

On Domestication

Dave Foreman

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It's twilight. I'm eating steak in a friend's backyard on the outskirts of Tucson. The charcoal briquets glow softly beside us. I watch his dog, on the edge of the light. The dog watches us. watches the meat on our plates. I'm carried back to the dream time by that wolf-life stare:

*Listen! **There.** Do you hear it? The wolves are howling in the distance: no, they are close now. The old ones speak of the ancient struggle between our people and the wolves, of the competition for prey. But our hunters tell us that today was different. Today, somehow, the walers helped to corral the reindeer. Our hunters would not have returned with the meat we now eat if the wolves had not helped. There they are. I see them at the edge of the firelight. Bear's Arm. our mightiest hunter, is rising. He will throw a burning stick at them to chase them away. No! He is throwing a leg-bone to them...*

It was a night like that, I think, fifty thousand years ago when, men and dogs began to domesticate each-other. I toss my t-bone to my friend's dog and know that ancient connection. As I gnaw the corn from the cob (corn which I grew in my garden), I think back again, of another grain, to the arid hills of Mesopotamia nine thousand years ago:

Come with me, you great hunter, and see what I hare done. Here. See this grass. Last fall Isa red the largest seeds from the grass and placed them here where the Earth is moist. See how large these seeds are...

These dim memories of domestication are of the most important events in human history. Events which forever changed us. Events which took from our innocence. Events which domesticated us.

I used to dislike dogs and was always eager to recite the litany of their faults. It is only recently while I have played with my friend's dog, that I have come to understand why I am alternately repelled and attracted.

Early human society was egalitarian, non-hierarchical, non-dominating. There was no sexism. Children were not mastered. The society of wild canids, however, was hierarchical. Dominance was a key element in maintaining it. When candid and hominid societies integrated, humans learned hierarchy. The dogs indeed lost the struggle for dominance but they won the philosophical battle because humans accepted their tiered structure. As I play with my friend's dog, I come to know the siren of power. It is so easy to make the dog sit obediently, it is intoxicating to" have such awesome authority

Although it took millenia, it was a simple step from the domestication of dogs to the domestication of plants, of other animals both food and draft, the control of water (in irrigation), to the domestication of wives, children, slaves, and subjects. In domesticating, we became domesticated. When the hunter tossed the wolf a bone, the overseer's whip hand cracked and the gloved hand took the control throttle of the giant drag line. When the first seed was planted, civilization and wilderness were first created.

Another aspect of domestication is the creation of monsters. Look into the eyes of a pitiful Pekinese. It is a wolf—or a "jackal—monstrously corrupted. Corn cannot even reproduce by itself it has been so altered by human ingenuity. It is an act of

supreme arrogance, of great evil, to presume to alter the evolutionary destiny of another creature—plant or animal—and twist its genetics to our own short-sighted, selfish ends. The manipulation of germ plasm is the true story of Faust. If there is any right pertaining to life, it is the right to fulfil one's evolutionary destiny without having it artificially detoured. We have violated that right for hundreds of other life forms, have made them slaves to our whim. Joseph Smith was wrong. One does not have to die and receive mastery over a new planet to become a god. Humans have carelessly assumed the role of gods during their short, insignificant lives.

As Mama Rue pointed, out in her column on Yule, Judeo-Christian religion has readily absorbed and altered the myths of other cultures. The Book of Genesis in the Old Testament is a prime example of this assimilation. The Hebrew story of the Garden of Eden was taken from earlier peoples in the Middle East and undoubtedly somewhat corrupted before it was written down in the form we know it today. But yet, the truth remains in it. It is the story of domestication and it reminds us of the consequences of that awful act.

Adam and Eve were happy in the garden and all that they needed was at hand (hunter-gatherer culture). They named the other animals and plan ,s (understood their environme.it and their place in it). Then Eve and Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge (developed agriculture and domestication) and were expelled by God (Nature) from the Garden (Wilderness) and were condemned to earn their food by the sweat of their brow (farming). Eve was sentenced to bear children in pain (suffer domination by men) and Adam was cursed to have his heel stung by the viper (be cut off from Nature).

Just as our happiest days as humans were in our early years, the wisdom of the Bible is in its first few pages. Until we renounce the sin of dominance/domestication and return to the hunter-gatherer life (the Garden of Eden), we shall never be at peace, shall never be happy, shall never be one with Nature, shall never be truly human.

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