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Linda Kalof, & Amy Fitzgerald (Eds.). *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*. Oxford, UK: Berg, 2007.

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Notions of progress are pervasive in misrepresentations and misconceptions of the evolutionary process. Interestingly, as human “mastery” of nature is implicated in the present crisis of biodiversity (a term used to refer to the erosion of diversity at every biotic scale including communities, habitats and ecosystems), our historical, psychological and material coupling of progress and economic growth present a formidable barrier to instituting the political and social changes necessary to quell the crisis. Can our philosophical and ethical relationships with nonhuman animals illuminate pathways to conservation and ecological sustainability? In the light of increasing rates of environmental and social injustices, how indicative of our capacity to leverage the requisite political will to reverse the present course is humankind’s treatment of nonhuman animals?

If the status of our closest living relatives, the nonhuman primates, is an informative diagnostic, we have a mountain to climb. Of a recognized 623 primate taxa (species and subspecies), 261 (42%) are considered threatened with the possibility of extinction and listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered by the World Conservation Union (IUCN, 2006). Our genetic next of kin, the great apes (which includes chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans) are routinely displaced from their habitats, hunted for meat, captured for trade, housed in zoos, made to perform for our entertainment and used as subjects in biomedical testing. The last great ape to be studied, the bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), whose peaceful network of social relationships holds the promise of illuminating the human potential for peace, clings to existence amidst a fragile calm that has settled over a war-weary Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

It is in this context, as a member of an international effort to re-establish a research presence and protect one of the few remaining populations of bonobos in the DRC, that I read (by candlelight) *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald. *The Animals Reader* is a well-conceived and well-edited volume that explores the complex history and range of cultural, biological, ecological and philosophical relationships between human and nonhuman animals. The volume is timely in that on the brink of a mass extinction event (driven primarily by anthropogenic causes), our ability to conserve may depend on a restructuring of (a) basic teleological notions that have frequently considered nonhuman life forms as serving human needs; and (b) economic conceptions that present humans in a proprietary relation to nonhuman animals and, to a greater extent, nature (Longo & Malone, 2006).

The Animals Reader consolidates 35 essential readings, covering both historical and contemporary contexts, towards the stated goal of challenging us to rethink the relationships among humans, animals, culture and nature. Such an endeavour requires a multidisciplinary approach, and Kalof and Fitzgerald deliver by assembling the writing of philosophers (e.g., Aristotle, Bentham, Singer, Spiegel, Nussbaum, Deleuze, and Guattari), scientists (e.g., Bekoff, van Schaik and colleagues, Mithen and Cartmill) and scholars spanning the humanities (e.g., Haraway, Lansbury, Burt, Montaigne and Sax) from primarily, although not exclusively, Western traditions of science and philosophy. Contributions are smartly organized into six thematic sections, specifically: (a) Animals as Philosophical and Ethical Subjects; (b) Animals as Reflexive Thinkers; (c) Animals as Domestics, “Pets” and Food; (d) Animals as Spectacle and Sport; (e) Animals as Symbols; and (f) Animals as Scientific Objects. The inclusion of Britta Jaschinski’s provocative artwork and photography is an important contribution to the overall reflective (and reflexive) nature of the volume.

The nuances of humankind’s ethical relationship to nonhuman animals, as well as the moral status of animals, are re-occurring themes in the volume. These perspectives are highlighted at the onset of the volume, and the first thematic section addresses our moral responsibility that ensues from an

affirmative answer to Jeremy Bentham's enduring question: *Can they suffer?* The editors include a professional exchange between Peter Singer and Tom Reagan. Both their well-known approaches—utilitarianism and liberal individualism, respectively, have done a great deal to advance the discussion of our ethical obligation to nonhuman animals. It can be debated, however, the extent to which these approaches adequately emphasize the structural aspects of our relationships with nonhuman animals, and by extension, nature and the environment. For example, Hamilton (2007) correctly states (with respect to the climate crisis) that we must make both a psychological and a material transformation, the latter being the greater challenge as our very identity is derived through patterns of consumption.

