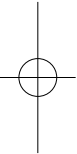




Book Review

Jeon Uiryeong [Jun EuyRyung] 전의령. 2022.
『동물 너머: 얽힘·고통·타자에 대한 열 개의 물음』
[Beyond animal: Ten questions on entanglement,
suffering, and others]. Paju: Dolbegae 돌베개.
189 pp. ISBN 9791191438543 ₩13,000

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Over the last few decades, non-human animals have burst into our discourse, actions, and lives. Dogs and cats have become companion animals rather than pets, sharing our residential spaces and exchanging affection with us; animal abuse has become frequently reported in the media; and veganism has been presented as an alternative lifestyle that reduces animal suffering. In this movement, often represented by the concept of “animal rights” and “animal welfare,” animals tend to be depicted as beings to be given care and compassion by humans.

Beyond animal: Ten questions on entanglement, suffering, and others by Jeon Uiryeong is a timely guide to understanding the issues surrounding animals from a broader context and to considering the complexity of relationships between humans and animals. Starting from animals living within or close to human residential areas, the book explores animals in diverse situations, including farms, zoos, and the so-called “wild.” The author provides striking examples of animal life in the contemporary era and connects them to recent academic discussions within and outside

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anthropology.

The main thrust of the book is that, as its title clarifies, it not only examines animals themselves but tries to look “beyond” them. What Jeon means by looking beyond animals is going further than disclosing the tragic situations they are sometimes found in, or urging direct action, but adjusting our viewpoint to grasp the whole picture of the tangled web that human and non-human animals are caught in. Here, the dichotomy between the two is critically examined, revealing the untidy lines that connect them, on the one hand, and, on the other, the inner diversity among human groups.

The book consists of two parts. The first, titled “Entanglement,” examines the nonlinear relations between humans and animals by focusing on companion animals, such as dogs and cats, and particularly on stray cats living in an apartment area under redevelopment. The author shows how the act of caring for animals is given meaning within the tangled web of capital and media that construct the conditions and practices of our daily life. Here, the seemingly intimate relationship between caring humans and cared-for animals is situated within the context of capitalist urban life.

The second part, titled “Suffering and others,” investigates the historical and social context in which the suffering endured by animals has become a critical issue. Reflecting on the connection between animal suffering and humans implicitly or explicitly involved in it, the author argues that the human-animal relationship needs to be reinterpreted by considering the inequalities in human society in terms of power, class, and identity. In dealing with images of animal suffering, such as those displayed in campaigns by global dog rescue organizations or blood sports in different regions, the author pays attention to the practice of marginalization, such as regarding Asian countries and working-class people as uncivilized in their treatment of animals.

The book helps us understand why we feel uncomfortable considering animal issues only within the dualistic view that divides animals and humans. It enables us to approach the tangled lines that connect different groups of humans and their effect on connected animal lives. Here, humans are not conceived as a homogenous group but rather as divided into different sub-groups struggling against each other within hierarchical systems. While there are people frightened by the cruelty of butchering farm animals, there are others who do that work for a living. While there are people who take care of orangutans as foreign volunteers, there are natives for whom that work provides subsistence.

A reader might be left questioning the shift in the perspective advocated by the author. Although it is certain that we need to consider the intricacy of human-animal problems beyond focusing on animals only, this effort might carry a risk of “humanizing” animal issues by asserting human problems as more urgent and critical than those of animals. In other words, paying attention to the suffering of humans beside the suffering of animals is undoubtedly required, yet human suffering cannot be compared to the amount and the intensity of animal suffering, as in the case of a slaughtering worker and a slaughtered animal.

Nevertheless, the author’s attempt to go “beyond” animals widens our view, allowing us to embrace variously positioned subjects participating in the making of our world and to reflect on ourselves not as members of an abstract human race but rather as situated in a particular context. It would be good if this way of going “beyond” animals could also return to animals and go “beneath”—deeper into the conditions of their existence. But perhaps this task should be left to the reader. Now that the entangled threads are identified, there is a possibility of reweaving them to create better conditions for the world where we, human and non-human animals, live, suffer, and die.

