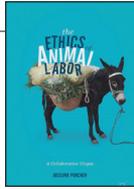


For Love of Animals

REVIEW

The Ethics of Animal Labor: A Collaborative Utopia

by Jocelyne Porcher



Jocelyne Porcher – a French accountant-turned-researcher-turned-farmer – resents in this treatise the disappearance of “domestic animals” from her country’s social life owing to its traditional farms’ marginalization. She blames the livestock industry and the European Union for this situation; but also specifies how academic experimentalists, animal liberationists, animal welfare and rights activists, and moral philosophers have unwittingly contributed to it thanks to their own confusions and ignorance.

Contrasting her experience working in both traditional and modern farming systems, she explains and promotes the former as the way to re-socialize with animals, to revive a component of French culture, to check labor/animal abuse and to ensure a healthier ecological future. Her effort rests upon her ethic of animal labor, which includes a theory of work.

Drawing a background to the present, Porcher illustrates that through the AD 1800s, industry got glamorized for innovation and human enrichment, while zootechnics – an animal-management approach – rendered animals as machines (to be handled unemotionally). These twin forces of industrial capitalism and zootechnics sidelined and denigrated animal husbandry, ultimately replacing it with livestock industry; subsequently, they fed into EU regulations.

Over the course of generations, French citizens lost understanding of animal husbandry, which they began to confuse with livestock industry. This confusion thrived partly because, zootechnics – despite its lasting legacy in the livestock industry – has not been taught in any particular form, and it has also escaped the historians’

notice even as the social scientists have also generally bypassed studying animal husbandry.

Porcher insists that the livestock industry has no grasp of the pleasure that farmers and animals used to derive, under animal husbandry, by working together in quasi-natural surroundings. Also, while the difficulty of animal husbandry 50 years ago used to be undercut “by the collective force of the work,” the segregated, repetitive drudgery of livestock industry is unbearable to the workers – and it is much the worse for the animals, whose “working day has ... no end.” The entrenchment of the livestock-industry model into farming has, in short, utterly deformed animal husbandry.

Stressing that “industrial” has nothing to do with being intensively productive, Porcher re-theorizes livestock industry as an enterprise that is solely profit-driven; investor-owned and “managed by employees” rather than by farmers; that over-medicalizes animals; digitalizes, automates, over-quantifies and dehumanizes worker-animal relations; severely coerces both workers and animals; and breeds diseases and health risks. This industry has thus come tied to “delocalization;” an obsession with hyper-productivity; compartmentalized labor; sexism; and operational disconnects.

Porcher proposes her ethic of animal labor as a way to remove the ignorance and confusions about animal husbandry (and to distinguish it from livestock industry). Her main argument is that work should be central to how we conceptualize human-animal relationship, and how we classify animals. She observes that humans “want to live” with animals but they cannot afford to do so unless they also earn “an income from them.” Some types of animal, too, are better off living with humans – and they like human companionship so long as they are provided for, are not abused and are protected from predators. Animals

could thus be classified as those “with whom we can live and work and who want to live and work with us” versus those “who we prefer not to live with, and who prefer not to live with us.”

The former type is what Porcher calls “domestic” animals; the latter type, “wild” animals. She argues that this distinction has always been fluid and socio-cultural rather than biological or ecological. An example she cites is that “dogs in China or cows in India are not the same domestic animals as they are in France.” Indeed, this distinction is rather a continuum – and it remains so even regarding the same biological animal. So, we have creatures that are “known as wild” but are nevertheless “implicated in work” – such as “primates at a zoo or wolves at an animal park.”

Porcher suggests that farm animals are a type of domestic animals – and what they typify is that “through work,” humans “transform a predatory relationship with animals into a gift relationship.” Work is thus “a possible route to freedom for animals” – but when it “is distorted,” it becomes “alienation” for them as much as for humans. So, while humans raise, maintain and recognize animals, the animals also recognize their humans; they also teach humans interspecies communication, alternative ways of looking at the world, and to “derive pleasure from life,” among other things.

But these animals ultimately gift their lives to the humans – making this interrelationship financially sustainable to the latter. This may not seem like a gift unless we understand that when a farm “animal ... no longer has a place in work,” it “faces extinction.” This extinction may not be biological – Porcher need not say – but social. Ergo, traditional farming’s disappearance has led to the social disappearance of farm animals even though they are still bred on torturous factory farms.

