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Book Reviews

Laura Wright, *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015, 232 pp., ISBN 9780820348568

Sandra Shapshay (ed.), *Bioethics at the Movies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, 400 pp., ISBN 9780801890789

Environmental degradation, climate change, various health threats, among which are Ebola and Coronavirus, and many other issues related to the environment and human-nonhuman interaction foreground bioethics as one of the key concerns permeating our sociopolitical and cultural lives. The role of the human on the planet, and the very idea of being human, should be revisited today to minimize the effects of multiple crises that jeopardize the existence of all. Bioethics is one tool through which to explore these issues. Two important books that can assist academics, scholars and general audiences worldwide in recognizing the significance of bioethics are Sandra Shapshay's (ed.) *Bioethics at the Movies* and Laura Wright's *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*.

Published over a decade ago, Shapshay's *Bioethics at the Movies* has never been more urgent than it is today. The book works particularly well with Wright's *The Vegan Studies Project*, which considerably expands the discussion on veganism, the human-animal relationship, and the practice of meat-eating that *Bioethics at the Movies* only briefly addresses in Nathan Nobis' "The Babe Vegetarians: Bioethics, Animal Minds, and Moral Methodology." Both *Bioethics at the Movies* and *The Vegan Studies Project* throw into relief the moral aspect of humanity's actions and behaviors with regard to humans and nonhumans that lead to discrimination, (neo)colonization, exploitation, abuse, and destruction. The books thus emphasize the role of bioethics in understanding the existing inequalities in various spheres of human and nonhuman lives and argue that bioethics is a potent instrument through which to fight discrimination and speciesism.

Bioethics at the Movies is particularly intriguing due to its discussion of such notion as a “person” (Shapshay xv). What Shapshay terms as “a person”, meaning “a full member of the moral community, a significant object of our moral concern” are essentially all humans and nonhumans (xv). Placing this issue at the heart of its discussion, the book explores various bioethical concerns that directly and indirectly influence our political, social, cultural, economic, and medical choices, decisions, and preferences. To specify, *Bioethics at the Movies* analyzes how we (mis)interpret fetuses, animals, and robots: Are they individuals that deserve equal rights, or are they non-human beings that are inferior to humans? Based on these (mis)interpretations, as contributors to the edited collection argue, such issues as abortion, vegetarianism and veganism, and artificial intelligence, among others, gain new meanings. To broaden this discussion and reinforce its multifaceted nature, *Bioethics at the Movies* also addresses the problem of biotechnology, particularly in the questions related to reproduction, and meditates upon the question of “medical intervention and the quest for the good life” (xvi). Death and age are also tackled in the collection, especially with regard to the role of medicine in our lives, various perceptions of disability, and the (in)ability to make death a conscious choice. Finally, the book brings to the fore the role of ethics and culture in questions related to bioethics. Through these complex theoretical and cinematic explorations of bioethics, *Bioethics at the Movies* fulfils its main purpose: to “clarify, refin[e], and challeng[e] the ethical positions people hold on a great many bioethical topics” (1).

Wright’s *The Vegan Studies Project* contributes to our understanding of bioethics through its meticulous investigations of cultural and sociopolitical meanings of meat and the process of consuming animals in various ways. Wright provides a complex discussion of veganism (and vegetarianism), focusing specifically on the construction of its meaning in the post-9/11 era. While the West has always resisted to what Wrights terms as “a vegetarian ethic,” the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 considerably challenged the perception of veganism in the Western world (33). Foregrounding 9/11 as “a moment during which veganism became both visible and highly suspect,” Wright claims that immediately after the attacks, “[n]ation, religion, and diet all functioned as the criteria by which we posited our difference – our very humanity – from the animality of our attackers” (30, 37). It is in this discussion that Wright not only reveals how one’s diet can become a legitimate “identity category” but also emphasizes the changing meaning of the animal that began to signify threat and evil (31). Choosing not to consume animals in various ways – from eating meat and eggs, to drinking milk, to wearing fur, and beyond – essentially denoted in post-9/11 U.S. one’s refusal to conform to “the confines of what constituted an agreed-upon ‘American’ identity” (31). *The Vegan Studies Project* thus largely contributes to our understanding of bioethics today, particularly through its explorations of “the animal” and consumption. The book foregrounds “a profound belief that animals can and do suffer and that to inflict suffering on them in order to render them into food and clothing (items that are necessary to humans but that do not necessarily need to

come from animals) is inherently and unequivocally wrong” (32). It also illustrates the difficulty of making the choice to be/become vegan, accentuating that negative associations with veganism permeate Western culture and sustain the belief that veganism is a de-humanizing category. Wright elucidates: “[T]o live one’s life without consuming or wearing animal products, particularly in the United States, is such a major shift that to choose such a lifestyle essentially is to place oneself perpetually on the extreme margins of society. It is to invite questions, criticism, alienation, suspicion, and misunderstanding” (32).

Both *Bioethics at the Movies* and *The Vegan Studies Project* are essential reads for academic and general audiences interested in the issues related to the environment, the human-nonhuman interaction, and the very idea of being human today. They are important contributions to the existing scholarship in environmental studies, future studies, and film studies, and useful resources for instructors and lectures who want to teach bioethics, particularly from the perspectives of cultural studies and film studies.