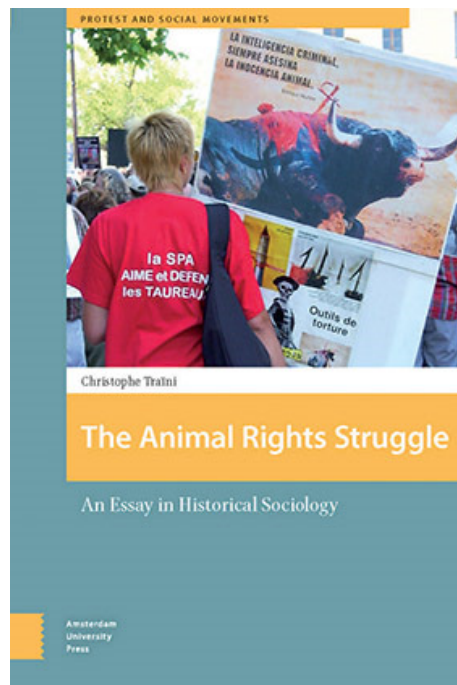


## Reviews

Elizabeth Cherry

### 19th Century French Animal Protection, No Longer a Bête Curieuse

Christophe Traïni, *The Animal Rights Struggle: An Essay in Historical Sociology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016. 206 pp. \$99 hc.



Scholars have devoted extensive efforts towards documenting contemporary animal rights movements in Western countries. We also know a great deal about early efforts for animal protection, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. In comparison, we know very little about early animal protection movements in France, and this book begins to fill that gap. Contrary to its use of the term “rights” in the title, political scientist Christophe Traïni’s *The Animal Rights Struggle: An Essay in Historical Sociology* provides an in-depth look into the origins of animal protection movements in France, with some comparisons to early movements in the United Kingdom.

Traïni uses archival research from the *Bulletins de la Société Protectrice des Animaux* (1855-1937), the French animal protection society, and the *Bulletins de la Société Française contre la Vivisection* (1884-1898), the early French anti-vivisection movement, to trace the

development of French animal protection movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In certain areas, Traïni brings in comparisons with the British animal protection movement: “In order to better analyze the successive developments in animal rights campaigning this work, wherever possible, relies on a Franco-British comparison” (9). Instead of a fully developed comparative case, then, Traïni states that “My objective when writing it was a more modest one: to convince the reader that the study of animal rights deserves much more attention than it has hitherto received” (9).

Primarily employing theories from sociologist Norbert Elias and Alexis de Tocqueville, Traïni argues that activists in three different stages of these protection movements — early protection societies, early animal shelters, and antivivisection movements — used three different types of “sensitizing devices” to mobilize sympathizers. Traïni defines sensitizing devices as “all the material support, the placement of objects, and the staging techniques that the militants exploit, in order to arouse the kind of affective reactions which predispose those who experience them to join or support the cause being defended” (15).

The first two chapters provide an introduction to the general workings of Norbert Elias’s civilizing process, especially as it applies to animal industries of the time, such as slaughterhouses. This type of Eliasian analysis of movements against animal cruelty will be familiar to readers of *Humanimalia*, especially those familiar with the works of sociologists Adrian Franklin and Lyle Munro.

The most interesting parts of the book, which contribute the most to our understanding of early animal protection movements in France, come in Chapters Three and Four, where Traïni brings to light several particularly French issues regarding animal protection. Chapter Three, “To Act as an Enlightened Philosopher,” describes some of the early tactics of the Société Protectrice des Animaux (or SPA). (Given the title of this chapter, one might think this chapter would discuss how the SPA attempted to counter the Cartesian philosophy of animals as unfeeling automatons, but Descartes is not discussed in the book.) Traïni details the seemingly counterintuitive campaign for eating horse meat conducted by the SPA, as a way of demonstrating their “intellectualized relationship with the animal protection cause” (31). In France, people associated horse meat with pagan rituals, and thus it came to be banned by Pope Gregory III in 732. Since that time, horses developed a special status in society and came to be associated with nobility, and thus eating horse meat became taboo. Why would the Société Protectrice des Animaux argue for eating horse meat? In 1856, Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, director of the Société Protectrice des Animaux (also member of the French Academy of Sciences, director of the National Natural History Museum, and

Professor of Zoology) argued that much of the French population was undernourished, and that horse meat, which was readily accessible and inexpensive, could help to feed the French masses. Instead of being sent to a rendering plant or to unlicensed butchers who surreptitiously sold horse meat, legalizing horse meat would give horses “economic and nutritional added value” (32). Despite some arguments against this from people within the Société Protectrice des Animaux, the campaign was successful when an 1866 edict authorized and regulated the sale of horse meat for human consumption.

