



BOOK REVIEW

Humans, Animals and Biopolitics: The More-than-Human Condition

Edited by Kristin Asdal, Tone Druglitrö and Steve Hinchliffe

Reviewed by David Redmalm, Department of Sociology, Uppsala University

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics captures the way a decentralized form of governing measures and mobilizes life itself through a number of technologies, such as demographics, surveillance and health initiatives, with the aim to prolong and enhance the lives of a population. According to Foucault, this biopolitical form of governing characteristic of modernity implies a detached and technical stance towards individual lives. In short, biopolitics turns individual lives into life as a mass noun. Interestingly, when human life is treated as a resource, human's self-proclaimed position as the crown of creation is unsettled and humans find themselves part of the same biopolitical nexus as many other animals. The technologies and consequences of the biopolitization of humans and other animals is the subject of the volume *Humans, Animals and Biopolitics*, edited by Kristin Asdal, Tone Druglitrö and Steve Hinchliffe. It is a book that should be required reading for Foucauldian theorists and human-animal studies scholars alike.

The volume nuances, expands and critiques the theory of biopolitics in nine chapters with fascinating and empirically detailed cases. The chapters illustrate the breeding, management, modification and ending of nonhuman animal life, and the ways humans are entangled in these processes. As shown in several chapters, it is not merely the case that humans are governed by the use of nonhuman animals. Natalie Porter suggests in her chapter on the responses to the avian flu in Vietnam that "biopower also operates on humans and animals collectively, as one social group composed of humans living with animals", and does so "in order to govern the existence of both species" (p. 137). Hence, humans are often transformed through these processes when put at par with other animals. Other chapters raise questions concerning what kinds of humans and animals emerge from biopolitical regulations. For instance, Robert G. W. Kirk underlines in his chapter on the development of regulations for "humane" animal experimentation that human society "relies on encounters with the nonhuman to understand itself" (p. 120). Mapping out a more-than-human biopolitics is a complex intellectual task as these encounters have recursive effects: the way nonhuman life is administered and used in laboratories and food industry reproduces a certain idea of "the human" that has consequences for nonhuman animals, which again effects humans.

Vibeke Pihl's chapter shows a striking example of how the administration of pigs used as model animals in gastric bypass surgery experimentation has repercussions on their human handlers, and even on the notion of the subject. Pihl notes how pigs are named

and treated as individuals in the experimental farm, while the researchers performing the operations only use numbers when referring to the pigs. It is a common idea that laboratories employ techniques to "dehumanize" animals in order to facilitate cruel experimentation, but Pihl demonstrates that the naming and individualization of pigs makes it possible to monitor and handle them more efficiently. What is more, Pihl points out, the researchers in the laboratory also find themselves treated as numbers as they are dependent on impact factors, quotations and h-index numbers. Thus, a dynamic of personification and anonymization enables a biopolitical treatment of individual lives, human as well as nonhuman, as resources.

The book's chapters focus on specific cases and empirical studies to show how human-animal collectives emerge from biopolitical strategies. But while the introduction written by the three editors provides the reader with an ambitious survey of different Foucauldian approaches to a biopolitics of humans and other animals, only a few of the chapters engages thoroughly with this theoretical discussion. However, as all chapters focus on different aspects of the biopolitics of human-animal relations, the reader's understanding is often enhanced when chapters are put into dialogue with each other, which shows that the chapters clearly amount to a collective effort. So the questions that Pihl's pigs raise are answered by Martina Schlünder's individualized and collectivized sheep, and vice versa.

There is also an important point made from the focus on empirical detail rather than theoretical abstraction. In the introduction, the editors explain that they do not aim to extract a whole ontology from Foucault's theory of biopower, as some Foucault scholars have attempted. The editors' Foucault is a "methodological" Foucault—a combination of poststructuralist theoretical insights combined with tools developed in science and technology studies and actor-network theory with its flat ontology, giving equal attention to all involved actors, be they human, nonhuman or inanimate object. In a footnote, the editors even suggest that Foucault should be understood as several ongoing discussions, or "biopolitics collectives," rather than as a single individual being (n. 1, p. 27). Foucault—a philosopher who wanted his works to be used as if they were Molotov cocktails, who resisted classifications and who not only predicted but welcomed the death of the author—would most probably applaud this approach. It does not have to be pointed out that among Foucault's most influential works are the books that make use of thorough studies of archive material from



social institutions such as prisons, asylums and hospitals. It would therefore be reasonable to suggest that the most Foucauldian approach to the study of contemporary forms of biopolitics would be to focus on empirical material, rather than on reinterpretations of Foucault's oeuvre.

Although the chapters show how collectives of human and non-human animals can be said to challenge biopolitical regimes in various ways, in the end, things remain pretty much the same in our anthropocentric world. Humans continue to be subjected to and to reproduce the biopolitization of life, while also retaining their privileged position relative to nonhuman life. Then again, none of the chapters nurture the illusion that there are easy ways out of the reach of biopolitics. Steve Hinchliffe, in his brilliant biopolitical reading of Michel Serres' meditations on birds, or "avian wisdom," suggests that instead of reproducing fantasies of absolute independence from discursive formations and biopolitical governing, the concept of biopolitics should be used to identify destructive forms of power, and highlight the way humans and animals engage in a "being or becoming sentient together" (p. 159).

This is a constant theme of the book: to show how an attendance to the way biopolitical arrangements always overflows with "liveliness", "noise", or the "more-the-human" can alter those arrangements. This is what happens in Swiss laboratories when dogs are replaced by sheep to reduce the ethical tensions in the laboratory, with the consequence that laboratory workers become attached to the sheep instead (Martina Schlünder's chapter). This is also what happens when the logic of the humane treatment of animals genetically close to humans is transferred to fish, which raises discomfort in the way humans have neglected "fishy sentience" (John Law and Marianne Elisabeth Lien's chapter). Finally, this is what happens when the relationship between a camel and his human traverses territorial and categorical boundaries to transform into "a radical intervention into the isolating and otherwise disempowering structures of normativity" (Susan McHugh's chapter, p. 180). The aim of the book, to introduce a more "lively" biopolitics, is definitely reached, providing the reader with theoretical, methodological, empirical, and hopefully even ethical insights. In other words, it is a work that certainly takes a step toward an alternative biopolitics.