Book Review

Foucault, Power, and Nonhuman Animals

Matthew Chrulew & Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel (Eds.), *Foucault and Animals*
(*Human-Animal Studies*). Leiden: Brill, 2017. 396 pp.

In their timely and well-curated collection, Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Wadiwel (2017) succeed in their difficult aim of providing readers with a grounding in the complex intersection of Michel Foucault's philosophy with human-animal studies. The publication reflects and augments the increasing interest in the usefulness and implications of Foucault in a still-emerging field in need of conceptual resources to more deeply expound upon its key questions and dilemmas. In this sense, the book's main readership will be made up of human-animal studies scholars of all levels with an interest in power, knowledge, and ethics. It may also appeal to some Foucault scholars engaged with the posthuman turn and interested in exploring what new light may be cast on his work if it is read through the prism of species, animality, and the nonhuman. The collection is admirably interdisciplinary, with contributors from literary studies through the humanities to the social sciences. Each author contributes either explicitly or more obliquely to the overarching question of how and to what extent Foucault's philosophy might be drawn upon to consider some aspects of human-animal relations. Chrulew and Wadiwel also consider a range of relationships such as those developed in labs and agriculture. While some of the essayists occasionally resort to theorizing about non-human animals or animality in general terms, several are explicitly critical of this tendency, and most focus on particular species in particular times, places, institutional and epistemic contexts, and relations of power.

The collection is organized thematically into four parts, each comprising three essays/chapters, except Part One, which contains four. Part One is sub-headed Discourse and Madness, comprising essays with a discursive focus

on close textual exegesis of various Foucault works in terms of their mostly unstated, and hitherto unexamined, relationship to animals and animality. One example is Joseph Pugliese's against-the-grain reading of how nonhuman animals in *Madness and Civilization* are depicted as non-foundational metonyms and nodal figures (hence as marginalized and absent presences who problematize the ways in which Western anthropocentrism shapes and constrains Foucault's philosophy). In Leonard Lawler's investigation of "absolute freedom" in *History of Madness*, he argues that a notion of animal freedom might be derived from this in a way that helps us to rethink animal life and human-animal relations. A strength of Part One and indeed the collection as a whole is that in addition to common themes, overlapping references, and mutually reinforcing arguments underlining the thoughtfully edited nature of the collection, there are also some interesting tensions and disagreements. For example, Claire Hout's essay is a challenging and highly scholarly examination of the complex and differential etymologies and implications of key terms in Foucault's works including "dog" and "animality" (traced across French, Latin, German, English, and Chinese). She is highly critical of the tendency to read Foucault's animality as inextricably linked with madness and/or wildness, a criticism that could apply to some extent to several of the accompanying essays.

Where Part One has a more discursive focus, broadly corresponding to Foucault's earlier, "archaeological" period, the subsequent sections are more focused on power, bodies, and materiality, broadly corresponding to Foucault's later, "genealogical" work. Interestingly, the editors are themselves critical of what they regard as the anthropocentrism of more archaeological uses of Foucault, which focus on human discursive and epistemic constructions of the animal as an object of knowledge. They characterize such approaches as typical of an earlier phase in Foucault human-animal studies scholarship and posit a step, in more recent studies, towards what they regard as a more sophisticated, political, and materialist approach. Those with this approach are concerned with how apparatuses of power differentially impact and govern nonhuman animal bodies in lived contexts and institutional sites of human-animal relations. This is persuasive insofar as the more discursive approaches do seem to neglect material and embodied power. However, one should be careful in construing this shift as entirely unproblematic because, equally, the more micro-political and corporeal approaches sometimes tend to overlook or under-emphasize the historicity and discursive-epistemic framings of power/knowledge, as well as the constitutive relationality of the animal vis-à-vis the human.

Whatever its merits, the scholarly and intellectual transition posited by the editors is broadly reflected in the organization of the collection, with Parts Two, Three, and Four focusing on Power and Discipline, Science and Biopolitics, and Government and Ethics, respectively. Brevity prevents me from mentioning each of the nine chapters that comprise these sections. One example is Alex Mackintosh's stimulating essay on cock-fighting and bear-baiting, which seeks to historicize human-animal power relations by examining how the shift from sovereign power to disciplinary power and bio-power identified by Foucault can be traced in human-animal power relations. He argues that it is in the sphere of human-animal power relations that key historical shifts in human power relations originated. Craig McFarlane has a diffident but wonderful chapter examining how apiarists' discourses on the "politics of the hive" intriguingly foreshadowed what became "the art of government" in seventeenth century English political discourse and practice. Chloe Taylor articulates how food and diet regulation are ethico-aesthetic technologies of the self, situating contemporary ethical vegetarianism as a self-transformative practice constituting a form of resistance to disciplinary power. In doing so, she delineates one way to connect the Foucauldian approach with key concerns of critical animal studies.

Most of the chapters are original, although two are reproduced or slightly-revised versions of previously published articles. Namely, Said Chebili's chapter, translated from the 1999 French original by Matthew Chrlew and Jeffrey Busolini, traces changing discourses and uses of animality through different epistemes. Also included is Clare Palmer's important chapter opening Part Two, originally published as a 2001 article in *Environmental Ethics*, which summarizes Foucault's conception of power and how effectively this can be used to examine human-animal power relations in different contexts. This is a slightly unusual editorial strategy, moving the collection away from its composition of contemporary original works and towards content normally reserved for a reader or scholarly edition. But as these chapters are important seminal examples of early applications of Foucault to human-animal relations, to which several of the other authors refer in framing and situating their contributions, their presence in the collection is coherent as well as convenient.

The collection overall feels complete, with little in terms of glaring oversights or omissions. It is perhaps a missed opportunity that there is not more engagement with Thomas Lemke's work (2014), which draws upon Foucauldian biopolitics alongside new materialism in developing a posthumanist multispecies biopolitics, as this seems very pertinent. Indeed, more reflection by the editors and contributors on the parallel traditions of Actor-Network Theory

(ANT), new materialism, and Deleuze-influenced work, could perhaps have enhanced the overall intellectual impact and significance of the collection. Bruno Latour is mentioned only by Rob Kirk, as a point of departure for his richly empirical chapter on the role of the nonhuman animal in the historical constitution of particular modalities of laboratory science and politics. While the distinctly ANT concept of the “heterogeneous collective” is pivotal in Holloway and Morris’s chapter on biopower and biosocial subjectification in domestic livestock breeding, there is no link to the ANT literature. This absence from the collection is notable because the relevance of connections to both ANT and new materialism are suggested very strongly by the important arguments in Clare Palmer’s pivotal chapter. She identifies Foucault’s distinction between “capacities” over things and “power” over subjects as a key obstacle to extending Foucauldian theorizing to animals, and further identifies reactivity as the essential criterion distinguishing them. These issues are central to Lemke’s concerns as well as to ANT. On the other hand, any edited collection must be delimited in some way, and the approach here is entirely defensible in its singular focus on exploring the productive interconnection of human-animal studies and Foucault exclusively, which is an ambitious enough aim that is accomplished admirably.

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References

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