

Jessica Pierce. *Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$26.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-20989-0.

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In *Run, Spot, Run*, Jessica Pierce examines the reasons why we keep pets, and the joys and consequences of pet keeping. She also poses ethical questions about the obligations we have to animals in our care. As a bioethicist, Pierce is uniquely positioned to speak on pet keeping. Her previous books have examined the moral lives of animals and end-of-life care for aging pets. In *Run, Spot, Run*, Pierce challenges readers to think about why we keep pets and what forms these relationships take, and encourages readers to confront the sometimes uncomfortable aspects of pet keeping. She discusses the ethical questions that arise—from the day-to-day decisions of what we feed our pets to the related large-scale environmental impacts of pet keeping, such as the impact of pet waste materials. She encourages readers to think about what pets require from us, what happens when pets become commodities, and whether we should keep pets at all.

Pierce's volume is divided into four sections, each of which examines a different facet of pet keeping. She keeps the ethical ambiguity of modern pet-keeping practices front and center without downplaying the significance of pets in the lives of many people. "Our relationship with our pets may involve dominion, but this is clearly not the full story. Anyone who has ever experienced a close bond with an animal knows this deeper

truth: these are not mere objects, and affection is far too facile a description of the feelings we have for them" (p. 17). Throughout the book, Pierce is careful to align herself with readers who may be pet owners themselves. She provides personal background and anecdotes about her own family's lengthy pet-keeping history, and weaves in her own thoughts about, and experiences with, pet keeping.

She opens with an examination of what types of animals are considered pets in the modern world and why we as a society have a (nearly universal) draw to keeping animals. Next, she examines the various ways in which we live and interact with pets—from talk to touch, health impacts, and questions and dilemmas that inevitably arise from living and interacting daily with different species. For example, in chapter 23, Pierce describes the novel *Room* (2010) by Emma Donoghue, where a young boy and his mother live in safe, clean, and humane conditions but are captives within the confines of a single room. She challenges readers to draw a parallel between this human horror story and the lives of some captive pets, who similarly live in good conditions but do not have liberty to leave. "As research into animal cognition and emotion further expands our understanding of animals' inner lives, the more ethically problematic holding them captive becomes"

(p. 102). Pierce is particularly critical of the pet industry, in that she views it as perpetuating the conditions in which keeping pets is an activity with “high value” for people but with low benefit and high cost for the thousands of animals raised to be sold and treated as products.

In the final chapters, Pierce poses the question of which animals should be kept as pets, approaching it in human ethical terms, asking “First, what particular burdens do captivity and confinement place on a given species? And second, what are the possibilities for reciprocal and mutually fulfilling companionable relationships with humans?” (p. 206). She notes that the positive aspects of pet keeping are evident: “The human desire to associate with other animals, to observe them and get inside their worlds, lies at the heart of pet keeping, and this impulse to connect seems vitally important to nurture in ourselves and in our children” (p. 219). She suggests that what we need to challenge is not pet keeping but some of the forms that pet keeping takes, particularly when we recognize certain practices as exploitative and harmful to animals themselves.

Pierce draws on current scholarship from human-animal studies, sociology, psychology, animal science, and historical sources to deeply examine this long-held human practice. Portions of the book are bound to make readers uncomfortable, particularly within chapters detailing the violence, neglect, and exploitation that can take place within the supposedly “safe” environment of a family home. One theme that would have been a positive addition within this volume would be the author’s opinion on animals in therapeutic settings. Such animals as guide and seizure dogs, therapy animals, and more could fall under the classification of both “pet” and “worker,” and this topic could easily have encompassed an entire chapter.

Many of the topics raised in *Run, Spot, Run* could potentially provide a solid springboard for additional research and new ways of thinking

about pets. In the chapter “Speaking for Spot,” Pierce calls for specific linguistic changes, like “companion animal” instead of “pet,” and for reducing the use of animal insults. Her observations echo philosophers and activists who have made similar calls to examine how we use language to reframe the ways in which we think about animals. In chapter 14, Pierce states that although there is research on the health benefits of animals for people, there is virtually no research into the health effects of pet-human interactions *on animals*. Finally, she mentions recent technological advancements like “smart fur” that responds to human touch, and that electronic pets and toys could fulfill pet-keeping impulses without the “collateral damage” to real animals (p. 208). She recognizes that this could promote the idea of pets as toys but, at the same time, may also reinforce the idea that animals have lives of their own and should not simply be objects of amusement. All of these examples could be used by a variety of interdisciplinary fields to further examine the ways we use, talk about, and frame our thinking about not just pets but animals in general.

From current pet keepers, to those thinking of getting an animal, and to scholars engaged in the study of animals in human culture, this volume serves as a close examination of the moral questions surrounding a widespread human practice. One of the strengths of the work is the way in which Pierce brings the ethical issues of pet keeping into the light while maintaining an empathic and approachable voice. The resulting tone of the book allows the reader to remain engaged with the content while confronting the uneasy questions she poses. *Run, Spot, Run* is overall a well-researched and welcome addition to the study of human-animal relations.

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