



Christopher
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God's Creation Wild and Violent, and Our Care for Other Animals

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In this article I give examples of violence, and ingenuity in the service of violence, in predation in the natural world. I consider various types of argument that ascribe this violence to different types of fall-event, and show that these arguments are to be rejected on both scientific and theological grounds, and that an honest theology of wild nature needs to concede that God is the author of an ambiguous world. I further reject, however, the idea that violence in nature licenses human violence, and propose instead an eschatological ethic of Christian care for creation based on ethical kenosis after the example of Jesus and the values of the Kingdom, an ethic much influenced by Romans 8:19–22.

On a bend of the Wye Valley in the English county of Gloucestershire is a spectacular place known as Symonds Yat, where the river runs through a steep gorge and round a tall island of rock. The place is famous for its wild peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*). I have had two visits to Symonds Yat. On the first, a peregrine could be seen sitting in a tree that protruded from a cliff, and not three feet away sat a crow, natural prey for peregrines. It was a reminder that predation takes place only in specialized circumstances in which the predator needs to feed, and in which its abilities allow it to outperform the prey in some way.

But it is the second visit that so sticks in the mind. Then I saw a peregrine wind itself up the sky until it was almost out of sight at the head of the valley. A pigeon flew across the gorge by the promontory and passed behind the rock. The peregrine could suddenly be seen in a long flat stoop, tightening and accelerating as it neared the island. It caught the pigeon as it emerged from the other side of the rock, knocking it down into the woods. My guess is that the pigeon, literally, never saw what hit it. As a piece of ambush,

based on calculating—from perhaps a mile away—the precise moment at which the pigeon would emerge from cover, it was stunning. Whether the pigeon was killed outright, or only maimed, and whether the peregrine found its victim among the trees, I could not see. The prey may have endured a long slow death, if the fox was slow to come.

In my home city of Exeter, there are wild peregrines, nesting on the spire of the church of St. Michael and All Angels, Mount Dinham. A friend of mine is involved in a long study of their diet and territorial behavior. He recently reported that the peregrines had been cooperating to kill a number of hawks of a type common in the area, known as a common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*, N.B., this is a different bird from an American buzzard). The first falcon stoops onto the buzzard, causing the hawk to flip upside down to show its talons, the usual response to mobbing

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by other birds. As it rights itself the buzzard is unprotected, and the second peregrine strikes, aiming to hit the buzzard on the back or head. Seriously disabled by its injury, the buzzard now falls victim to the first peregrine stooping again for another strike. Again, the prey creature may suffer intensely, if only briefly, as its powers are destroyed by violent attack and it falls traumatized to the ground. This new observation of peregrines cooperating and coordinating attacks¹ is also a reminder that cooperation, which is sometimes advanced as more characteristic of evolution than the competition Darwin so stressed, is always itself a form of disguised competition. Natural selection always has losers; cooperation merely changes the nature of the winning entity.²

The first part of this article reflects on humans' relation to those sufferings in the nonhuman world that have no human cause. The problem for Christian thinkers is that it was, presumably, God who created the evolutionary process, and therefore God who is responsible for the creaturely sufferings of a world "red in tooth and claw." I have written extensively on the implications for Christian theology of taking Darwinian evolution seriously, and update my thinking here.³ In the second part, I go on to consider what implications there might be within such a theology for our treatment of nonhuman animals.

The Problem of Suffering within Evolution

I say that it was presumably God who created the suffering in evolution. It is important to recognize the strands of thought that try to avoid that unpalatable conclusion. Very few thinkers who accept the scientific consensus on evolution seek to deploy the ancient answer that human sin introduced violence into the world. The chronology of such answer is hugely problematic, given that we now know that animals were tearing each other apart, and suffering from chronic disease, millions of years before modern humans evolved. The only two thinkers still to invoke human sin as the dominant cause of creaturely suffering within an evolutionary framework are (a) William Dembski, with his strange model of retroactive causation—this seems to me to make the problem worse rather than better, since Dembski's God inflicts suffering on myriad creatures because

humans will one day sin; and (b) Stephen Webb, who isolates Eden from the rest of the world to make human moral choice determinative. But there is not the slightest evidence that his proposed "dome" ever existed, or that any humans ever lived in a violence-free world (or yet, of course, that two humans were, in any meaningful sense, the origin of the species).⁴

