

“Humans, animals and biopolitics” edited by Adal, Druglitrø and Hinchliffe. Book review.

*Humans, Animals and Biopolitics: The more-than-human condition.* Edited by Kristin Asdal, Tone Druglitrø and Steve Hinchliffe. London and New York, Routledge. 197pp.

How humans and animals live together has long been an important question. The stakes involved are ontological, political and ethical: what it is to be human (and animal); and how animals (and humans) should be treated. Humanism, as is well known, assumed a strict division between humans and non-humans. By contrast, the more-than-human approach abandons such binary understandings. Instead, humans – and in the case of this volume, animals – are understood through a relational ontology wherein what it is to be either is never a single-species question. Human and animal lives co-become; they are co-constitutive; and in this contingent coming together, there is always a politics – a particular mode of assembly that can be traced, recognised, and perhaps intervened upon. It is, therefore, perhaps no surprise that Foucault’s concept of *biopolitics* (and its subsequent development by various authors) has proven such a fertile theoretical resource for contemporary more-than-human thought.

Yet, as the editors of this timely and important volume in Routledge’s ‘Multispecies Encounters’ series point out, applying biopolitical concepts through a more-than-human perspective is not without problems. They note two necessary re-emphases: that biopolitics is conceived as not being solely about humans; and that human power over various human and animal lives is understood as contextually specific and processural (rather than universal). Thus re-focussed, the introductory chapter makes an important contribution to recent more-than-human work. In particular, it traces three varieties of post-Foucaultian biopolitical thought that each seek to incorporate nonhumans as biopolitical actors: posthumanist (particularly the work of Cary Wolfe), materialist (here they focus on Thomas Lemke), and material-semiotic biopolitics (Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, and Donna Haraway amongst others). Whilst by no means exhaustive, this review is helpful for categorising some recent influential theoretical engagements.

What follows is a series of nine well-crafted and empirically rich chapters, written by an interdisciplinary cast hailing from the fields of geography, feminist science studies, anthropology, history and literary studies. Indeed, the key strength of the volume is in its diversity of approach. Drawing on case-studies of human-animal imbrications ranging from migrating birds and obese micropigs to orthopedically compromised sheep and human-loved camels, the authors each carefully consider questions of interspecies politics – and indeed how more-than-human understandings can unsettle such neat divisions between species implicated in biopolitical relations. The various authors engage to differing extents with diverse theorists, but share a commitment to an empirical epistemology focussed on the contextual practices of animals and humans and their intra-action.

The editors suggest that the aim of the edited collection is to facilitate a generative encounter between different readings of biopolitics in different contextual situations. They succeed. Indeed, whilst it is tempting to single out chapters as noteworthy (and this reviewer has particular favourites), to do so would detract attention from the ways in which the collection works together as a form of bricolage: read together, it does have emergent properties. The volume will thus be of interest to scholars interested in making sense (and use) of biopolitical concepts and more-than-human methodologies, and will be a useful addition to pedagogical materials in courses covering more-than-human and animal geographies.