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"Gut Buddies: Multispecies Studies and the Microbiome"

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Recent work in the life sciences presents the human as a superorganism, composed of and kept alive by diverse microbial kin. We learn that this life is changing fast as a result of modern lifestyles and that missing microbes are causing epidemics of absence. There is a growing interest in restoring components of the microbiome. This article explores some of the implications of these developments for multispecies studies through a focus on helminth therapy—the selective reintroduction of parasitic worms as "gut buddies" to tackle autoimmune disease. It first traces the visceral vectors, cycles, and assemblages through which people are differentially entangled, disentangled, and reentangled with helminths. It then analyses these entanglements with reference to literature on the science and politics of (auto)immunity. The article places helminth therapy in the vanguard of new ways of enacting immunity. Scientists writing about helminths are reworking binary, martial models of immunity as the defense of the self to consider immunity as the tolerance, recruitment, and creative experimentation with microbial symbionts. Here immunity is enacted in contrasting multispecies assemblages that illustrate the communal and the immunitarian characteristics of contemporary biomedicine. In conclusion the article reflects on how the probiotic relations of helminth therapy suggest new ways of thinking of companionship and hospitality as more-than-human, but not posthuman, achievements. (Text from author's abstract)

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