
Book Review

Brianne Donaldson, *Creaturely Cosmologies: Why Metaphysics Matters for Animal and Planetary Liberation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), xxiii + 151pp., \$84 (cloth), ISBN: 978-1-4985-0179-8.

In Brianne Donaldson's book, *Creaturely Cosmologies*, animal ethics and the question of being human are considered in new and inviting ways. In search of a better metaphysics sensitive to our contemporary world and its challenges, Donaldson explores two 'creaturely cosmologies' (namely Jainism and process-relational philosophy) because each, rather than centering the human, situate humanity as within and always-already a part of the greater community of fellow creatures (p. xi). What is human then is not to be understood as over-against and unique from the multiplicity of others on our planet, Donaldson argues, but rather as forever evolutionarily entangled with nonhuman creatures.

Donaldson begins by patiently engaging the field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS), which complicates and unhinges anthropocentric assumptions about humanity. While humanist paradigms distinguish human from nonhuman via difference (i.e., complicating the binaries between humans and non-humans) and identity (i.e., an animal ethics founded on the similarities between humans/nonhumans), new perspectives in CAS presented by Donaldson concentrate on creaturely *indistinction* as a way forward. In contrast to approaches of difference and identity, indistinction involves setting aside the presupposed essences of what it means to be human/nonhuman, so that instead of situating non-humans into anthropocentric valuations, humans are liberated from the metaphysical perspective of superiority over against nonhuman animals. Such a move extends its influence across all notions of human identity and culture, Donaldson argues, to the extent that history moves away from a short-term and human-centric view toward a long-term biocentric perspective. When consummated in such a way, history is seen as experiences shared between humans/nonhumans across 'zones of voluntary association and mutual affect that alter the experience and development of those involved' (p. 10).

Donaldson next discusses the process-relational philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead by resituating the Western philosophical binary of subject vs. object, opting instead for a worldview that emphasizes contextual relationality. Process-relational philosophy holds reality to be constituted by events (mutual interactions and processes shared between subjects and objects) all within a *panexperiential* cosmology (Donaldson's phrase). Anything/one can be a subject and object, according to Whitehead, depending on the contextual mode of activity between both in any given event. Objects are not merely inanimate things, according to Donaldson, but 'provocations in themselves within a plane of relationality' (p. 23). Objects influence,

act upon, and mutually interact with subjects who are always already in a process of becoming. Since panexperiential reality involves the becoming (or unfolding) of subject/object experiences, Donaldson's view of indistinction recapitulates the traditional binaries of mind vs. matter, living vs. nonliving, and subject vs. object.

Donaldson then brings the work of quantum physicist Karen Barad into the conversation, as the latter likewise argues that reality is performative and experiential rather than static or pre-existent. Similar to Whitehead, Barad's cosmology is one of relational becoming, where even sub-atomic particles assume a relative agency. For Barad, observers and things-observed intra-act, which is to say they move, mold, and inform one another.

Next, Donaldson explores the sentient substance of the Jainist *jīva* (i.e. the immortal, vital essence of living things) and how this is fostered by the non-sentient Jain metaphysics of motion, rest, space, matter, and time. Although the *jīva* is sentient and distinct from non-sentient materiality, all substances in Jain cosmology are mutually interactive and necessary. Donaldson is careful here to differentiate the *jīva* from Western concepts of the human soul, spirit, and body, in so far as knowledge, action, and the mind are considered unique and essential to humankind. 'By correctly understanding the *jīva*', on the other hand, 'one sees that every life form is an expression of multiple aspects of reality' sharing sentient/non-sentient substances and permanent/impermanent modes and qualities (p. 63). Reality, according to Jain cosmology, is an experiential process of 'relational multiplicity that is causally linked' between humans and nonhumans, and comprised of seemingly contradictory realities (p. 71).

Donaldson presents an ontology of 'intra-active becoming' during discussions that synthesize the ethical implications of Jainism and process-relational thought (p. 75). In this way, *Creaturely Cosmologies* is more of an exploration of planetary and animal ethics for a contemporary world, where humans might 'provoke new practices and inspire new perceptions' of creaturely and planetary non-harm moving forward (p. 91). Although *Creaturely Cosmologies* is explicitly metaphysical, readers will find Donaldson much more concerned with how practices impact actual bodies on our planet. Donaldson's elucidation of Jainism, for example, should act as a helpful introduction for students of religion, yet practicing Jains may also find Donaldson's perspectives refreshing if not challenging. Of note, Donaldson presses her fellow Jains to extend their nonviolent practices beyond the insular realm of the personal and into socio-political systems of which Jains are tacitly (or actively) a part. Elsewhere, Donaldson forges new pathways for the ancient religion to converse with contemporary philosophical perspectives. For example, she uses the concept of *syādvāda*—an epistemological relativism that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of infinite variety—as a corrective to Derrida's post-structural relativism.

In the conclusion of her book, Donaldson takes seriously the uncomfortable implications of becoming according to Jainism and process thought, which always involves loss. Although the past can never be redone or undone, both systems make possible the re-making of a future world that mitigates inevitable losses.

The book's greatest contribution may lie in its attempt to move readers beyond Western binaries and into a diverse field of new possibilities and creaturely entanglements. Jainism and process-relational thought, for example, reject the binary of self-perceiving, agential subjects over against inanimate objects (perceived as things). Instead, Jainism and process philosophy hold ontology to be a process of agential and relational becoming wherein reality is active and not passive. Using these two foci,

Creaturely Cosmologies converses with exciting and emerging perspectives in quantum theory, animal rights activism, and environmentalism while also offering fresh approaches to the works of Derrida, Foucault, Butler, Deleuze, and others who might be familiar to readers of this journal. As a whole, *Creaturely Cosmologies* is an accessible body of work for any wishing to appreciate an initial foray into Critical Animal Studies, Jainism, and Process-relational philosophy.

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