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## Book Review

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Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey (eds.), *Animal Theologians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 452 pp., \$39.95 (pbk), ISBN: 978-0-19-765555-9.

In *Animal Theologians*, Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey collect a formidable collection of scholarly essays on the animal theologies of twenty-four historical and contemporary figures. The edited volume is divided into three sections representing different eras of animal theology. Part I: Prophets and Pioneers features figures from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century beginning with Pierre Gassendi and ending with Henry David Thoreau. Part II: Social Sensibility covers the nineteenth and early twentieth century beginning with John Ruskin and ending with Mohandas Gandhi. Part III: Deeper Probing begins in the mid-twentieth century with Albert Schweitzer and ends with an analysis of the editor Andrew Linzey's own animal theology.

Though this volume covers a lot of ground, its scope was limited by two main factors. First, the volume's authors and its animal theologian subjects are mostly white, Christian, and male. The editors incorporated chapters on some Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu figures and there are a handful of women among the contributors and the animal theologians, but the focus on 'theologians' limits the inclusion of diverse voices that may not fit within this narrow framework, thereby reinforcing Christian hegemony. There are myriad Buddhist or Indigenous thinkers, for example, who might have added enlightening perspectives on animals, but likely did not fit within the narrow framework of 'animal theologians', as understood by the editors. The editors define theology as 'an understanding of the inner logic' of a religious or spiritual stance or position and further limit their definition by explaining that the ideal 'theo-logic' should be concerned with animals (p. 2–3). The editors continue, '[r]ather obviously, if God is by definition the Creator of all things, it follows that animals are fellow creatures' (p. 3). The beginning of this 'theo-logic' that ends with the determination that animals have their own worth in the eyes of God is actually not obvious to many religious and spiritual people all over the world, who have different ideas about divinity, personhood, and animals because they do not adhere to the Christian conceptions of creation or God. And the editors themselves reveal an interest in subsuming diverse viewpoints within a broad white, male, straight, and Christian theology when they state that they 'look forward to the day when animal theology as well as Black theology, feminist theology, gay theology, and ecological theology are all unnecessary because religious communities have incorporated them into the theological mainstream' (p. 21). This is a deeply concerning perspective on other religious traditions and the diverse Christian theological subfields that provide necessary critiques of 'the theological mainstream', not with

the goal of becoming part of that mainstream, but instead with the intention of dismantling that mainstream and elevating diverse theological perspectives instead.

Second, the book is overwhelmingly anthropocentric as it emphasizes what the editors call 'animal-sensitive' perspectives, but not animal- or eco-centric perspectives (p. 21). The editors see this inclusion of animals in theology as a step towards liberating 'theology from its own anthropocentric ghetto', but many of the theologians included consider animal sensitivity primarily as a pathway towards human liberation with limited attention to the lives and afterlives of non-human animals. Wesley T. Mott's chapter on Henry David Thoreau's efforts to live in community with animals, Linda M. Johnson's chapter on John Ruskin's ability to know birds by drawing them, Alice Crary's chapter on the impact of the abattoir on Leo Tolstoy, Ryan Brand's chapter on Martin Buber's worldview-changing encounters with his horse, and Serenhedd James' chapter on Frank Buckland's dorm menagerie all provide fascinating perspectives on the ways that living alongside animals shapes their understanding of animals, the world, and themselves. But these animal theologians retained their anthropocentrism even as they allowed themselves to be changed by their animal companions. Daniel A. Dombrowski's chapter on Charles Hartshorne provides an interesting alternative as Dombrowski makes it clear that Hartshorne sees animals as persons and concludes that there is some hubris in the anthropocentrism of the Abrahamic religions (p. 377). But Kathleen Long's chapter on Michel de Montaigne's perspective on elephant theologians stands alone as the only true eco-centric perspective in the volume. Long asks, '[w]hat if animals had their own religions and their own culture, not dependent on our own and not a reflection of ourselves?' (p. 44). She described Montaigne's analysis of Pliny's *Natural History* and his conclusion that '[j]ust because we cannot imagine animal religion does not mean that it does not exist' (p. 48). This lesson from Long and Montaigne aligns with much of the contemporary work in animal studies, which takes seriously the idea that animals have complex and full lives that we cannot yet completely understand. Montaigne was writing in the sixteenth century, so this chapter also serves as a good reminder that making greater strides towards eco-centrism is not only warranted but long overdue.

This volume will be useful for students and scholars interested in the intellectual history of animal theology and the collection's authors do a particularly good job of contextualizing each figure within the religious and social movements of their time. However, it is my hope that this volume serves as an entry point rather than an endpoint to exploring religious and spiritual engagements with animals from diverse perspectives. I hope this volume will motivate readers to continue their research and consider religious traditions and non-human animals themselves as unique, complex, and worthy of understanding on their own terms.

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