It remains to consider proposals that invoke some other type of fall-event, or fallenness, to "get God off the hook" of blame for the suffering within evolution. Perhaps there was "fallenness" introduced into creation without a definite fall-event. This is the line taken, in effect, by Celia Deane-Drummond in her writing on "Shadow Sophia," and by Nicola Hoggard Creegan in her analogy with the parable of the wheat and the tares. Evil exists in creation, for which God is not to blame, but of which the cause is ultimately mysterious.⁵ Unless some cause can be identified, however compatible with the rest of Christian theology's understanding of the world, such proposals seem to lack explanatory power, and God remains "on the hook."

Michael Lloyd has also made a proposal in this area. He comes to the conclusion that it is unthinkable that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ could be the author of violent processes, so the best explanation in his view is the rebellious angels.⁶ This is obviously tempting—it taps into long-established patterns of Christian thought in which what is ugly about the world can be laid at the door of Satan and his coworkers. But we should be very careful about embracing such an explanation. What it would imply is that God set out to create straw-eating lions, and was unable to do so because of the angels. That is a much more powerless God than I for one believe in, and hardly seems consonant with our understanding of the God who was able to bring everything into existence from absolutely nothing, as is the classical Christian confession. Also, the notion of a straw-eating lion seems dubiously coherent, for the very good reason that the very evolutionary processes that made lions the violent, flesh-ripping creatures are the *same processes* that made them the strong majestic creatures to which humans have always looked as symbols of power and majesty. The same processes that made peregrines magnificent flyers also made them the destroyers of pigeons and maimers of buzzards. It is a common Christian mistake to dissect out what we love about life and attribute it to God,

and then to take the uglier bits and attribute them to Satan. To do so in respect of the natural world is both theologically dubious, and risks closing down the conversation with science that is so vital both to Christian learning and to apologetics.⁷

Neil Messer has made a very sophisticated effort to get God off the hook of blame for evolutionary suffering, writing of the “nothingness” that, in the thought of Karl Barth, necessarily attends any process of creation. It is this nothingness that results in violent processes that God could not have willed.⁸ The reader will see that this proposal suffers from the same difficulties as attend the proposals of Deane-Drummond, Creegan, and Lloyd. The nothingness is inherently mysterious; indeed, Messer says that it has no real existence, and yet it is puzzlingly able to prevent the sovereign God acting as God chooses. And again, Messer’s account begs the question as to where, in a single set of processes as science understands them, we can split off what God willed from what God did not.

I am always intrigued by Messer’s work. But I regret that his desire, which I thoroughly share, to give full weight to the Christian doctrinal tradition, when combined with his predilection for the theology of Karl Barth, leads him away from a willingness to learn from science about the way things really are. I do agree with him, however, that the theologian of creation faces very difficult choices in this area. In Messer’s Barth-based view, there is a resistance, inseparable from the possibility of creation, but having itself no ontological status, that prevents God creating a violence-free world. In my own position, there is also a presumption of a sort of constraint on God. Because my faith tells me that a loving God created this cosmos out of absolutely nothing, and my understanding of evolutionary biology (and of thermodynamics) tells me that, in a cosmos such as this, suffering is an inevitable concomitant of sophisticated sentience, I presume that the only way a God of love could have created a world of complex and feeling creatures—a world, moreover, capable of being redeemed by love—was by a process to which suffering was intrinsic. The constraint is therefore a plausible, if tentative, inference from theological reflection on the science, rather than a mysterious theological claim stemming out of Barth, and behind him the tradition that evil is only a privation of the good (*privatio boni*).⁹

