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**Sunaura Taylor (2017). *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*.
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As the title suggests, Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*, explores intersectionalities between disability rights and animal justice. While the book is academic, in the sense that it is thoroughly researched and situated in both in disability studies and animal justice literature, Taylor writes from an inviting first-person perspective. This choice of first-person, combined with her use of short provocative chapters and the startling insights she reveals, provoked in this reader a sense of discovery akin to reading well-crafted mystery novels.

Taylor begins by describing a set of realizations she had as a young child. The first of these realizations involved witnessing the horror of chickens "dying, slowly being cooked" (xiii) on a large transport truck during a hot summer day. She describes the second realization, brought about by falling three times in short succession while attempting to dance, as suddenly understanding "that's what handicapped means" (3). These realizations, she explains, led to her eventual activism for animal justice (Taylor and her siblings became vegetarians almost immediately after witnessing the chicken truck) and eventually disability rights (involving with her life-changing participation in her first disability rights protest in 2003).

Taylor describes the image of the chicken truck as continuing to haunt her into adulthood, motivating her to investigate the conditions at a nearby chicken processing plant and then to recreate the scene on a large mural in her work in her MFA program. Taylor's careful prose links disability rights and animal justice activism, while her passion and her artistic sensibilities reveal

this connection as less and exploration in theory and more as a sort of kinship. The cover art she created for the book is exemplary of this kinship, depicting the figures of a human in a wheelchair and a cow and employing an effect that blurs the discontinuities between the images. In the text itself, Taylor describes how she has often created self-portraits depicting herself in her disabled embodiment surrounded by animals (these portraits can be found on her website <http://www.sunaurataylor.org>).

Other exemplary sections include her deconstruction of the so-called “mercy killing” of a “disabled” fox by a resident living near a Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Centre. Taylor explains that the fox, who like Taylor herself, had arthrogryposis, had an unusual but nevertheless functional gait and, one might presume, a fairly usual quality of life for a fox. The fox had normal muscle mass and “the remains of two rodents and bones from a larger mammal mixed with partially digested apple” (23) were found in the fox’s stomach indicating it hunted successfully. Invoking the disability studies observation of the ableist “better off dead” trope, Taylor describes how despite these functionalities the fox’s non-normative ambulation was seen as indicative of a suffering so profound that its death was the only merciful option. In this manner, and with frequent reference to other compelling cases, Taylor continually lays out and links compelling histories and ongoing legacies of ableism and speciesism.

In another chapter, Taylor reveals a strange vintage brochure from the 1940s/50s aimed at factory meat production employees. The brochure portrays animals with slings and crutches and instructs employees to handle the animals on the killing floor gently, for the sake of the meat. This pamphlet reveals that the process of meat production has always provoked some sense of anxiety over the treatment of animals, though an anxiety often linked to profit. In terms of broken kinships to nature, Taylor describes how the U.S. military’s poisoning of the land in her

hometown resulted in her being born with arthrogryposis. Another section describes how cruel and short-sighted factory farming conditions, such as cramped cages, overcrowding, selective breeding for food production, and filth, create disabled animals and sometimes animals whose industrially-spread infectious diseases become so unmanageable that they are subject to (often at the behest of trade agreements) mass culls.

Addressing the possibility for greater kinships, Taylor points out the many ways that, despite speciesist claims that is impossible to know their will and capacities, animals frequently tell us they “want” to be free of their cramped enclosures and spared the manifold forms of suffering that constitute the various ways they become meat (62). In describing the ways she, and other people with disabilities have been referred to derisively as animal-like or having animal characteristics because of their non-normative presentations, and also how she and other disabled people have sometimes reclaimed these sorts of labels for reasons of transgression, or entrepreneurship, Taylor highlights additional kinships. The text concludes, without spoiling the ending by giving too much detail, in an ironic and poignant vignette regarding Taylor’s experiences of solidarity and kinship with a uniquely complex animal companion she had adopted for the purpose of its being a service dog.

An additional strength of the book is Taylor’s engagement with other voices and thinkers in animal justice/disability rights conversations. She presents the views of individuals and organizations such as PETA, Temple Grandin, the humane meat movement, and, most strikingly, Peter Singer, with a sort of Gademarian (2004) interpretive charity that allows the reader to see these ideas in their full intelligibility before eloquently and perceptively advocating for more connected and progressive understandings of animal rights and disability rights, and the connectedness essential to making both discourses more inclusive.

At times witty, whimsical, and frequently highly personal, *Beasts of Burden* does not stridently reveal itself as a work of activism. At its heart, however, this is exactly what it is. In an unusual but highly effective style and tone that reflects its larger claims of the importance of resisting ableism and speciesism and honoring diversity in ways that matter, this book occupied my conscience, made me question my assumptions, and enlarged my view of inclusion.

References:

Gadamer, H.G. (2004). *Truth and Method*. (J. Weinheimer & D.G. Marshall Trans.) London: Continuum.