

Review of Jennifer L. Koosed (ed.), *The Bible and Posthumanism*. Semeia Studies 74, Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014.

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“What does it mean to be human?” asks Jennifer Koosed in her introduction to *The Bible and Posthumanism*. Moreover, “What should it mean?” (12). These are the driving questions of this edited volume and the larger conversation known as “posthumanism.” Koosed surveys major figures in posthumanism who have influenced the essays in this book. Relationships between human and non-human animals are a recurring concern, from Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975) to Jacques Derrida’s *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2008). Donna Haraway’s works ranging from “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) to *When Species Meet* (2008) probe the limits of human existence. Indeed, the work of Cary Wolfe (e.g., *What is Posthumanism?* 2010) and others push the conversation to think about humanity’s present and future amidst other creatures and agencies. The essays in *The Bible and Posthumanism* show the relevance of this conversation for biblical studies, and vice versa.

The opening essays by Hannah M. Strømme and Denise Kimber Buell highlight the stakes when bridging posthumanism with the Bible. Strømme observes how numerous philosophers from Derrida to Wolfe blame the biblical creation stories in Genesis 1-3 for humanity’s war against the animal. She complicates this by reading the story of Noah after the flood (Genesis 9) as a second creation story where God simultaneously gives animals to humans as food while making a covenant with all creation. Buell uses Derrida and Avery Gordon’s work on *hauntology* and haunting to consider extra-human agencies in worlds both biblical and modern. She shows how nineteenth-century spiritualists understood (in)human agencies much like ancient peoples, contrary to contemporary historians who dismissed both as superstitious. Buell and Strømme illustrate how modern and biblical notions of human, divine, and other are always already imbricated.

Many essays in this volume focus on questions of the animal. Hugh Pyper investigates the animality of YHWH as a lion in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Amos 1:2) in contradistinction to ancient near eastern kings. Rather than excising beast and divine from human affairs, the Israelites exist in dynamic relationship with a sovereign god who is both. Ken Stone examines a different lion by reading Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famous quote, “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him,” alongside the story of Balaam’s ass (Numbers 22-25). Following Vicki Hearnes’s observation that language does not prevent violence, Stone highlights the miscomprehensions that cut across species from the human Balaam, to the ass, and ultimately to God. Eric Daryl Meyer shows how Gregory of Nyssa’s analogical exegesis of Song of Songs, a text filled with animal imagery, attempts to strip the human of its animality to a pure spiritual being. However, Gregory’s exegesis results in a decidedly animalistic human “desire” for the holy. In each of

these essays, (extra-)biblical texts illustrate the slippages between human and non-human despite attempts to assert otherwise.

Several essays investigate the limits of “the human” and its body more broadly. Heidi Epstein explores grotesque musical bodies figured in the Song of Songs which seep into Michal Waszynski's *The Dybbuk*, the 1937 film adaptation of S. Ansky's 1913-1916 play of the same name. Rhiannon Graybill reads Ezekiel alongside Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs and My Nervous Illness* (2000) to investigate the male prophetic body. Ezekiel and Schreber both evidence torturous bodily pain and the limits of language when the body is divinely possessed for prophecy. George Aichele brings together the 2007 film *Lars and the Real Girl* and the Gospel of Mark to explore the artificial nature of human existence. The doll Bianca in the film, like the “sons of men” in Mark's gospel (e.g., Mark 3:28, 10:45), reveals how lines between real and unreal or human and a/inhuman are never clear. Benjamin H. Dunning focuses on anthropologies of Valentinian texts like *The Tripartite Tractate* and the *Excerpts from Theodotus*. Dunning shows how these texts understand the human as potentially composed of three distinct substances (hylic/choic, psychic, and pneumatic), each of which have different sources in creation and connect the human in varying ways to other creatures both heavenly and beastly.

The biblical theme (and practice) of sacrifice provokes several explorations that conclude the volume. Robert Paul Seesengood brings together his experience of hunting a deer, Derrida's encounter with his cat, and a multitude of voices concerning human consumption of animals in the Bible. Seesengood shows how the conflicting biblical perspectives on eating animal flesh resonate with the multiplicity of the animal (*animot*) seen by Derrida and the multiplicity of the human being constituted by countless other organisms. Yvonne Sherwood reads across an array of texts from Leviticus to Prometheus to Agamben along with biblical sacrifices like Jesus' crucifixion or Abraham and Isaac. Sherwood shows how from primordial times to today, “sacrifice is all about clarifying the divisions between god, human, animal, and inorganic matter—and that it is also about dissolving those distinctions” (251). Stephen D. Moore concludes with the book Revelation, where Jesus appears as a lamb walking on four legs (e.g., Revelation 5:6). This murdered lamb rules over humanity as the text both relies on the logic of animal sacrifice while implicitly criticizing human domination over the animal (p. 301-26).

This book is an excellent introduction to posthumanism for biblical scholars and provides diverse models for future exploration. Modern industrial farming and environmental disaster at the hands of humans place an ethical urgency upon such studies. Broader renegotiations of human subjectivity, alongside the recent popularity of zombies and the like, raise questions about what else is taking place. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* suggest that the inhuman processes of global capitalism have sparked many new posthuman possibilities (2000, 215). Perhaps future work will explore how the Bible as object and text contributes to and operates within these globalizing posthuman machinations.

Bibliography

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