



The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications

Aaron S. Gross

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Through an absorbing investigation into recent, high-profile scandals involving one of the largest kosher slaughterhouses in the world, located unexpectedly in Postville, Iowa, Aaron S. Gross makes a powerful case for elevating the category of the animal in the study of religion. Major theorists have almost without exception approached religion as a phenomenon that radically marks humans off from other animals, but Gross rejects this paradigm, instead matching religion more closely with the life sciences to better theorize human nature.

Gross begins with a detailed account of the scandals at Agriprocessors and their significance for the American and international Jewish community. He argues that without a proper theorization of "animals and religion," we cannot fully understand religiously and ethically motivated diets and how and why the events at Agriprocessors took place. Subsequent chapters recognize the significance of animals to the study of religion in the work of Ernst Cassirer, Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Jacques Derrida and the value of indigenous peoples' understanding of animals to the study of religion in our daily lives. Gross concludes by extending the Agribusiness scandal to the activities at slaughterhouses of all kinds, calling attention to the religiosity informing the regulation of "secular" slaughterhouses and its implications for our relationship with and self-imagination through animals.

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