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Foreword Review SOCIAL SCIENCE

Sister Species: Women, Animals, and Social Justice

Lisa A. Kemmerer, Editor
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On the list of “isms”—ageism, heterosexism, classism, racism—speciesism is most likely to fall at the bottom. *Sister Species,* a collection of essays by feminist animal activists, could change that. In this book, feminism and animal activism come together with the idea that all forms of oppression are linked. And the book claims this in a time when “many concerned and dedicated social activists are fighting just one form of oppression while unwittingly fueling the fires of other injustices.” To seek justice for one group and not another is to forward an ineffective egalitarian project, this book contends.

Readers will feel implicated in such arguments. On occasion, the reader is even addressed directly: Lisa Kemmerer writes in the introduction that “… if you are able to access and read this book, you are almost surely among those to whom much has been given.” Such statements are perhaps not easily internalized. Others in this book may be even less easy for readers to take: “If I didn’t need to eat meat to stay alive,” one contributor writes, “then eating meat was killing for pleasure.” With such provocative contentions, the contributors strongly advocate a vegan lifestyle.

Forceful in its rhetoric, the book is also a delight. It contains personal essays that speak to the marvelous capacities of non-human minds—a chimp’s ability to invent language, for instance. The contributors’ encounters with animals—feeling the embrace of a baby chimp, allowing roosters freedom to choose how they want to live—will fascinate. The contributors speak from personal experience. They are all women and all animal activists, but they work in a wide array of situations. We hear from an animal cruelty investigator, the president and cofounder of PETA, a physician, and a professional artist, among others.

The book stands to change one’s thinking. It rejects the biological dichotomy of male and female. It links patriarchy and pastoralism, the oppression of female humans and non-humans alike. “Ain’t I a female, too?” is a question put in the mouths of cows and chickens. There are no prerequisites for reading *Sister Species*: terms are carefully defined, and readers are introduced to core feminist principles. Moreover, the conversational style of the writing makes it a high-quality read. In other words, the narrative essays of *Sister Species* are digestible—even when the realities of animal treatment are difficult to stomach.

JANELLE ADSIT (July / August 2011)

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