BOOK REVIEW

Mariam Motamedi Fraser, *Dog Politics: Species Stories and the Animal Sciences*

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My dog, Laszlo, hates leashes. He loves people and enjoys running with friends. But in a city with strict leash laws, Laszlo's opportunities to frolic are limited. Sometimes, on a leash, he snaps when dogs get close. Laszlo is 'leash-reactive': he refuses to comport with human expectations about his behaviour. Then again, I too would hate being leashed. Mariam Motamedi Fraser suggests that Laszlo's challenges highlight the profound difficulty for any dog to become 'socialised "enough" to cope with the demands that are placed upon them' (p. 29).

Dog Politics focuses on the grand scientific story about domestic dogs: that they are defined by their relationship *with* and responsiveness *to* humans. The story has three parts: dogs were the first domesticates, their speciation and domestication were virtually simultaneous, and evolution with humans established a special bond. Fraser calls this the canine 'species story' (p. 2). She argues that it is far less coherent than is widely assumed and has deadly consequences for dogs. There is no such thing as 'the dog', we might say, and this is a book about it.

Fraser assails the 'species story' in systematic fashion. Chapter 1 draws on animal training and behaviour literature to argue that the 'natural' dog–human bond is the product of significant labour. The bond is not a given – it fails, or is failed by, many dogs (p. 36). Chapter 2 turns to the species story, where Fraser rejects dog–human co-evolution. Like others, including Michael Worboys, Julie-Marie Strange and Neil Pemberton, Fraser emphasizes the role of dogs in Charles Darwin's thinking. The chapter then turns to contemporary debates about canine speciation. Covering significant ground in a short space, *Dog Politics* cannot give all competing theories adequate room, but its caution about universal claims about dogs is welcome.

Fraser encourages wariness about scientizing the human–dog relationship but misses an opportunity to engage Edmund Russell's attempt in *Greyhound Nation* (2018) to rethink human–dog history through scientific concepts. For Russell, hewing to 'species' and a capacious understanding of evolution allows us to denaturalize the idea of a singular dog and perceive alternative ways in which humans and dogs shaped each other's development. Because Fraser also seeks a path to considering individual animals, this conversation could have been extremely productive.

Chapter 3 detours into the history of animal behaviour, describing how individual animals become 'generic species representatives' (p. 100). Many behaviour studies are not, Fraser insists, truly representative. Chapter 4 returns to the human–dog bond, analysing two popular books depicting dogs as, 'inherently, creatures of "the bond"' (p. 137).

Drawing on Jocelyn Porcher's analyses of animal labour – while disavowing labour as a proper interpretive frame for animal activity – Fraser insists that 'bond' stories are 'a pseudo-ethical balm, applied to a political wound' (p. 144). There is a paradox in accusing Clive Wynne (the author of *Dog Is Love*) of ignoring power relations, since he coined the term 'super-dominance' to articulate them, but Fraser's broader point is that stories of canine reliance on humans preclude us from asking what canine life might be like without us.

Chapter 5 turns to laboratory research with dogs, asking how the species story becomes a methodological problem for researchers. The chapter suggests that researchers could gain from embracing researcher–animal intersubjectivity, even if they are unlikely to do so. Here and elsewhere, the book focuses on popular science more than on scholarly literature, but popular science *does* shape how many people view dogs. Chapter 5 stresses Jessica Pierce and Mark Bekoff's *A Dog's World* (2021). Although Fraser distinguishes her position from Pierce and Bekoff's, their commitment to thinking about a world of dogs-by-themselves, of pet life as captivity, and their refusal of generalizations about 'the dog' parallel Fraser's own commitments.

In Chapter 6, Fraser historicizes scientific criticism of 'species' (somewhat confusingly, as Chapter 2 explored speciation). The chapter strikes an ambivalent note: 'I am less concerned with the "truth", or not, of species, and more with how species, and especially species stories, *work*' (p. 206). Yet in Chapter 7 Fraser adds, 'Should a case be made, then, against species, as it is against "animal"? I believe it should, although *how* to make that case … deserves some reflection" (p. 231). By reserving final judgement on 'species', the book leaves readers in mild limbo: we are encouraged to keep the concept, but in the destabilized form of 'species stories'. Like 'race', 'species' frames and structures individual lives (p. 232). Ending with a turn to Alfred North Whitehead, Fraser seeks a way to think about canine individuality and entanglement without reifying the 'bond'.

Dog Politics is a lively read that raises important questions. Readers might still wonder, do species stories really preclude considering individuals? Are dogs threatened most by their 'species story'? Fraser notes that we think of humans as individuals first and species members second, but dogs as species first, individuals second. Yet what about the modern obsession with individual dogs and breeds? Taking Fraser's own example of pit bulls, social media teem with meme-ified examples of characteristic "staffy" (Staffordshire bull terrier) behaviours as well as paeans to each dog's individuality. Fraser's emphasis on the species story results in less comparison between 'species', 'breed', 'type' and 'individual', which all shape how people think about dogs. Fraser notes, 'Pit bulls are *already* a type': but if so, they are also already more than their species, differing from, say, golden retrievers. Simplistic generalizations about 'the dog' and belief in distinctive breed traits comfortably coexist. This is not to reject the book's premise: the species story contributes to human failures to maximize canine well-being, but it is one of many pieces, not least among them a profit-seeking economy that sells human–dog companionship in toys and treats and discourages dog owners from giving their companions (let alone themselves) the space and time needed for true actualization. The problem of animal welfare is the problem of social order.