I freely acknowledge that there are difficulties either way. Both strategies seem to compromise the absoluteness of the sovereignty of God—it is to circumvent this that I postulate that the constraint on God is a logical one, even though the logic is beyond human powers to demonstrate. Where I have a particular problem with Messer is that I cannot see *which* properties of the natural world can be assigned to the operation of resistance to God. This is an important test of the two views, because without these distinctions, a *privatio boni* approach to natural evil defaults to a vague assertion that the world is not all it should be, an assertion lacking all explanatory power. The “only way” position, in contrast, is clear that values and disvalues are inseparable—it is the same processes that lead to the refinement of creaturely characteristics that also lead to suffering and extinction.

In his most recent essay in this area, in which he responds to my work with characteristic generosity and care, Messer alludes to the antitheodicist’s critique found, for example, in Kenneth Surin, Terrence Tilley, D. Z. Phillips, and John Swinton.¹⁰ Antitheodicies include the challenge that to suppose that God makes some sort of calculation as to the balance of goods and harms in a world that might be created is to reduce God to a moral agent like human beings.¹¹ It is not for us to put God on hooks, or to measure God as though God were a creature. They also include the yet more disturbing thought that to justify violence in the world as caused by God is to run the risk of desensitizing humans to the reality of particular acts of violence,¹² or worse, justifying human violence against other creatures.

Both of these are serious charges, and both stress the importance of our responding, as moral agents, to the experience of suffering creatures rather than defaulting to armchair speculations. The charges are particularly telling, I believe, against theodicies that attempt rational demonstrations from first principles of the plausibility of the God of theism. But the person of faith who, out of that faith, seeks to explore the ways of God with the world, knowing that her answers will only ever be partial and provisional, is not judging God from an armchair, and she knows that God can never be considered as though God were a creature. I note in passing that the two types of antitheodicist charges, in a sense, operate in contrary directions—the first is concerned that God

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might be reduced to comparison with humans; the second, that humans might elevate themselves to godlike status and behavior. So a solidly constructed theology of the distinction between God and the world should be antidote against both.

Moreover, when we consider suffering in wild nature through evolutionary history, we are thinking about myriad sufferers to whom we can be of no help (and some to which we might but perhaps should not—we could shoot out the peregrines of St. Michael's or euthanize their chicks, but buzzards would then pounce on more rabbits in the city's suburban gardens). It thus seems to me valid to pursue a very careful (and always humble) theological exploration of evolutionary theodicy, in the hope, among other things, that it might promote good ethics in the relation to our treatment of nonhuman creatures, the subject to which I shall turn in the second half of this article.

Messer also commends Swinton's fourfold response to evil in that fine book, *Raging with Compassion*. The vocation of Christians, on this account, is to resist evil by such distinctive practices as lament, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, and hospitality.¹³ These are hugely important resources in human relationships, but the difficulty in applying them in any straightforward way to wild nature reflects just how different our theological ethics needs to be when considering the nonhuman creation in its ordinary operation. Was there lament in my heart for the pigeon at Symonds Yat? Perhaps a flicker, but it was accompanied by an enormous admiration for what evolution has made possible in the peregrine falcon and a sense of zest that creation contains such wonders. Was there lament for the buzzard at Mount Dinham? Perhaps more, because I so delight in the soaring of buzzards over my own valley. But again, I can only admire the intricacy and skill of the peregrines' tactics.

Forgiveness, too, does not seem quite pertinent when human agents are not involved, though David Clough has made a determined case for the sinfulness of other animals, and Joshua Moritz has argued toward the same conclusion.¹⁴ I must set down here that I am completely unpersuaded by this case. There seems to me no demonstrable parallel to the human sense of knowing the right and yet doing the wrong, or yet of knowing (from revelation) what God might desire and turning along the opposite

path, and these, to my mind, constitute the essence of human sin. Nor are humans actors in the drama of these natural processes in a way that would involve us as forgivers.¹⁵ So, in considering purely the actions of peregrines and other predators, forgiveness does not seem relevant.

