One of the fastest-growing areas of research in recent years has been Animal Studies, an interdisciplinary endeavour that seeks to dismantle the ‘great chain of being’ understood as a hierarchy, which places human beings at the top and all other animals further down the line, depending on their level of complexity when measured against human standards. This entails a decisive shift in perspective: humans become part of the animal world; our gaze is that of a participant of animal life, not merely an intelligent observer. *Animals and Other People* is one of the recent crop of books published about literature, which proceeds from this basis: it considers representations of human and animal life side by side, the philosophical and political concepts that gave rise to them and examines the way literary form both portrays and determines animal and human representations.

This is thus not a book that is straightforwardly about the representations of animals in the literature of the eighteenth century. Neither is it an overview of the literature of the period. Instead the author examines how concepts like life, personhood, individual versus species, and society are constructed by selected scholars, such as Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau, and creative writers like James Thomson, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Anna Barbauld etc. How are human subjects constituted after Descartes, how are they differentiated from animals, and how are animals, in turn, differentiated from things and mechanical contraptions (*pace* Descartes)? And how do creative writers respond?

The first chapter deals with James Thomson’s use of personification to create an inclusive, domesticated society of humans and animals, a move which constructs animals as people, but perhaps does not acknowledge difference between species
and which retains the understanding of culture/civilisation as ‘good’ and nature as potentially dangerous. The author then moves on to discuss the concept of the creature and reads *Robinson Crusoe* as testament to the insecurity of the human-animal boundary, and the anxieties that may arise from that. Chapter Three focuses on Swift’s use of satire in *Gulliver’s Travels* to shed light on the question of how, if at all, human beings are set apart from other beings. Are human beings to be understood as individuals or as representatives of the species, just as we commonly think of animals? Chapter Five addresses the troubling figure of the child, who still has to learn human morality and be enculturated into society, and who thus appears to be closer to the apparently amoral world of the animal. The chapter looks at how the children’s literature of the period seeks to educate children into virtuous citizens by means of teaching them kindness to animals (i.e. to those weaker than them). It also discusses how Rousseau turns this process on its head in his novel *Émile*, arguing that it is society which is amoral, not the child, because it is unequal and corrupt. The book closes by taking another look at how Barbauld’s poem “The Caterpillar” complicates the relationship between humans and animals and the moral preconceptions that underlie them.

*Animals and Other People* is an immensely valuable addition to Animal Studies scholarship. Occasionally (and I do mean occasionally) the style is a little wooden, the author preferring conceptual precision over clarity of expression. However, even if it is not the easiest read in the world, the reader who perseveres is richly rewarded. The chapters speak to the available secondary literature and to each other, thus allowing a picture to emerge of the various ways in which writers of the eighteenth century deal with the living world around them and the formal means they use to do so.

[601 words]

Author: