

**Justyna Włodarczyk. *Genealogy of Obedience: Reading North American Dog Training Literature, 1850s–2000s*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. 254 pages.**

Diogenes was the first scholar known to (Western) history who was fascinated by the figure of the dog. So much so that he wanted to live like one, whereas his school of thought became known as the cynics (which translates to “canines” from Greek). The thing that Diogenes valued most about dogs was their freedom, as they were able to roam the streets without much regard for conventions “whether of religion, of manners, of dress, of housing, of food, or of decency” (Russell 247). Dogs do not care about one’s social status, they treat people on the basis of how they act towards them and who they *really* are. The same sentiment is expressed by Cesar Millan, the (in)famous self-proclaimed dog whisperer, who values dogs for their ability to just let go and live in the moment, as he has expressed it in many of his shows. However, apart from the 25 centuries separating both men—Diogenes was born in 412 BC, Millan is one of the most prominent faces of today’s obedience training—it is their approach towards the supposed freedom of dogs that is the main difference between them. How is it possible that over such a span of time dogs have turned from individual and independent beings, as Diogenes saw them, to elements that needed to be tamed and controlled?

As it is often the case, things are not that simple nor (luckily) that bad. In *Genealogy of Obedience: Reading North American Dog Training Literature, 1850s–2000s* Justyna Włodarczyk uses a Foucauldian framework to discuss books devoted to dog training. The ideas of obedience and control, as understood and developed by the French philosopher, have never been applied to the said topic, which makes Włodarczyk’s work truly groundbreaking. Still, she stresses herself that her book is not “contributing to Foucauldian scholarship; I see it contributing to animal studies” (3). So while Foucault’s discussion of biopolitics and biopower enriches her argument, from an animal studies perspective it is Włodarczyk’s retracing of the history of dog training that makes the book captivating.

The titular genealogy is also understood in a Foucauldian sense as a critical analysis of the emergence of certain beliefs, in this case associated with and applied to dog training. What makes Włodarczyk’s work (even more) perverse is that she chooses to discuss American dog training literature, which, at least in theory, should be all about the freedom associated with being an animal/pet. Appreciative and protective of their own freedoms, it becomes clear since the beginning of Włodarczyk’s analysis that Americans were not as willing to apply the same logic to their animal compatriots. The narrative that emerges from dog training literature is not comprehensive, nor one-sided, however, there are some patterns which the author masterfully detects. The trends, approaches and observations seem somewhat stuck between two poles of understanding dogs as either parts of the animal or the human world. In a sense, the stories about dogs are also stories about their humans.

The point of departure of this work, the second half of the nineteenth century, marks the emergence of dog training literature. The books were addressed to white, middle-class urban dwellers as only they could afford the luxury of living with a trainable dog. As Włodarczyk reiterates, not all dogs were considered worthy of training. The idea of applying the Victorian ethics of kindness to dog training was of course not as noble or kind as it sounds. The corporal punishment was clearly involved, but it was executed for the

good of the dog, not out of spite or anger. Throughout all of the works analyzed in this book it becomes evident that their authors firmly believed that every form of instruction was supposed to benefit the pet, even though the approaches towards man's best friend varied across time. It is worth pointing out (as Włodarczyk does in her work) that these changes were connected with the changes experienced by humans, which, in turn, affected the dog training discourse.

In the 1850s dog training went beyond the confines of the circus or the show and was presented as an educational activity for humans. While some books on dog training already appeared before that time, they were reserved for hunting and working dogs. Now the companion animal was elevated to the level of trainability, which means it was embraced by the human world, allowed to enter the realm which was out of its reach at the inception of the nineteenth century. Dog training books from that time are devoted to tricks, which stand in strong opposition to the tasks reserved for hunting and working dogs.

These are the topic of Chapter 2, which is the only one abstaining from the issue of trainability. It deals rather with eugenics, which is of course a topic that appeared through the years in various books, yet birth was never proof or reason for a dog's (in)ability to master the discipline measures exhibited by man. The chapter presents the differences between the approaches towards the hunting dogs of slaves and slaveholders. In doing so it highlights the middle-class, white character of dog training literature. Slaves used their dogs to hunt smaller prey and they were most concerned with their usefulness, whereas for slaveholders hunting was a ceremony, and their well-trained dogs were an integral part of it. Killing animals was regarded as a sport in which the malnourished, poorer dogs kept by the slaves clearly could not participate. That is why they were often disposed of whenever the owners considered them a nuisance. Włodarczyk combines the story of slaves' dogs with the present-day representations of the pit bull, considered a typical African American breed, demonized and often exterminated due to the fear they attack white Americans.

This chapter may seem to depart from the general narrative of the book, however, due to its peculiarity it underlines the intertwining notions of training and breed, which at times were considered dependent on each other. More often than not though, trainability was (and is now) seen as an ability inherent to any dog. The tools of discipline were mostly the same: the whip and the collar, but in the second half of the twentieth century dog training experienced a gentler turn, as both were replaced by the lead. The lead was eventually dropped, at least to some extent, as the basis of training is now concerned with body control, positive reinforcements and fun. While some dog trainers, like Millan, serve as paragons of a more manly, anti-intelligent obedience training, it is this feminine, gentler and kinder approach that has dominated today's dog training. Thanks to it the dog is appreciated for its individuality, it once again became a creature which was so valued by Diogenes, not fully wild nor domesticated.

### Work Cited

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967. Print.

Łukasz Muniowski  
University of Warsaw