



DOG TRAINING

Helping you and your dog become best friends for life.

BOOK REVIEW - *THE CULTURE CLASH*, BY JEAN DONALDSON

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE: Anyone who wants to increase their knowledge of canine behavior, and all who consider their dogs to be furry little people with values and morals.

I first read *The Culture Clash* in 1998 and have been recommending it ever since. People often ask me to recommend books and many times I have been hesitant because there are many bad ones and only a few good ones. *The Culture Clash* by Jean Donaldson is one of the better books on canine behavior. When first published in 1997, *The Culture Clash* received the prestigious Maxwell Award from the Dog Writer's Association of America as the Best Dog Training and Behavior Book of the year. More importantly, this book was one of the first to challenge the dominance myth and punishment based training.

In *The Culture Clash*, Donaldson helps us to understand our dogs as dogs, and not as furry little creatures that we too often attribute with human like characteristics. Donaldson's refreshingly new approach has had a tremendous effect on the relations I have with my dogs and my understanding of why they do what they do.

Unfortunately, the depiction of dogs by the mass media, and even many dog people, has created some all too common misconceptions about dogs: that they have morals, know when they have done something wrong, are capable of planning revenge, and have a desire to please. This has done a great disservice to all dogs, resulting in our giving them human like responsibilities and then being disappointed when they cannot live up to our expectations.

Our dogs' failure to live up to our standards has also led to the proliferation of the "dominance theory" in the dog-human relationship. This in turn has led to the use of punishment based training techniques because of the emphasis on "showing the dog you are the leader." Donaldson convincingly demonstrates that dogs are NOT disobedient because they are trying to be dominant, but because they do not understand what a cue means or they find other instinctual stimulus to be more motivating than what we are asking of them (e.g. asking them to come when chasing a squirrel). Once we understand this and start applying scientifically validated learning theories to training our dog, we discover that dominance is totally irrelevant. This is evident in our training classes at Green Acres where young children are training the family dog as easily, and sometimes more effectively than their parents.

Donaldson explains how our dogs' instinctual behaviors can actually be used to make them even better companions. For example, many old school training books would tell you never, ever allow your dog to play "tug-of-war" because it will make the dog dominant. This advice is

totally erroneous. As Donaldson explains, dogs in the wild tugging together at a carcass are NOT trying to dominate one another; they are working cooperatively together to dissect the carcass. By playing tug with our dog, with rules of course, we are not making them aggressive, but are building a bond by working together cooperatively as a pack. You will find that for many dogs playing tug is a very motivating reward, possibly more motivating than chasing that squirrel.

FAVORITE QUOTE:

The Top 10 Things We Know About Real Dogs (From *The Culture Clash* by Jean Donaldson)

1. It is all chew toys to them. They have no concept of valuables. (i.e. a shoe is as good to chew as a rawhide)
2. They are amoral and have no concept of right versus wrong, only safe vs. dangerous.
3. Self-Interested (no desire to please, what is in it for me?)
4. Lemon-brains (i.e. small & relatively unconvoluted brains which learn only through operant and classical conditioning)
5. Predators (search, chase, grab and hold, dissect, chew all strongly wired)
6. Highly Social (bond strongly and do not cope well with isolation)
7. Finite Socialization period (fight or flee anything they are not socialized to)
8. Opportunistic and keen scavengers (if it is edible, eat it, NOW!)
9. Resolve conflicts through ritualized aggression (never write letters to editor, never sue, can aggress without fatal force and minimal damage to each other)
10. Well-developed olfactory system.

The Culture Clash makes a great companion to our clicker training classes.