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When Species Meet (Posthumanities)



Synopsis

“When Species Meet is a breathtaking meditation on the intersection between humankind and dog, philosophy and science, and macro and micro cultures.” —Cameron Woo, Publisher of Bark magazine

In 2006, about 69 million U.S. households had pets, giving homes to around 73.9 million dogs, 90.5 million cats, and 16.6 million birds, and spending over \$38 billion dollars on companion animals. As never before in history, our pets are truly members of the family. But the notion of “companion species” knotted from human beings, animals and other organisms, landscapes, and technologies includes much more than “companion animals.”

In *When Species Meet*, Donna J. Haraway digs into this larger phenomenon to contemplate the interactions of humans with many kinds of critters, especially with those called domestic. At the heart of the book are her experiences in agility training with her dogs Cayenne and Roland, but Haraway’s vision here also encompasses wolves, chickens, cats, baboons, sheep, microorganisms, and whales wearing video cameras. From designer pets to lab animals to trained therapy dogs, she deftly explores philosophical, cultural, and biological aspects of animal-human encounters.

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Customer Reviews

This eclectic, semi-academic volume is one part philosophical treatise, one part rambling memoir and one part affectionate look at a singular Australian sheepdog named Cayenne ("It's hard to be

grumpy myself in the morning watching this kind of joyful doggish beginning!"). With intellectual precision and obvious enthusiasm, author and "posthumanities" professor Haraway (*The Companion Species Manifesto*) delves into topics as diverse as the rigors of breeding purebreds, the ethics of using animals in laboratories and the grand leaps of anthropomorphism people use to justify thousands of dollars in medical care for a pet. A professor in the History of Consciousness program at U.C. Santa Cruz, Haraway's prose is rigorous but readable, her ideas backed up with generally clear examples; she can, however, veer into abstract academic language ("People and animals in intra-action do not admit of preset taxonomic calculation") and gratuitous digression (as in a distracting chapter on her sportscaster father). These complaints aside, Haraway's serious, challenging approach to the human-animal relationship web should prove a novel, gratifying read for animal-owning science and philosophy buffs. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Donna Haraway's latest book, *When Species Meet*, is a stunning meditation on the ordinary. Tying together questions of interspecies encounters and alternative practices of world building, Haraway explores how contemporary human beings interact with various critters to form meanings, experiences, and worlds. The text effortlessly slides between theory and autobiography; one of the driving connections in this regard is Ms. Cayenne Pepper, an Australian sheepdog whose "darter-tongue kisses" compel Haraway to look closely at what biologist Lynn Margulis calls "symbiogenesis," a process that explains how life forms continually intermingle, leading to ever more "intricate and multidirectional acts of association of and with other life forms." From lab animals to interspecies love to breeding purebreds, Haraway ensures that her readers will never look at human-animal encounters of any sort in the same way again. While those familiar with Haraway's oeuvre will find numerous connections to her earlier work, she does an excellent job of narrating how she came to the questions at the heart of *When Species Meet* and (perhaps most importantly) what is at stake for her in these questions, politically and otherwise. Of particular interest to philosophy buffs are Haraway's gratifying critiques of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's well-known writing on "becoming-animal"; these critiques arise as part of Haraway's overall challenge to the boundaries between "wild" or "domestic" creatures. Similarly, her response to Jacques Derrida's ruminations on animals reveals the provocations that can arise from work that pokes holes in conventional disciplinary engagements with any given topic. Haraway's willingness to take on both biology and philosophy, to cite

only two of her resources, results in suggestive insights on a number of issues, but especially (with Derrida, et. al.) regarding the question of what it means to take animals seriously. I found Haraway's considerable enthusiasm and knowledge in *When Species Meet* to be invigorating. This book should appeal to a broad audience including animal lovers, scientists and their allies, theorists, and people who love random and little known information (e.g., the history of imported North American gray wolves during South African apartheid). While Haraway emphasizes that her desire to look more carefully at companion species, those "who eat and break bread together but not without some indigestion," does not come with any guarantees, she infectiously believes that there is a good deal at stake in the mundane and extraordinary details of the co-shaping species she documents across these pages. Given her hope for the worldly orientations, such as curiosity and respect, that might be cultivated by looking at companion species differently, it is appropriate that she begins and ends the text by reminding us that "[t]here is no assured happy or unhappy ending • socially, ecologically, or scientifically. There is only the chance for getting on together with some grace." Review by Marie Draz, Feminist Review Blog