Thoughtfulness, the concentrated attention of the contemplative, is highly pertinent to this work at the boundary of theodicy and theological ethics. I wrote above of my instinctive responses to scenes of predation involving creaturely suffering. But our instincts can be honed, refined, and indeed modified by scientific understanding of creaturely behavior and by patient observation. This will also inform our sense of the space and habitat creatures need to be themselves in an increasingly human-crowded world.¹⁶

This brings me to hospitality. This is a tricky term, because it might seem to play back into the anthropocentrism that has so dogged our relation to nonhuman creatures. To say that we should evince hospitality might suggest that the earth was *our* particular home, and other creatures only guests, instead of the reality that we are the destructive latecomers into a biosphere that has been a home for other creatures (albeit a temporary one for almost all species that have ever lived) for billions of years. But perhaps the concept merits more exploration. We may be latecomers, but in most contexts on the surface of the planet we have the power to choose whether to give space to other creatures to be themselves or take all that space for ourselves, ending up with no tigers or rhinoceroses, no leopards or lemurs. The terrifying prediction of the Stern Review on climate change was that extinction levels might be as high as 25–60% in mammals at a rise in global mean surface temperature of 3 °C.¹⁷ If anything, our assessment of the likelihood and impact of climate change has become yet more alarming since that report was written. We are taking other animals' space subtly and obliquely, but in terrifyingly deadly fashion, by allowing our forcing of the climate to eliminate habitat throughout the world. This is the reverse of hospitality. I return to the concept of hospitality below, in relation to our treatment of domestic animals.

There remains the charge, the most troubling of all those I have listed, that to attribute the creation of violent processes to God is to desensitize us to violence or, even worse, to license violence. I need to

challenge this inference for precisely the same reason that the critics of theodicy have such reservations about our explanations of evil. We are not God. There is no parallel in human life to the choices God made about the creation of the cosmos. We cannot imagine those choices, except in believing they were made out of love.

It is proverbial in ethical theory that we cannot argue satisfactorily from the way nature is to principles of right action. What I have argued above is that we cannot, either, argue from what God has done in creating the world to how we should act in it as creatures. Where we are given, as Christians, clues as to how we should act, they come especially from two sources, our knowledge of Jesus the Lord, and the scriptures as interpreted for us by the Spirit in the light of Jesus's teaching and example. Again, insights from those sources teach us the importance of lament, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, and hospitality, all of which we can see in Christ and in the Hebrew scriptures he loved. But again, they remind us that we are not God, and cannot bring anything into existence out of nothing. We therefore cannot draw any inference from the constraint on God, postulated above, that values in the biosphere necessarily arise only in association with the disvalues of violence and suffering.

The other powerful teaching the New Testament, and particularly the Pauline letters, gives us is that the cross and resurrection of Christ mark the hinge of history, the entry into the eschatological age in which God will bring in the new creation, of which we are already a part as Christians, but for whose final consummation we can only long as Jesus taught us to long—"thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

Frustratingly, for the point of view of this issue of the journal, the New Testament gives us very little guidance on how other animals fit into this picture. That they must have a place is clear to me—how barren a place would heaven be without other creatures? How lacking in hospitality, come to that, would be a God who saved into a redeemed life only human beings? How hollow would the great coda of the Colossian hymn seem if "all things" do not find their place with God, when God, as Paul tells us, will be "all in all" (Col. 1:20; 1 Cor. 15:28). But that issue is not the one that engages us here, which is how we

should act toward other creatures in the interim phase in which the eschaton is "already but not yet."