Social co-living with animals has thus become a utopian dream for contemporary France; alternatively, traditional farming is France’s lost utopia. Toward restoring this utopia, Porcher recommends a legal framework that would set our work expectations

from, and duties toward, animals; ensure farm animals a life and habitat consistent with their “world and its relational, cognitive and affective potentialities” while also guaranteeing “diversified food” sensitive to their needs and tastes. In collaboration with a designer, Porcher has also proposed “a mobile abattoir;” moreover, she insists that abattoirs be made socially visible, transparent – to allow us to ask and answer questions that would improve our co-living with animals.

– Piyush Mathur

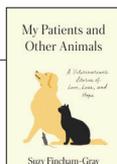
The Ethics of Animal Labor: A Collaborative Utopia by Jocelyne Porcher, 2017. Palgrave Macmillan; ISBN: 978-3319490700.

Piyush Mathur, Ph.D., is the author of *Technological Forms and Ecological Communication: A Theoretical Heuristic* (Lexington Books: 2017). For more info on his latest project, visit chuffed.org/project/dogs.

REVIEW

My Patients and Other Animals

by Suzy Fincham-Gray



As you’ll see in the new book *My Patients and Other Animals* by Suzy Fincham-Gray, we’re wild for our pets!

Even at the tender age of 14, Fincham knew that she wanted to be a veterinarian. That was how old she was when she began volunteering at a local animal clinic – the same Herfordshire-area clinic where later, as a veterinarian-school graduate, she’d “seen practice” and learned a thing or three about larger animals.

While that was helpful and Fincham was tempted to stay in Great Britain, she knew that her heart was with cats and dogs, not sheep and cattle. With a lump in her throat and a multi-year plan in mind, she came to America to attend Cornell University, which led her to the University of Pennsylvania’s veterinary teaching hospital.

It was there that she came to understand that the relationship between people and their pets baffled her.

Fincham did not grow up with pets in her childhood household so, for better understanding and because she was lonely, she adopted a cat, then another, and a third. With her own pets in mind, it was easy to see human connections in pet-ownership, but at the same time, Fincham’s impatience caused conflict with co-workers.

Looking for a better fit, job-wise, she moved to Baltimore where her family grew to include a man and a hyphen; then to San Diego, where they gained a long-awaited dog.

In her career, Fincham-Gray has met animals that left their pawprints on her heart and lessons in her head. There was Hercules, a Doberman. A wolfhound taught her that her instincts and subconscious were both good tools to rely on. A jaundiced cat taught her that limits can be moved; she learned that hasty decisions are the worst ones to make; and she discovered that it’s hard when a pet dies, no matter whose pet it is.

I defy you not to cry. If you’re someone who loves a four-footed kid, *My Patients and Other Animals* won’t let you stay dry-eyed for long.

And yet, much as you’re going to enjoy the almost-Herriot-type beginning of this animal-loving delight and as much as you’ll eat up most of it, beware that there are things here you won’t like. Fincham-Gray describes old-time practices that may make readers gasp. She recalls dogs in pain, cats near death, injuries, abandonment, and not all the endings are happy.

The good news is that those cringe-worthy bits are balanced by thoughtful observations on the human-animal bond, dogs-dogs-dogs, “moggies,” and a bit of romance. For a dog- or cat-person, even despite a few shudders, that makes *My Patients and Other Animals* a can’t-miss book.

– Terri Schlichenmeyer

My Patients and Other Animals: A Veterinarian’s Stories of Love, Loss, and Hope by Suzy Fincham-Gray, 2018. Spiegel & Grau; ISBN: 978-0812998184.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Grazier’s Podcast

apple.co/2x6xy6g

If you’ve heard it through the grapevine, it must be true! Actually, a lot of what comes “through the grapevine” in the agricultural world does hold merit. Many people who raise livestock and/or crops appreciate hearing accounts of firsthand experience from other farmers or graziers. Does it work? Is it worth the effort? What would you do differently?

Would you like to hear it through the grapevine, too? Tune in to *The Grazier’s Grapevine*.

The Pennsylvania Grazing Lands Coalition, with generous support from the National Wildlife Federation’s Cover Crop Champions Program, is producing podcasts related to grazing and soil health.

The Grazier’s Grapevine podcasts are conversations between at least two people about topics related to grazing, soil health, agronomy and more. There will be at least seven episodes produced in the next few months. Three have already been released, and can be downloaded.

Organic Herbs

bit.ly/2x4GXeI

A classic ATTRA publication *Herbs: Organic Greenhouse Production* just got an update by National Center for Appropriate Technology Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator Andrew Coggins. It takes a look at various marketing channels for organic herbs and assesses the economic factors to consider for small-scale organic greenhouse production of fresh-cut herbs. It also addresses production methods, including potential for hydroponic production.