In "When Species Meet", Donna J. Haraway asks two questions, " (1) Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog? and (2) How is becoming with a practice of becoming worldly? " (pg. 3). She examines the interaction between humans and other species, predominantly focusing on domestic species such as dogs for their historically close relationship to humanity. She works to undo concepts of human exceptionalism, "the premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies. Thus, to be human is to be on the opposite side of the Great Divide from all the others and so afraid of and in bloody love with what goes bump in the night " (pg. 11). Her work intersects not only with posthumanism, but also with discourses of race and gender, especially in the exceptionalism blended with eugenics that is the concept of purebreds. Haraway writes, "Canis lupis familiaris, indeed; the familiar is always where the uncanny lurks. Further, the uncanny is where value becomes flesh again, in spite of all the dematerializations and objectifications inherent in market valuation " (pg. 45). This examination of the uncanny recalls the concept of the uncanny valley, something not-quite-human, yet almost so. With the manner in which humans, and Haraway in particular, anthropomorphize their dogs, these subjects are both familiar and novel simultaneously the more we think about our interactions with them. Discussing the role of healthcare

in *When Species Meet* Haraway writes, “Dogs in capitalist technoculture have acquired the right to health, and the economic (as well as legal) implications are legion” (pg. 49). As consumers in a marketplace increasingly catering to their unique needs, the pet-parent concept so popular in the blogosphere no longer accurately describes the role of animals in the economy. Dogs, especially, are not just subjects/patients, but also commodities in a Marxist system (pg. 52). Discussing the role of humanity in the world, Haraway suggests “that it is a misstep to separate the world’s beings into those who may be killed and those who may not and a misstep to pretend to live outside killing” (pg. 79). While she is not trying to reduce the world to the view of Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, she does encourage empathy in the laboratory setting. After all, “the puppies had to become patients if they were to become technologies and models” (pg. 59). Even this concept of certain animals as having a unique place in society is relatively recent. Haraway writes, “In the United States, dogs became companion animals both in contrast and in addition to pets and working and sporting dogs around the late 1970s in the context of social scientific investigations into the relations of animals such as dogs to human health and well-being” (pg. 134). This idea, however, still privileges humanity. In one of her strongest conclusions, Haraway writes, “Ways of living and dying matter” (pg. 88). The traditional humans-only method does not do justice to the reality of the world. Like Azetbur, the Klingon Ambassador in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991, dir. Nicholas Meyer) critiqued the United Federation of Planets, an anthropocentric view is “little better than a Homo sapiens only club.” Interestingly, Haraway finds the most prescient comparisons to these cross-species encounters in the realm of science fiction. She concludes, “Animals are everywhere full partners in worlding, in becoming with. Human and nonhuman animals are companion species, messmates at table, eating together, whether we know how to eat well or not” (pg. 301).

Interesting perspective on the roles of animals in our lives. If you love animals, especially “animals with jobs”, take a gander.

Donna J. Haraway’s *When Species Meet* is a great resource for anyone interested in

animal/human relations in the context of posthumanism. Haraway has always been an astute observer of social/political/natural interactions, and this book follows in the same tradition. No ideology is safe from her questioning mind as she explores the science and ethics behind industrial food animal farming, the use of animals in biomedical research, and pedigreed animal breeding.

Reading the last chapter, and when I encountered the phrase of Haraway, "I had found my nourishing community at last," my heart pit-a-patted. And I was reminded my own community, how delightful it is to eat with them. Reading Haraway, I learn too much, with never settled stomach. Touching it is.

I agree with the previous reviewer: this book is not intended for a general reader. It is intended for a specialized academic audience. It seems silly to critique it based on not fulfilling the needs of a general reader. It's like buying a sports car and then complaining that it doesn't have enough room or hugs the road too much. If you didn't want those things, why buy a sports car? Similarly, if you didn't want an academic press book, don't buy one. This book is brilliant and deals with animal issues that have yet to be addressed. It thoroughly changed the way I conceptualize the body in my scholarship, and the way that I conceptualize the difference and dichotomy between humans and non-humans. The crux of her argument is that humans are always in a state of becoming with animals.

Although the topic (pets) seems a specialized interest--although of course Haraway makes the obvious point that household companion species are enormously important in the US--this is a major treatise by one of the foundational thinkers in a major transformation taking place in the social sciences and humanities, "the animal turn" "new materialities" "posthumanities" etc. Essential reading to anyone interested in the future of environmentalism and feminism.

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