It is natural to turn to that other famous, if enigmatic, passage on the nonhuman creation in Romans 8:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. (Rom. 8:19–22, NRSV)¹⁸

A key focus of the debate about animals is human uniqueness. Our theological uniqueness seems clearly established by Genesis 1:26–28 and Psalm 8. But all parties in the debate would concede that, scientifically, claims to human uniqueness have been eroded alike by discoveries of abilities in other animals such as language, theory of mind, tool-use, et cetera, and also by the new genetic studies showing that most modern human genomes contain Neanderthal and Denisovan DNA. As so often, science helps us to see that things are more complex than any ancient writer could have imagined. However, foundational texts such as this one from Romans take Christian reflection in a different direction. The issue is not our scientific distinctiveness, but our calling in Christ, our status and role as inferred from eschatological theology. Uniqueness is given by God to humans in order to enable them to participate in God's saving purposes, not for their own status or for them to abuse. This is in keeping with Moritz's recent work on the *imago Dei*, which brings to the fore our election for a role (therefore falling within the "functional" category in Noreen Herzfeld's helpful classification of understanding of the *imago*—and also within the "eschatological").¹⁹

Our Treatment of Animals

So, we are in need of an eschatological ethic that we can apply both to our treatment of wild nature and of domestic animals. I began to develop this in an essay on stewardship published in 2006,²⁰ and in the closing section of my monograph *The Groaning of Creation*. In the latter, I suggested that the key instincts of an eschatological Christian ethic were kenotic. We should have the same mind that was in

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Christ Jesus when he “emptied himself taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). I quote here how I have come to understand the ethical kenosis that should arise from having the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

The first element in such ethical kenosis, after the example of Christ, is what I call kenosis of aspiration. Like Christ, the believer is called not to make of status a “snatching-matter” ..., not to aspire to a status beyond that which is most helpful to other creatures. The essence of a kenosis of aspiration is of resisting the temptation to grasp at a role which is not God-given, not part of the calling of the individual believer or community. The consequence of such grasping is at once to fail to respect fully the status of the other creature, and to fail to receive our situation as gift from God. This is the sense in which I believe the Genesis 3 account of “the Fall” has a profound wisdom to it. It is an account of the tendency in human nature to grasp at more than is freely given, to seek to elevate our status beyond what is appropriate and helpful, to seek to be “as Gods.” So Simone Weil writes: true love means “to empty ourselves of our false divinity, to deny ourselves, to give up being the centre of the world ...”²¹

With kenosis of aspiration, however, must go a kenosis of appetite. It is possible to think of sin as “a compulsion towards attitudes and actions not always of [humans’] own willing or approving,” a power which prevents humankind from recognizing its own nature.²² This may be a compulsion to desire status over against God—the greatest and most pernicious of sins, and therefore the one on which the Genesis 3 account focuses. But it may be for power over others or for sex for sex’s sake or for an excess of intake of alcohol, drugs, food or sensation of whatever kind. All these draw us into idolatry—they make of a substance or experience a kind of substitute god. All drain away the freedom that comes from worshipful dependence on God. Particularly evidently in respect of the ecological crisis, disordered appetite harms our freedom to contemplate appropriately and relate lovingly to the nonhuman creation. Such appetite consumes more of the world’s fullness²³ than is our share. The application of this principle of kenosis of appetite is widespread—it applies to deforestation to expand farmland for excess export crops, but also to the high-food-mile demands of the West which fuel so many unsustainable practices, to the taking of spurious long-haul flights as well as the fritter-

ing away of carbon-intensive energy in so many human dwellings.

A particular aspect of the kenosis of appetite, which links it to the kenosis of aspiration, is the kenosis of acquisitiveness. Just as we must be willing to order our ambitions and our experiences in accord with the freedom of the redeemed order, so we must order our acquisition of the material trappings of life, which again are often acquired at the expense of the well-being of others, be it through sweated labor to make trainers or printed circuit boards, or the mining that delivers exotic metals and other raw materials at great expense to human health and natural ecosystems.²⁴

