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Eternal Treblinka

THE BOOK

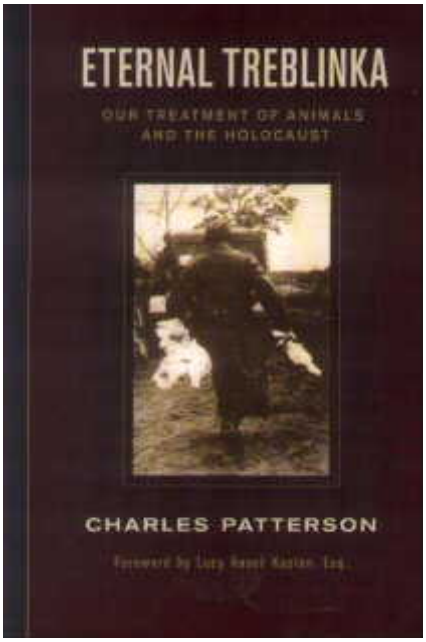
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Review 3, by Biman Basu, India, Asia

Main PageReviews1234567891011
Featured book: Reviews a wealth of little-known information



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Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust *by* Charles Patterson, Paperback, 6" x 9"
Lantern Books. Publication Date 2002. xvi+296 pages, ISBN 1-930051-99-9. Price $20.00

The village of Treblinka lay 80 km northeast of Warsaw on the main Warsaw-Bialystok railway line. It was near this Polish village that two Nazi German extermination camps for Jews were set up in December 1941 and July 1942, as part of the "final solution to the Jewish question" envisioned by Hitler. By the time the camps were closed down in 1943-44, some 750,000 Jews had been killed in gas chambers here, making it second only to Auschwitz, the largest extermination camp set up during the Nazi rule. Details of the beastly treatment meted out to the inmates of these camps before they were paraded into gas chambers by the Gestapo came to light only after the defeat of Germany in the War, through testimony of a few thousand lucky survivors; and they were horrendous. In these camps people were treated and slaughtered like animals. For the countless animals slaughtered every day around the globe, therefore, the modern human society could be rightfully considered an eternal Treblinka, as the author of this thought provoking book contends.

> *...in Eternal Treblinka, Patterson has been able to present a wealth of little-known information and extensive evidence that will help the reader get a better understanding of the events that eventually led to the greatest shame that mankind has witnessed in history... Rating: 7.5...*

What made 'civilised' humans to treat fellow human beings like that? In Eternal Treblinka, Charles Patterson attempts to provide an answer: the contempt of humans for animals the reckless slaughter of which has been practised since time immemorial. Divided into three parts, the first part of the book looks at the historical perspective in the domestication and subjugation of animals, leading to the 'great divide' between humans and animals. The second part discusses the industrialisation of slaughter (in the US) and the degeneration of animal breeding into genocide (in Nazi Germany). In the third part the lives and experiences of some of the Holocaust survivors and their subsequent transformation into ardent animal activists are recounted.

Drawing a parallel between the Holocaust and mass slaughter of animals, Patterson quotes the late animal activist Steven Simmons, who said, "Animals are innocent casualties of the world view that asserts that some lives are more valuable than others, that the powerful are entitled to exploit the powerless, and that the weak must be sacrificed for the greater good." The treatment of Jews by the Nazis was a glaring example of this attitude.

> *...Patterson believes that the 'great divide' between man and other animals was the result of man's emergence as the dominant species on this planet...*

Patterson's Superlatives
My Birthday: I'm younger than I look and older than I'd like to be. Time waits for no one.

Place Of Birth :New Britain General Hospital in New Britain, Connecticut, USA

Real Name: Charles Patterson

Calling in life: Writer

First book: Anti-Semitism: The Road to the Holocaust and Beyond--first published in hardcover by Walker, New York in 1982 and later in paperback. It's still in print.

First award: Latin Prize in school, which was a book--Caesar: A Biography, by Gerald Walters. I still have it, although its a bit frayed around the edges...like me.

I Love: People who stick up for the underdog

I hate: I don't hate, or at least I try not to. When I do, I look at myself and try to figure out what it is inside me that's behind my reaction. When I point my finger in an accusatory way at someone or some group, I remind myself that three of my fingers are pointing back at me.

My biggest fear: Being ignored

My strength: Perseverance

My sex appeal: Modesty prevents me from answering this question.

My wildest fantasy: That all the slaughterhouses in the world will stop their killing so the animal's eternal Treblinka will become an eternal Sabbath

My Hero: The prophet Amos (in the Bible)

My favorite quote: "It's a matter of taking the side of the weak against the strong, something the best people have always done." --Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin

I am passionate about: Promoting my book Eternal Treblinka so it can get out there and do some good

My favorite possession: My computer...especially when it works

What touches me most: Injustice and suffering and those who try to help

I don't compromise with: My deepest convictions

I look forward to: The time when we humans stop destroying the earth and each other

Patterson believes that the 'great divide' between man and other animals was the result of man's emergence as the dominant species on this planet. One of the first successes primitive man achieved was the domestication of wild animals - goats, sheep, pigs, cattle, and other animals for their meat, milk, hide, and labour - some 11,000 years ago. This happened in the Near East when human groups began to shift from a nomadic life of hunting and gathering to one of settlements supported by domesticated plants and animals. Patterson calls 'domestication' a euphemism for 'exploitation' where humans castrated, maimed, selectively bred, confined and slaughtered animals to fulfil their own needs.

