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Review of Creaturely Theology -- Edited by Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough

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Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals, eds. Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough, SCM Press 2009 (ISBN 978-0-334-04189-4), x + 294 pp., pb £30

The collected essays comprising *Creaturely Theology* are announced as a bold entry of properly theological voices into a new ‘wave’ of conversation about animals—one concerned with *how* (as opposed to *whether*) animals matter and how they are presented, absented, and represented in language. While expressing gratitude to earlier scholars like Andrew Linzey, editors Celia Deane Drummond and David Clough lament that theologians have been comparatively slow (relative to colleagues in other disciplines) to take up ‘the question of the animal,’ even though articulations of the relationships between humans other animals—or, more abstractly, humanity and animality— frequently use the divine as a point of triangulation. Given that philosophers, feminists, and political theorists (Midgley, Adams, Derrida, and Agamben, for examples) have been attending to ‘God, humans, and other animals’ for some time, they argue that the analyses of theologians are an overdue addition to the conversation. Insofar as before God the category ‘creature’ functions as a larger frame containing any difference between humans and animals, the ‘question of the animal,’ they suggest, must be addressed by a ‘creaturely theology’ which calls into question the human production of ‘animal’ alterity.

If these essays are the opening lines for theological voices in a drama where several scenes have already passed, the plot itself is nevertheless too young to know whether theologians will have a major or a minor part in the unfolding events. Still, this new character (or chorus?) enters with confidence, and speaks with gravity and clarity. Regrettably, it is only possible to comment on some of the essays, and that all too briefly. I hope, however, to conclude with a few questions intended to draw theologians further out onto the stage.

Both Celia Deane-Drummond and John Berkman search through the intricacies of intellection and instinct in Thomas Aquinas’ anthropology in order to retrieve a more positive Thomistic theology of animals. Berkman argues that Aquinas’ understanding of the impulses of animal irascibility leaves more room for a quasi-rationality in animals than do Aquinas’ explicit comments. He claims that despite Aquinas’ absolute distinction between humans and other animals (on the basis of human rationality), Aquinas actually attributes strikingly *little* rationality to most human behavior. In that vein, Deane-Drummond notes that moral intuition (for Thomas, an exclusively human affair) often proceeds by means of gut intuition. If *these* intuitions are to be considered rational, perhaps the exclusion of animal ‘instinct’ from rationality is arbitrary. By different paths, both Deane-Drummond and Berkman come to endorse Alasdair MacIntyre’s contemporary line of Thomistic thought—who recognizes the virtue of practical rationality in the unique practical concerns and habits of various animals.

David Clough draws out inconsistencies in Martin Luther's writings—not to rescue him from his own harsher passages regarding animals by recovering a more amiable Luther-in-hiding—but instead to insist that the tensions themselves ought to 'anagogically' lead those of us historically downstream of Luther to seek a resolution of the same tensions in a new context. Luther, in other words, was living under and living out a tension which he could not have recognized, but which we have the opportunity to resolve—to the benefit of creatures around us.

David Cunningham takes up the category 'flesh' to argue that all creatures might bear the *imago dei*. The dogmatic function of the *imago dei* has been, no doubt, to set humanity off from other creatures in an absolute manner; and no doubt, within the Christian tradition the *imago dei* has often served as an empty signifier which baptizes broader cultural conceptions of human uniqueness. But perhaps it is not necessarily so! Articulating the *imago dei* in Christological terms (rather than anthropological) allows Cunningham to claim that all those creatures bearing the 'flesh' which the *Logos* assumed participate in God's image. Taking this concern for God's presence to 'flesh' in a different direction, Denis Edwards finds inadequate the theories of redemption currently in circulation (sacrifice, satisfaction, substitutionary atonement) and advocates for a return to the ancient model of 'deification through incarnation,' particularly as developed by Athanasius. Such a 'fleshy' understanding of redemption could broaden the scope of Christ's work to incorporate 'kangaroos and chimpanzees, kookaburras and dolphins' (p. 82).

Aaron Gross demonstrates the inseparability of three modes of human encounter with animals: the concrete interaction with individual animals (ethics), the abstract conception/construction of 'animality' and 'humanity' (ontology), and the socio-political institutions (broadly defined) in which human-animal relations are embedded (structures). Ameliorating the plight of animals in and around human society requires taking all three levels into account. So, for example, multiplying ethical imperatives against cruelty may somewhat address the individual and the structural levels, but leaves untouched the conceptual framework that legitimates (and perhaps *generates*) cruelty in the first place.

Stephen Clark's essay whimsically explores of the notion that our fairy stories—populated as they are by elves and giants—may represent the vestigial memory of a time when *homo sapiens* (or some ancestor) lived alongside other hominid species. This thought leads to an even more speculative exploration of the possibility that strands of humanity might evolve (or be engineered) in divergent directions so that, once again, 'we' live side by side with creatures *like* 'us,' but *unlike* us. The *theological* intent of these reflections is to erode the emotional and ideological levee around the notions that 'humanity' and 'religiosity' are coterminous categories and that religious agency and significance belong to humanity alone.

Christopher Southgate argues that ‘hands-off’ (Wilderness) approaches to conservation are naïvely parochial given the catastrophic scale of climate change. Rather than presuming that ‘nature’ will care for her own so long as humans leave well enough alone, we can no longer deny that human culture is already implicated in the flourishing or demise of wild places and wild creatures. Concretely, Southgate insists that an adequate response must include plans for (and in some cases implementation of) ‘assisted migration’ programs in which animals are coercively relocated to distant latitudes and preserves where extinction is not a foregone conclusion.

In conclusion, I remain ambivalent toward arguments which rest the conclusion that animals should be accorded equal moral or theological significance on the premise that there is some reflection of humanity to be found in animals—be it rationality, religiousness, moral agency, rights, emotion, or altruism. While many essays in this volume convincingly employ forms of this argument, I have several cavils. First, is *integrating* animals *into* current cultural, moral, or even religious structures actually a project that will do them much good? We ought to be mortified by our collective tolerance of cruelty to animals, but is the consideration given to fellow human beings categorically better? Second, if it might be shown (as Gross makes some headway in doing) that concepts at the heart of modern political order (e.g. rights, moral agency) originate from an attempt to distinguish humanity *absolutely* from other creatures, then perhaps there is added urgency in the project of interrogating and redefining our basic categories (human, animal, moral, rational, spiritual) rather than laboring to expand our current categories in order to include (more) animals. Recommended for anyone with a basic theological proficiency, this book is an excellent introduction to the research trajectories of various creaturely theologies to be expected in coming years.

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