Romans 8:19–22 is a significant passage also for Andrew Linzey, who like me wants to argue for an eschatological ethic. Linzey’s approach is very important as we turn from wild nature to domestic animals. For Linzey, a sign of our liberty in the Gospel would be to liberate other animals by ceasing to make any use of them for our purposes, whether that be laboratory testing, labor, or food.²⁵ Though this is a very plausible argument, I fear it has theological problems. My issue with Linzey’s theology is that it is—like others we found wanting earlier in this article—based on the notion of a fall from a primordial harmony. I suggested above that all we know about the evolution of the biosphere and of humanity suggests that there was no such event. Moreover, the biblical narrative does not suggest that the eschaton is a return to such an Edenic harmony—it is rather a *new* creation, made possible by the Cross and Resurrection. Eschatological ethics cannot therefore be a retreat from the complexities of relationship that developed within the old creation; rather, it must be about their transformation.

Again, it seems to me that the principal guide for Christians on the path to that transformation must be the example of our Lord and the work of the Spirit in the early church. Radical as that example was in all sorts of ways, we do not see an innovative departure in Jesus’s treatment of domestic animals. The ox may be rescued on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5), but there is no suggestion that it is not to be put to work on other days. Nor is there any suggestion that the radical gesture of the Messianic entry into Jerusalem was further radicalized by Jesus leading, rather than riding, the colt (cf. Matt. 21:5–7). Nor that the Passover can be eaten without a lamb. Jesus, then, does not

abandon those complex relationships that humans have with animals they live with, use, and care for. Rather, relationships worked out within life in Christ must be characterized by those kenotic virtues that I began to outline above.

One of Messer's great contributions to bioethics is his list of criteria for the evaluation of a new proposal in biotechnology. He asks:

- Is the project good news to the poor?
- Is the project an attempt to be "like God," or does it conform to the image of God?
- What attitude does the project embody toward the material world (including our own bodies)?
- What attitude does the project embody toward past failures?²⁶

This can be helpfully applied as a test of proposals for ways of treating domestic animals. Is what is proposed something that exploits the labor of the farmer, or makes her treat animals in ways that degrade both her and them? Is the proposal—crucial question in the light of the distinctions I drew above—"playing God" in the lives of creatures, or does it conform to the sort of kenotic ethic I began to outline above? Does it recognize the creatureliness of other creatures and the giftedness of the material world? Does it recognize that we ourselves are embodied symbionts, absolutely dependent on other creatures for our flourishing? And does the proposal lament and repent of ways in which animals have been treated, such as are so graphically depicted by Michael Pollan in his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.²⁷ Does it—to pick up on Pollan's metaphor—make the walls of abattoirs out of glass, or does it rather hide cruelty away and package neatly and anonymously the products of its industry?

But I submit that there can be ways of rearing and living with domestic animals—and yes, killing them for food—that do pass Messer's criteria. For Messer himself, hospitality is the reason why there is a Christian imperative to be vegetarian. It cannot be hospitable to another animal, in his view, to keep it and care for it when ultimately it will be killed for food. I am less sure of this. It seems to me that farm animals kept under low-intensity conditions, where each can be known by name, cared for throughout its life, and enabled to flourish after the manner of its kind, are indeed the recipients of hospitality. Indeed, hospitality is one way to describe that voca-

tion in farmers that led even men in their seventies to use their compensation money to go out and restock their land after the UK foot and mouth crisis in 2001. That was certainly not an economic decision; it was about a deeply-felt desire for relationship with animals, animals that would not exist otherwise, as they are bred only because of their use by humans. Of course, I recognize that the majority of farming in the Western world is not of this kind, but the principle remains.

An eschatological ethic of animal care, then, will need to be free of the greed and commodification that is currently rife within Western agriculture. It needs to make different calculations about the balance between profit and welfare, not, for example, moving sheep around a country for tiny margins (a practice that greatly contributed to foot and mouth in the UK). It needs to meet Messer's very helpful criteria, being oriented toward the Kingdom of God rather than that of Mammon. It needs, as Anne Primavesi has so helpfully emphasized, to be received as gift rather than grasping as entitlement.²⁸ And it needs—to return to the Romans passage—to be received in freedom from idolatry and compulsiveness so that the freedom of other creatures, within the constraints of the relationship that humans themselves create by domesticating and breeding farm animals, is at its greatest.