In Patterson's words, "The main coping mechanism humans employed was the adoption of the view that they were separate from and morally superior to the other animals... The relationship of humans to other beings became what it is today - one of domination, control, and manipulation - with humans making life-or-death decisions concerning what were now 'their' animals." According to Patterson, the enslavement/domestication of animals affected the way humans related to their captive animals and in turn to each other. "Since violence begets violence", he says, "the enslavement of animals injected a higher level of domination and coercion into human history by creating oppressive hierarchical societies and unleashing large-scale warfare never seen before."

By the time civilizations emerged in the river valleys of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China, the exploitation of captive animals for food, milk, hides, and labour was so firmly entrenched that the religions that emerged in these civilizations, including the Judeo-Christian tradition, sanctified the notion that the world has been created for the sake of the human species.

Roman law even classified animals as property and hence things without any inherent rights. The right of humans to deprive animals of their lives and natural liberties were so ingrained in Roman thought and law that it was always assumed and never had to be justified.

> *...The book provides detailed, often shocking accounts of the horrible methods used to kill animals in slaughterhouses in the USA, some of which even arranged visits by 'spectators' to watch the killings!...*

"Not only did the domestication of animals provide the model and inspiration for human slavery and tyrannical government", says Patterson, "but it laid the groundwork for western hierarchical thinking and European and American racial theories that called for the conquest and exploitation of 'lower races', while at the same time vilifying them as animals so as to encourage and justify their subjugation."

The book provides detailed, often shocking accounts of the horrible methods used to kill animals in slaughterhouses in the USA, some of which even arranged visits by 'spectators' to watch the killings! It describes the blood-chilling screams of the animals as they were carried to their doom in the high-tech, mechanised slaughterhouses. The scene was almost repeated in Hitler's extermination camps, only here it dealt with humans.

As the world knows it, the main motive behind Hitler's resolve to exterminate Jews was to create a better German race. Interestingly, the eugenics movement - which aims at improving the human race by better breeding - had its origin in the United States. As early as 1910, a poultry breeder named Charles B. Davenport spearheaded the eugenics movement in America. Davenport and other American eugenicists believed that "social deviation was genetically determined and that criminality was the result of bad genes."

At the first National Conference on Race Betterment in 1914, Davenport, accustomed to breeding animals, urged his audience "to awaken an interest in heredity among our best stock, so that in marrying, the old ideals of marriage into good stock may be restored." Such exhortation eventually led to passing of draconian laws such as compulsory sterilisation of criminals and mentally ill in several American states, and anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust in Hitler's Germany.

Even before Hitler's ascent to power, German scientists were impressed by America's progress in eugenics. German eugenics journals reported regularly on developments in the United States, especially the progress Americans were making in translating racial theory into laws that supported sterilisation, racial segregation, and immigration restrictions.

A little known player in the Holocaust drama was the American auto giant Henry Ford. According to Patterson, "Ford, who was so impressed by the efficient way meat packers killed animals in Chicago, made his own special contribution to the slaughter of people in Europe. Not only did he develop the assembly-line method the Germans used to kill Jews, but also launched a vicious anti-Semitic campaign that helped the Holocaust happen."

> *...Notwithstanding the link that Patterson has tried to establish between human treatment of animals and the Holocaust, his arguments appear rather sweeping and are not irrefutable.....It is debatable if the Holocaust would have happened had Hitler not come to power in Germany. To draw a parallel between the Holocaust and human slaughter of animals is stretching things too far. After*

> *all, mankind has been meat-eaters since time immemorial and not all non-vegetarians enjoy killing; neither are all vegetarians peace-loving...*

By the time the Nazis came to power, more than twenty institutes for 'racial hygiene' had already been established at German universities. The goal of racial hygiene was "the prevention of inferior life and genetic degeneration by 'targeted selection and promotion of superior life and eradication of those portions of the population which were undesirable.'"

After the Nazis came to power in 1933, scores of American anthropologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and geneticists visited Germany and were warmly received. Officials arranged high-level meetings with Nazi leaders and scientists and visits to racial hygiene institutes, public health departments, and hereditary health courts. Even after the World War II began, American scientists continued to visit and support Germany in its eugenic movement.

The final section of the book profiles Holocaust-connected activists who possess "sensitivity to the suffering of others that characterises many Holocaust survivors and their families." This section mainly deals with the experience of the survivors, animal activism, vegetarianism and things like that.

Notwithstanding the link that Patterson has tried to establish between human treatment of animals and the Holocaust, his arguments appear rather sweeping and are not irrefutable. The Nazi treatment of Jews in Hitler's Germany cannot be considered as anything more than the outcome of a perverted mental state of an individual who could incite hatred in others *(Patterson however vehements opposes this. See his interview - ed.)*. It is debatable if the Holocaust would have happened had Hitler not come to power in Germany. To draw a parallel between the Holocaust and human slaughter of animals is stretching things too far. After all, mankind has been meat-eaters since time immemorial and not all non-vegetarians enjoy killing; neither are all vegetarians peace-loving. Although some animals are killed for meat, many others are loved and given protection by the people. Millions of non-vegetarians around the world love animals and keep pets. There are also hundreds of tribes in Africa and other continents who survive by hunting animals but rarely show aggression against fellow humans.

However, in *Eternal Treblinka*, Patterson has been able to present a wealth of little-known information and extensive evidence that will help the reader get a better understanding of the events that eventually led to the greatest shame that mankind has witnessed in history.

-Biman Basu

-Biman Basu
Biman Basu is a prominent writer of Asia, having written more than 15 books on various subjects. He has reviewed a number of books for various journals. He has been associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews since its inception. He can be contacted at basu_biman@yahoo.com. More information about him.
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Interview with Charles Patterson.