Editors’ Introduction

Foucault and Animals

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The animal in man no longer has any value as the sign of a Beyond; it has become his madness, without a relation to anything but itself; his madness in the state of nature.

for millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.

Michel Foucault, History of Madness and The Will to Knowledge

The legacy of Michel Foucault’s thinking can be found across a diverse range of fields of inquiry, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, politics, architecture, health sciences, ethics and sexuality. Yet Foucault says very little about animals. And perhaps, as a consequence, while Foucault would seem to be everywhere in social and political theory, the impact of his work is yet to be fully appreciated within the emerging field of animal studies. As has been shown in recent critical engagements with Foucault that have drawn connections with animal life, including those of Giorgio Agamben,1 Donna Haraway,2 Nicole Shukin,3 Cary Wolfe,4 and Jamie Lorimer,5 Foucault’s work is extremely profitable for understanding our conflicted relationships with animals. More than just another of the endless applications of his work, we believe this

2 Donna Haraway, When Species Meet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
3 Nicole Shukin, Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
conjunction to be essential: both for the advancement of a new field struggling with questions of power, knowledge, and ethics; and for the study of a philosopher whose antihumanism failed to interrogate the category of species.

This edited book collects essays by scholars at the forefront of their fields to provide readers with a grounding in the intersection of Foucault’s thought with animal studies. The contributors hail from a range of disciplines, from philosophy to geography, yet each offers an interesting new perspective on how Foucault might be used to consider human-animal relations. As with Foucault’s own wide-ranging work, the book covers philosophical discussion as well as analyses of science, policy, and praxis. It focuses not simply on the perpetual transfer of Foucauldian concepts to new domains, but on their effective adaptation to the specific issues and difficulties of multispecies contexts, meeting the urgent need for in-depth, interdisciplinary theorisation that is able to map and challenge how the lines of distinction between human and animal are defined and policed in apparatuses of knowledge and power. The essays analyse and disrupt systems of power from zoos to factory farms which simultaneously organise conduct, violence, care and domination of nonhuman animals.

Recent years have seen significant growth in work on animals in humanities scholarship. In the interdisciplinary field of animal studies, as well as in critical theory and Continental philosophy, “the question of the animal” has emerged as an essential aspect of the new humanities. This scholarship has problematised the uniqueness of the human, particularly insofar as it is defined and produced at the expense of “the animal.” It has interrogated how the category of “species” is fashioned and regulated in material and textual “naturecultures,” and how it intersects with categories of class, race and gender, demonstrating how mechanisms of animalisation (of both humans and animals) perpetuate the suffering of oppressed groups, whether human or otherwise. It has demonstrated the barbarity of civilisation’s unacknowledged violence against the nonhuman.

Alongside a prominent if often superficial emphasis on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming-animal,” perhaps the greatest influence by a Continental philosopher on recent animal theory has come from Jacques Derrida’s late work.6 Here, Derrida deconstructed the anthropocentric philosopheme that incessantly divides the supposedly unique human from what is so cruelly and violently called “the Animal,” and insisted instead that we recognise and respond to the difference and multiplicity of the living. Leading

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