black box who is so obviously not the furry member of our family. It’s been marketed all wrong, I think. Skinner was right but has gotten bad press. The truth must be presented in a way that people will start to buy into. They have to, because not getting it has led to the death of countless dogs. Here is an example to illustrate the difference.

Walt Disney vs. B.F. Skinner

A dog has been reprimanded every time he was caught chewing furniture. Now the dog refrains from chewing furniture when the owner is home but becomes destructive when left alone. When the owner comes home and discovers the damage, the dog slinks around, ears back and head down.

Walt’s view: The dog learns from the reprimand that chewing furniture is wrong. The dog resents being left alone and, to get back at the owner, chews the furniture when the owner leaves. He deliberately, in other words, engages in an act he knows to be wrong. When the owner comes home the dog feels guilty about what he has done.

BF’s view: The dog learns that chewing furniture is dangerous when the owner is present but safe when the owner is gone. The dog is slightly anxious when left alone and feels better when he chews. It also helps pass the time. Later, when the owner comes home, the dog behaves appeasingly in an attempt to avoid or turn off the harsh treatment he has learned often happens at this time. The owner’s arrival home and/or pre-punishment demeanor have become a predictor: the dog knows he’s about to be punished. But he doesn’t know why.
THE CULTURE CLASH

There is no question whatsoever that the second view is correct. The question is really no longer which interpretation is the truth but rather why anyone still argues the point. Amazingly, this information has been around for decades, yet most people who own dogs haven’t learned it yet. If people’s knowledge about driving cars were similar to their knowledge about “driving” dogs, they’d try going across lakes and then sue the manufacturer when the thing didn’t float.

Dogs are extremely prevalent in our society, though not as prevalent as cars. One reason for our astonishingly poor understanding of dogs might be extremely slow trickle down from experts: trainers educating one owner or one class at a time rather than something on the scale of public service announcements or spots on Oprah.

But I think there’s a second reason for the slow acceptance of realistic interpretations of dog behavior: simple reluctance to let go of anthropomorphism. Behaviorism, made famous by Skinner, has suffered some serious backlash since its assault on the world of psychology in the mid-twentieth century, largely because it could be successfully argued that hardcore behaviorism comes up short for understanding humans in all their mega-brain complexity. When it comes to animal training and behavior modification, however, the fit is incredibly good. But in the case of dog training and behavior modification, it would seem no amount of evidence makes the behaviorist model palatable to the average dog owner. The implications of this are really important.

The impressive staying power of Walt’s fuzzy-wuzzy warmhearted but distorted view of dogs is a perverse measure of how much we like them. We want them to be smart, morally “good.” Many cynics see dogs as superior to people in their loyalty and trustworthiness. By contrast, the behaviorist model, however superior, hasn’t caught on in the mainstream because it seems to reduce dogs to input-output machines. Our fear is that if we accept this viewpoint, we strip dogs of their status as honorary humans, and the logical extension of this is there might then be negative ramifications for the welfare of dogs. Humans are tribal. Our compassion and consideration for other beings is strongly correlated with our perception of how similar they are to us, and a strong measure of that similarity is intelligence. IQ is still an acceptable prejudice. For example, heated ethical discussions ensued when the question of language acquisition in great apes was raised. Without a possible capacity for language, it had somehow seemed more okay to accept a utilitarian attitude towards them. No one much questioned the premise of intelligence as criterion for being considered for compassionate treatment.
Our species has a long history of incredible violence and horror perpetrated, essentially, because the victims were too far outside our perceived tribe. Our current tribal boundaries have a lot to do with species, IQ and moral integrity. Our bond with dogs is obviously strong. But they are not human and so now we are stuck explaining the bond. We do it by exaggerating how much they resemble us in the areas of intelligence and morality. This is a typical example of a bias or attitude coming first and then edifices of explanatory facts or fictions being built in support of it.

Perhaps we are ready to accept the real species. We are now living in a culture that is much more aware of the concepts of tolerance and validation. Dogs are not like us, not nearly as much as we thought, but that’s okay. We can still bond with them, share our lives with them and use them as surrogate children without apology. We don’t have to build myths surrounding their nature to legitimize how we feel about them. They are valuable and fascinating as they really are. They don’t need to be promoted in intelligence or morality to merit fair treatment or places in our families. Empathy and compassion for beings that are clearly unlike ourselves is in fact the next phase of ethical progress.

Facing up to reality is important not just because anthropomorphism has outlived its usefulness. It has always had a very real down-side for dogs. Dogs that are not Lassie-like are inevitably marginalized. The greatest gains for the welfare of dogs are now to be found in abandoning the Disney dog and replacing it with information from two sources: dog behavior and the science of animal learning. It is our responsibility to have a clue about the basic needs of the species we are trying to live with as well as a clue about how to modify their behavior with minimal wear and tear. If we achieve this, we can help them fit into our society without totally subjugating their nature.

**Lemon-Brains, but We Can Still Like Them**

The two areas in which there is the greatest amount of myth and knowledge void are:

1. Dog behavior, i.e., the genetic endowment and constraints or “hardwiring” the dog comes with, and
2. Animal learning, i.e., the nuts and bolts about how experience affects the behavior of dogs and other animals, including us.

Humans do learn through operant and classical (Pavlovian) conditioning. In this respect, we are like dogs. However we, unlike dogs, are also masterful at learning through observation and insight. We have language to mediate our