Reading the Hebrew Bible With Animal Studies by Ken Stone (review)

Philip J. Sampson

Journal of Animal Ethics, Volume 13, Number 2, Fall 2023, pp. 222-223 (Review)

Published by University of Illinois Press

sions of the term? Jess Ison comes closest to engaging this question when she concludes that "'queer identity' is a political term" as opposed to a biological one and that "extending queerness" might have detrimental impacts on queer humans who continue to face discrimination (pp. 215–216). Staging a more intentional discussion of this debate would have been a welcome addition to this first-of-its-kind anthology.

Reading the Hebrew Bible With Animal Studies. By Ken Stone. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018. 227 + viii pp. Paperback. $25.00. ISBN: 978-1-5036-0375-2.)

PHILIP J. SAMPSON
Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics

This book is exactly what it says it is on the cover. A sensitive and detailed reading of selected pericopes from the Hebrew Bible, interacting with current approaches to animal studies, including theorists such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Jacques Derrida. Of course, contemporary texts have little in common with those written more than 2,500 years ago. Moreover, the wide cultural gap radically affects basic presuppositions such as the place of animals. For us, animals (except "pets") are usually dead, dismembered body parts; cellophane-wrapped food products on the shelf. For the ancient near-Eastern authors of the Hebrew Bible, they were live animals good for labor, dung, milk, and transport; occasionally for meat; or else a threat to life and livelihood.

Stone makes this heterogeneity a virtue, indeed, a strength. It echoes, he argues, the diversity of the texts that constitute the Hebrew Bible itself as well as the interdisciplinary nature of animal studies, "the variable forms of life that we refer to collectively if simplistically as 'animals,'" and even the multiple differentiations between humans (p. 14). In fact, he proposes "multiple interpretative approaches" rather than a quest for a single meaning; an openness to differences that forces reflection (p. 93). He thereby seeks to illuminate aspects of the biblical texts that would otherwise be obscured by a wrongly supposed familiarity and, conversely, to shed light on the relationships between human and other animals that we mistakenly take for granted.

The book has seven interrelated chapters, each rereading a biblical pericope or theme in dialogue with selected questions from contemporary animal studies. From the role of goats in the narrative of Jacob, to the silent dogs of Exodus, and to the distinctive "zoological gaze" of the ancient near-eastern farmer and shepherd, we are drawn into discussions of domesticated "companion species," their free-living brethren, and animals as "subjects" rather than "objects." This might sound like a collection of essays rather than a unified text, which would, indeed, be in line with its honoring of heterogeneity. But it is more than this. Unifying themes run through the book, which make it more than a postmodern celebration of difference—themes that are at the heart of the growing scholarly interest in the interaction between human and other animals.

As Darwin argued, there would be no humans without other animals, and the kind of animals we are derives from the kind of animals they were. Stone draws on Lévi-Strauss's observation that animals are good to think with, to make a more cultural case. "[W]ithout the presence of the specific animals . . . [in the Hebrew Bible], neither biblical theologies nor the religions of Judaism and Christianity . . . would exist in anything like their current forms" (p. 4). Indeed, neither would those cultures which have been shaped by these religious traditions. Animals have provided both symbols we can use to speak about the architecture of culture and also the material means for

the production and reproduction of culture itself—the foundation as well as the superstructure. Moreover, human cultures would look, at the least, very different without continued interaction between humans and other animals. The biblical story that Stone traces is one that emphasizes interdependence rather than affirming human exceptionalism, thereby making animals "agents of history, active participants," not objects of the background or context (p. 29). It demands serious consideration of animals, always already present as constitutive of our culture.

Such co-constitution of humans and our companion species assumes difference, a boundary between the mutually constitutive parts. Indeed, (mis)reading the Bible often starts with a rigid boundary between "humans" and "animals," supposedly exemplified by God giving humans "dominion" over the animal creation (Gen. 1.26f). As Stone points out, the text itself challenges our desire to draw firm lines. Human and other animals were created on the same "day," share the same earth and the same (vegan) diet, and each is made a "living soul" (*nephesh chayah*). Moreover, the animal creation was not made as one category in the general singular, but as different creatures; there are multiple differences between and within both human and other animals. This heterogeneity subverts any simple desire for a definition of the "human" that relies upon a firm boundary between us and them. There is not one boundary, but many.

Stone is a theologian and, consequently, has a wider horizon than is common in animal studies. The Bible, after all, points beyond its text to the Creator of all, and God is disclosed in the heterogeneous world of animals. Humans were made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1.26), but, while unique, this is not the marker of exclusivity that it is often taken to be. Other animals also "reveal something about God that is distinctive to the particular forms and actions of each species" (p. 144). Moreover, human and other animals share fundamental qualities and capacities. All were created with "living souls" (Gen. 2.7; Gen 2.19) and join together in praise of their Creator (Ps. 148); all are saved (Ps. 36.6). Stone explores the possibility that this is more than metaphor, that animals are religious "subjects" rather than objects, that biblical religion "did, in certain respects at least, include animals as well as humans in its purview" (p. 18). If so, then all animals are to be included within those rights and privileges commonly reserved for humans, and all live within the same ethical community.

In the context of a growing interest in the multiple relationships between human and other animals, this is an important contribution to the literature, which should enjoy a broad readership. Although I would have liked to have seen more interaction with others working at the intersection of theology and animal ethics, it nevertheless brings a range of disciplines into conversation, not only theological and animal studies, but also ethics, primatology, and environmental scholarship—"Noah's ark as 'the first Endangered Species Project'" (p. 18). It will accordingly interest a range of both religious and secular scholars, including theologians, environmental scientists, animal ethicists, and literary theorists.

Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity. By Tom Tyler. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. 235 + xii pp. Hardback. £90.00. ISBN 978-1-5179-1018-1.)

RANDY MALAMUD
Georgia State University

Tom Tyler opens his quirkily engaging book discussing how a (relatively) ancient video game, Nintendo's 1984 *Duck Hunt*, pro-