In Chapters Three and Four, Traïni discusses how and why the Société Protectrice des Animaux gave annual awards to people who developed inventions or apparatuses that facilitated the work of domesticated animals while reducing their suffering. These early protectionists viewed themselves as educators whose goal was to promote and guide others for the benefit of the entire community. They contributed to the “applied sciences” in the name of animal protection by giving awards for inventors of “a drinking bottle for helping horses swallow medicine, a collar to protect young chicks from being attacked by cats and other small predators, a spring-loaded trap to be used by clay pigeon shooters, and a new muzzle which was lighter and less likely to hurt the animal wearing it than previous designs” (29). In addition to these awards from the French SPA, the British Society for the Protection of Animals also gave awards to people who worked with animals on farms, as drivers, or even in butcher shops who treated animals with care and compassion, and to writers and artists who worked on projects of use to the BSPA. They also targeted children by giving awards in schools. These awards, Traïni argues, contributed to the “emotional economy which is the source of much of the satisfaction that activists derived from their involvement in the movement” (48). The benefactors who give these awards experience gratification when their beneficiaries, the awardees, make a show of gratitude. When these subtle encouragements failed, these animal protection organizations turned to repression and coercion, Traïni argues. He shows how RSPCA inspectors and SPA members also surveilled and intervened in animal cruelty. In France, SPA members received a special card, later called a “diploma,” which allowed them to track down animal abusers and report them to the authorities.

Another useful element of the book comes from Traïni’s wide-ranging sources of data in Chapter Six, “The Rise in the Power of Tenderness,” where he employs archival data as well as literary examples to demonstrate how this new democratic era encouraged the development of compassion among youths and adults. Children learned lessons on how to care for animals through children’s literature (such as Anna Sewell’s 1871 novel *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse*) and through their soft animal toys. Adults

also learned how to take an animal's point of view by reading poetry from Robert Burns, William Blake, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the sympathetic figures of Victor Hugo's literature, such as Quasimodo, Jean Valjean, and Gavroche, helped to develop their compassion for other people. Hugo's poem, "Le Crapaud" (The Toad), both demonstrated and encouraged compassion for animals. Companion animals no longer primarily served to show a family's status in society, Traïni argues. Instead, they now served as another method for people to develop tender attitudes towards animals.

In Chapter Seven, Traïni outlines the beginnings of the early French anti-vivisection movement and develops a comparison among the three main stages of early French animal protection movements along their "emotional registers." The earliest animal protection societies that fought against animal cruelty in public places (1840-1870) exemplify the "demopedic emotional register," distinguished by "vigilance and pedagogical gentleness from animal welfare campaigners on one side, gratitude and pride from the penitent deviants on the other" (144). The shelter movement and movement to feed stray cats (1870-1890) occupy the "tenderness register" by making a display of their care for animals. Finally, the antivivisection movement (1875-1911) created an "exposure register" because of their work to expose or unveil hidden acts of cruelty in laboratories. In this way, animal protectionists moved from attempting to develop compassion in others to working as avengers, confronting those who harmed animals. Traïni also notes that around this same time, psychologists began to classify animal protectionism as a pathology: "certain individuals have an exaggerated affection for animals — zoophilia — to which they would sacrifice all human beings. Antivivisectionists, who are mostly women, belong to this category of sick people" (153). Throughout this chapter, Traïni wonders why women might have been drawn to the animal protection movement, and offers thoughts like, "it seems reasonable to suggest that women activists were drawn to identify with the figure of the exploited animal by the fact that they themselves had experienced masculine domination" (134). Unfortunately, Traïni does not employ the work of ecofeminist theorists who have written extensively on this topic (such as Carol Adams or Lori Gruen), nor of sociologists who have studied women's participation in the animal rights movement (such as Rachel Einwohner or Emily Gaarder). This chapter also includes a lengthy but tangential and temporally anachronistic critique of Charles Patterson's book *Eternal Treblinka*, which does not add to the chapter's overall argument.

Chapter Eight, "A Decreasingly Wild Nature," does not fit with the rest of the book. It briefly begins with an overview of 19th century naturalists, and here it does employ some of Traïni's archival research. However, it then moves to late 20th century conservation movements, to late 20th century direct action against hunting, to early 21st

century animal rights and vegan movements, with little to no sources of data. Moreover, it conflates a number of different movements, including wildlife conservation, animal welfare, animal protection, animal liberation, animal rights, and the particularly French antispeciesist movement. Traïni's book would have been better served by leaving out this attempt to bring his well-documented historical argument to the present day.

Traïni's archival research is a great strength of the book. Given that we know so little about the development of early animal protection movements in France, his well-documented history adds a great deal to our understanding of these issues. He shows readers the particularities of the French case, as well as how they compare to similar developments happening in the United Kingdom. The historical cases he presents are fully developed, with intriguing quotes that help readers to truly see the sentiments of the time. At the same time, Traïni's theoretical argument could have benefitted from more engagement with animal studies and social movement literature beyond Elias and Toqueville. We know their theories work to describe this time period, as they both wrote during and about this same period. Given the breadth of his archival data, it is disappointing Traïni did not explore whether and how newer social movement theories applied to this time period. Theories of "moral shocks" might apply here, as Traïni uses the term (26), describes how tactics "stir up emotions which were needed to fuel collective mobilizations" (69), and states that activists employ "novel shock tactics" (175), but we never see reference to the extensive research on moral shocks, nor to its theoretical origins (Jasper and Poulsen). Similarly, Traïni's argument would have been aided by engaging with other sociologists who study emotions and animal rights activists, such as Julian McAllister Groves.

*The Animal Rights Struggle: An Essay in Historical Sociology* provides a much-needed addition to our understanding of the development of early animal protection movements in France. Readers seeking solid empirical examples of 19th and early 20th century French animal protectionists will be rewarded by this work.

### **Work Cited**

Jasper, James M., and Jane D. Poulsen. "Recruiting strangers and friends: Moral shocks and social networks in animal rights and anti-nuclear protests." *Social Problems* 42.4 (1995): 493-512.