Is there, then, anything to be learned from wild nature? Not, certainly, the lesson that success depends on violence—the lesson I am implicitly accused by Messer of wanting to learn—but two other subtler lessons. First, the value of biodiversity. This is so often celebrated and insisted upon by ecologists that it is easy to forget that this is not necessarily obvious. A diverse ecosystem is one rich in relationships (albeit many of them predatory or parasitic). But it is also one rich in strategies for responding to perturbations of the system, such as the advent of a new pathogen or a shift in climatic conditions. Human agriculture has been slow to learn both the importance of the "wisdom" contained within wild-type strains of domesticated crops, and the agricultural (and cultural) perils of monocropping.

One of the great threats of climate change is that it may stress systems too suddenly and radically for their frameworks to respond. Humans can, up to a

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point, move individual species, and may have to as the effects of climate change become more severe,²⁹ but it is extremely difficult to move, or yet to engender, the complexity and diversity that can arise in a system in evolutionary time. Hence the need for even an eschatological ethic to contain the precautionary wisdom that has been such a helpful theme of Deane-Drummond.³⁰ Wild nature also gives us a sense—increasingly elusive as humans change the world and do all sorts of things that would have seemed impossible even a generation ago—of what is “natural,” and hence what is likely to “work” biologically. Failure to heed these lessons, and the search, once again, for easy profit, led to the feeding of animal proteins to cattle, and hence to the BSE/“mad cow disease” crisis of the 1990s.

At a time when, two years after huge concern over bird-borne influenza, the Ebola virus is devastating nations in Western Africa, it is very evident how easily human (and other animal) health can be jeopardized by pathogens jumping species, and therefore, again, how prudent humans need to be in their choice of the ways by which we feed ourselves and the animals on which we rely. (The same considerations, also, are one of the reasons why, sadly, an element of experimentation on other animals will continue to be necessary, albeit in the most prudent, careful, and limited form possible.)

So, the lessons wild nature teaches us tend to be precautionary—it is a vast reservoir of “wisdom” as to “what works” in the biosphere. But what the New Testament teaches us is the radical character of the possibilities that arise when humans come into their freedom and pursue their vocation humbly and kenotically. It is this combination of an ethic of practical wisdom, combined with a vision of human transformation in which humility and concern for the poor are at the forefront, that is the particular contribution Christian ethics can offer into our present dire predicament. I have tried to show that this ethic can be derived from consideration of what ecology on the one hand, and the New Testament on the other, tell us about life—past, present, and future—and that these conclusions survive the realization that the violence and suffering in nature are products not of a fall-event, but of the way God gave rise to the amazing world in which we live and move and have our being. ◇

Notes

¹N. Dixon and A. Gibbs, “Cooperative Attacks by Urban Peregrines on Common Buzzards,” *British Birds* 108 (2015): 253–63.

²This is important to note in relation to Sarah Coakley's fascinating 2012 Gifford Lectures on cooperation, see S. Coakley, “Sacrifice Regained: Evolution, Cooperation, and God,” <http://www.faith-theology.com/2012/05/sarah-coakley-2012-gifford-lectures.html>.

³C. Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); ———, “Rereading Genesis, John and Job: A Christian's Response to Darwinism,” *Zygon* 46, no. 2 (2011): 365–90; ———, “Does God's Care Make Any Difference? Theological Reflection on the Suffering of God's Creatures,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, ed. E. M. Conradie, S. Bergmann, C. Deane-Drummond, and D. Edwards (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 97–114; and ———, “Cosmic Evolution and Evil,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*, ed. C. Meister and P. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴W. A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2009); and S. Webb, *The Dome of Eden: A New Solution to the Problem of Creation and Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010).