If evolutionary and ecological perspectives are required to propel ethical/moral arguments in the direction of systematic (institutional) change, then the capabilities approach articulated by Martha Nussbaum potentially builds such a bridge (despite her overstatement and oversimplification that humans are universally violent, p. 35).¹ To consider the conditions for nonhuman animal “flourishing” is to embrace anti-exploitative (i.e., Marxist) perspectives, and such perspectives encompass ecological principles (Foster, 2000). *The Animals Reader* dedicates sufficient space to the matter of animal consumption and production, an appropriate editorial decision due to the issue's primacy in terms of ethical and ecological relations between human and nonhuman animals. On this topic, Kalof and Fitzgerald's selections span the millennia, from excerpts of Plutarch's “Moral Essays” to Mason and Finelli's contemporary critique of factory farming. These chapters sufficiently “flesh out” the costs and consequences (to animals, ecosystems and human societies) of the commodification and marketing of sentient beings and conclude that welfare reforms will always be inadequate (with specific respect to suffering) within a system that treats farmed animals as consumables.

The contribution to the volume by natural scientists is equally impressive, and contributions range from the reconstruction of human–animal interactions within the evolution of our human lineage, to the cognitive ethological approach to behaviour in social animals (possibly illuminating the origin of social morality) and finally to the documentation of cultural transmission among orangutans, extending the origins of material culture to approximately 14 million years ago. Such natural history data and comparative approaches serve to develop a complex picture of animal minds and nuanced social lives. This backdrop is critically important when, in later chapters, the volume returns to questions of animal spectatorship (e.g., in zoological gardens and other voyeuristic projects), exploitation of animals in recreational activities (e.g., hunting and dog fighting) and as purveyors of meaning via symbols, pets and scientific objects. In all cases, we must consider the complexity of animal lives when we establish power-based relationships that set the tone for “manifold other human practices that exploit animals and nature based upon principles of non-reciprocity” (Malamud, Chapter 24, p. 230).

In sum, *The Animals Reader* is a collection of essential classic and contemporary essays that, through its scope and scale, succeeds in challenging us to reassess the very ethical and ecological underpinnings of our myriad interrelationships with nonhuman animals. Readers will emerge with a thorough sense of the historical debates within, and current status of, the multidisciplinary field of animal studies. Further, students and scholars might well feel compelled to incorporate select perspectives into their professional activities of research, teaching and activism. Finally, the volume reaffirms the notion that successfully understanding what it means to be human is only possible through knowing what it means to be nonhuman. This very endeavour, however, will be shaped by how we proceed, how we perceive our place in nature and how we treat the subjects of our inquiries. Will we have the restraint and humility to achieve this goal?

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Note

1. See Fry (2006) and Fuentes (2004) for anthropological challenges to assumptions about violence and “human nature.”

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Kerry H. Whiteside. *Precautionary Politics: Principle and Practice in Confronting Environmental Risk*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

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What should we learn from the successes and failures of environmental policy in the twentieth century? Have we regulated too little or too much? If you tend towards “too little” then you may wish to engage with an ongoing discussion on “the precautionary principle” and will likely find Whiteside’s *Precautionary Politics* a good starting point. The book is a study of the meaning, rationale and policy implications of the principle along with the controversies provoked by it. Whiteside provides a new and original voice in an ongoing debate on the precautionary principle: by focusing on a U.S. audience and by approaching the subject from the field of political theory, which has so far been rather silent in the debate.

Whiteside proceeds from a specific case: that of agricultural biotechnology. In particular he juxtaposes the key U.S. assumption that genetically modified *products* can be regulated regardless of the process by which they were produced to the European commitment to regulate everything that comes from the *process* of genetic modification. His choice of case study both serves to illustrate how a precautionary approach focuses on uncertainties and on how its discussion must transcend the anthropocentric/ecocentric divide in environmental ethics. According to Whiteside, while ecocentrics analyse interferences with the environment in terms of their “naturalness,” and the ecologically enlightened anthropocentrist attempts to fit a preconceived idea of nature into a broader scheme of human self-interest, debates on GMOs bring into question the idea of nature—or what is natural.

From his analysis of GMOs, Whiteside proceeds to the precaution versus risk assessment debate, which is an inevitable component of any discussion of the precautionary principle, particularly one aimed at U.S. readers. Taking on well-known critics of the principle such as Goklany and Sunstein, Whiteside argues that while the simple dichotomy of science versus precaution is misleading, neither can current risk assessment and management tools easily incorporate the precautionary principle due to the particular aspects of new environmental risks. Critics of the precautionary principle, on the