

The Risk of Factionalism among People Caring for Animals

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Wrenn, Corey Lee. 2015. *A Rational Approach to Animal Rights: Extensions in Abolitionist Theory*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 239 pp. € 98,85. ISBN 978-1137434647.

Palgrave Macmillan offers another book about Animal Studies that, potentially, could have represented a significant contribution to this area of study. Abolitionism is an important voice among the animal agenda and its so-called “extensions” could have represented “food for thought” for many activists and researchers.

In her book, Wrenn sets up a critic of the current Nonhuman Animal rights movement that she denounces to be: on the one side, compliant with “the state, industry, and elite power and influence founds”; on the other side, based on a series of irrational tactics that prevent, rather than promote, the achievement of animal liberation. “The Nonhuman Animal rights movement”, she affirms, “is a social justice endeavor that is flooded with a number of irrational tactics that run counter to scientific evidence”. The author, therefore, presents a peculiar analysis of this movement in order to promote what she think is a “rational” approach to animal ethics.

While the main aim of the book is worthwhile – it consists in constructing “a coherent and effective path” for animal liberation –, the author’s polemic tones prevents the reader from concentrating on the main argument. However, notwithstanding the polemic tension, Wrenn is still able to highlight some of those factual risks that exist inside animal protection organizations – as the risk to focus too much on stability, on fundraising, on professionalization, bureaucratization, and non-profitization to the detriment of animal protection – that could have been more strongly addressed if the study would have progressed in an analytic way.

As she acutely points out,

Professionalization brings with it many complications and compromises. It also works to naturalize particular tactics and goals which come to dictate the “common sense” of Nonhuman Animal advocacy [...]. Organizations prioritize tactics and goals that are best suited to fundraising and organizational longevity, not necessarily those which would be better adapted to dismantling speciesism. It is therefore problematic to take for granted the efficacy and appropriateness of popular tactics promoted by these groups. Attention should be paid to whether or not tactics work for liberation and, to a much lesser extent, their economical potential. Advocates should be accountable to other animals, not to funding agent.

In the very first pages of her work, she proposes a singular critique of the multifold world of animal protection. She accuses the major US charitable organizations of misusing the money they get to help animals and, more seriously, affirms that they thrive on the same abuse they pretend to oppose:

Nonhuman Animal suffering is a commodity that keeps both industries and non-profits (animal charities) in business [...]. A vegan world means PETA, HSUS, Farm Sanctuary, Mercy for Animals, Compassion Over Killing, Vegan Outreach, and many other donation-driven Nonhuman Animal aid groups would have to downscale considerably or perhaps even close up shop.

Therefore it immediately appears how the book, rather than proposing a constructive critique of what could be implemented, tends to create divisions and separations inside the animal protection universe. It is not unusual that different factions among the charitable movements tend to focus on their different strategic plans, opposing each other, rather than caring for the main objective of their agenda.

Wrenn, in fact, opposes the “professionalized organizations” with the more radical faction to which she belongs, vegan abolitionism. She offers the reader what she thinks is the right approach to the issue, that is a more radical “feminist” abolitionist one – that to her represents the only way to reach the very goal of animal liberation. Her belief in abolitionism is so strong that she vehemently discredits every other form of animal protection, as vegetarianism and welfarism, defined as unuseful and misrepresented perspectives, imbued of post-speciesist ideology.

The author affirms that the current animal rights movement is based on a sexist, capitalistic, neoliberalist, theistic, sexist, white-centered vision of the world, to which she opposes what she describes as “a vegan, intersectional, anti-capitalistic, secular, and *evidence-based* approach”. Animal ethicist, she says, are “commonly elevated to superstardom in activist communities” but they “develop tactics though thought experiments rather than evidence-producing scientific experiments”. To these *philosophers*

she opposes a *scientific* approach to animal issues, as if science could offer answers to the manifold quandaries life continuously presents.

If the issues raised by the authors are worthy of attention, in the whole the book represents a missed opportunity. I wish in future the author will be able to offer a more balanced analysis of those problems that really exists inside the Animal rights advocacy movement. The book, in fact, acutely detects some of the leaks existing in this system and this represents its mayor merit.