⁵C. Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 185–91; and N. Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶M. Lloyd, “Are Animals Fallen?,” in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals in Theology and Ethics*, ed. A. Linzey and D. Yamamoto (London: SCM Press, 1998), 147–60; and ———, “The Humanity of Fallenness,” in *Grace and Truth in a Secular Age*, ed. T. Bradshaw (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 66–82.

⁷This objection must also be raised against an article just published by Nathan O'Halloran, S.J. See N. O'Halloran, “Cosmic Alienation and the Origin of Evil: Rejecting the ‘Only Way’ Option,” *Theology and Science* 13, no. 1 (2015): 43–63.

⁸N. Messer, “Natural Evil after Darwin,” in *Theology after Darwin*, ed. M. S. Northcott and R. J. Berry (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009), 139–54. This thinking is taken up in some important work on animal theology—see D. Clough, *On Animals: Volume 1 – Systematic Theology* (London: Continuum, 2012).

⁹Going back to Augustine of Hippo, *Enchiridion* xi, available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.iv.ii.xiii.html>.

¹⁰N. Messer, “Evolution, Animal Suffering, and Ethics: A Response to Christopher Southgate,” forthcoming; K. Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); T. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Georgetown, VA: Georgetown University Press, 1991); D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (London: SCM Press, 2004); and J. Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

¹¹Cf. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, 35.

¹²Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 221–57; and Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 27–28.

¹³Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 80–243.

- ¹⁴Clough, *On Animals*; and J. Moritz, "Animal Suffering, Evolution, and the Origins of Evil: Toward a 'Free Creatures' Defense," *Zygon* 49, no. 2 (2014): 348–80.
- ¹⁵I have written elsewhere about humans' priestly role in respect of creation (*The Groaning of Creation*, chap. 6), but for me this involves the offering up of all creatures' praise, rather than any element of declaring forgiveness to them.
- ¹⁶D. G. Horrell, C. Hunt, and C. Southgate, "Pauline Ethics through an Ecotheological Lens," chap. 8 in *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).
- ¹⁷N. Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- ¹⁸For detailed consideration of the interpretation of this passage in an age of ecological crisis, see Horrell et al., "The Groaning and Liberation of Creation (Romans 8:1–23)," "The Construction of a Pauline Hermeneutical Lens," "An Ecological Reading of Pauline Theology," chaps. 4, 6, and 7 in *Greening Paul*.
- ¹⁹J. M. Moritz, "Evolution, the End of Human Uniqueness, and the Election of the *Imago Dei*," *Theology and Science* 9, no. 3 (2011): 307–39; and N. Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).
- ²⁰C. Southgate, "Stewardship and Its Competitors: A Spectrum of Relationships between Humans and the Non-human Creation," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2006), 185–195; and cf. also Southgate, "The Call of Humanity," chap. 6 in *The Groaning of Creation*, 92–115.
- ²¹Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. E. Craufurd (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 159–60.
- ²²Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 112.
- ²³I avoid the term "resources" here as that carries the implication that the good things of the world are defined by their availability for use by human beings.
- ²⁴Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation*, 101–102.
- ²⁵A. Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994); and ———, *Animal Gospel: Christian Faith as Though Animals Mattered* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998).
- ²⁶N. Messer, *Selfish Genes and Christian Ethics: The Theological-Ethical Implications of Evolutionary Biology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 231–33.
- ²⁷M. Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
- ²⁸A. Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- ²⁹C. Southgate, "The New Days of Noah? Assisted Migration as an Ethical Imperative in an Era of Climate Change," in *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*, ed. C. Deane-Drummond and D. Clough (London: SCM Press, 2009), 249–265.
- ³⁰For example, in C. Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

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"For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." –1 Cor. 15:53



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AUDREY BOWDEN

Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering and Director of the Biomedical Optics Group, Stanford University



EDWARD DAVIS

Professor of the History of Science, Messiah College



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Professor of Neurobiology, Stanford University



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Los Alamos National Laboratory, Principal Investigator for the ChemCam Instrument, Mars Curiosity Rover

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