

On Animals: Responses to David Clough's Systematic Theology

with David Fergusson, "God, Christ, and Animals"; Margaret B. Adam, "The Particularity of Animals and of Jesus Christ"; Christopher Carter, "The Imago Dei as the Mind of Jesus Christ"; Stephen H. Webb, "Toward a Weak Anthropocentrism"; and David Clough, "On Thinking Theologically about Animals: A Response."

THE PARTICULARITY OF ANIMALS AND OF JESUS CHRIST

by Margaret B. Adam

Abstract. Clough's theological account of animals critiques the familiar negative identification of animals as not-human. Instead, Clough highlights both the distinctive particularity of each animal as created by God and the shared fleshly creatureliness of human and nonhuman animals. He encourages Christians to recognize Jesus Christ as God enfleshed more than divinely human, and consequently to care for nonhuman animals as those who share with human animals in the redemption of all flesh. This move risks downplaying the possibilities for creaturely specific forms of redemption; limiting the cosmic efficacy of salvation in Christ; and losing the particularity of Christ's divine and human natures. Another, possibly less risky, direction to take Clough's insights about creatureliness and well-formed theological ethics might attend to the perverse ways that humans assess the worthiness of human and nonhuman animals by substituting particularities of use and abuse for the particularities of creation and salvation.

Keywords: animals; creatures; flesh; particularity; redemption; salvation; theological ethic; two-nature Christology

In *On Animals: Volume 1, Systematic Theology*, David Clough critiques the line-drawing that supports theological anthropocentrism and denigrates nonhuman animals. He shows that the firm lines we draw between human and nonhuman animals are not as justifiable as we would like them to be. We frequently presume divisions between human and nonhuman animals

Margaret B. Adam convenes the Doctrine portion of ministerial education for the Scottish Episcopal Church and is an Honorary Academic Associate at St. Stephen's House, University of Oxford. She may be contacted at 34 James St., Oxford OX4 1ET, UK; e-mail: margaret.adam@ssho.ox.ac.uk.

that are not consistently supported by Scripture, science, church teaching, or experience. This is not to say that there are no differences, but that there are far more similarities than differences, and we may never know precisely where the ultimate lines of distinction fall. Taxonomies, scriptural narratives, doctrinal discourses, and popular opinions have thus far failed to resolve the issue conclusively. Indeed, as members of God's creation rather than as divine cocreators, we humans lack the perspective with which to perceive and assess all of our particulars and how they compare with those of other members of God's creation. (For the purposes of this article, I am confining my attention to animal members of creation. A richer engagement would address nonanimal members of creation as well.) We cannot stand outside or above creation to get a God's-eye view and sort it out; nevertheless, we do draw lines, based on current perceptions, imaginations, and self-interests.

Clough highlights the lines that are drawn in the interest of sustaining an elevated and redemptive status for humans and a secondary, nonredeemable, status for animals. Often, he notes, we humans claim for humans alone the particulars we like and appreciate; then we identify as nonhumans, as animals, those creatures who do not exhibit the features we have claimed for ourselves. He calls attention to the particularity of nonhuman animals that is lost when we clump them together as a collective trope, without any clear differentiation except that which differentiates them from us. (The second volume will address some of the ethical discernment of practices that follow the processes of differentiation.) And he cautions us not to think that the most important divide is one between human and nonhuman animals. Instead, *the* difference is between God and that which God creates, such that the primary collective trope is the set of not-God: creatures, the set of human and nonhuman animals (Clough 2012, 64).

Clough argues that God created human and nonhuman animals in God's image and that Jesus Christ is incarnate in flesh, the stuff of both human and nonhuman animals, such that God does not limit salvation in Jesus Christ to humans. Nonhuman animals share with human animals the prospect of eschatological reconciliation and the possibility of present life turned toward that reconciliation. Clough proposes that, in order to rectify present and longstanding wrongful human relationships with nonhuman animals, we must let go of the sense of human superiority and the theological basis for that superiority that constrains to humans alone creation in the image of God, election by God, and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If human *and* nonhuman animals are created in the image of God, elected by God for salvation, and redeemed through the creaturely, fleshly incarnation of Jesus Christ, then the distinctive character of humans is not so much a matter of capacity but of a particular divine call: "we have been given our task to live as human creatures and

they have been called to be creatures in their very many different ways” (Clough 2012, 76).

Clough argues that *what* Christians believe about the creation of human and nonhuman animals, the incarnation, and redemption affects *how* humans treat nonhuman animals. If Christians believe that God creates only human beings to be in God’s image and that Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, only saves humans, then they will be inclined to ignore or abuse nonhuman animals. Rather, “the Christian hope must . . . be that the bodies of other-than-human animals are not disposable parts of the current world order, but will be resurrected with human bodies in the new creation. Such a vision of the redeemed bodies of animals—human and other-than-human—should encourage Christians to appreciate that their relationships with other animals in the present is a particular and pressing concern” (Clough 2012, 172). Clough’s argument is that right belief, right vision, encourages right practice. Renewed attention to Christian teaching and understanding about animals can help begin to address the broken relationships among human and nonhuman animals. This is a challenge well worth pursuing, even and especially if we cannot document cause and effect relationships between vision and practice in the short term. A concurrent challenge might ask that we monitor our current comfortable practices to see how they might be altering our belief and vision.

CARE FOR PARTICULAR CREATURES

Clough expands the image of God to include all creatures, as a response to some Christians’ assumption that only those created in the image of God can be saved by God in the new creation. His response will appeal especially to other Christians for whom ideas of inclusion and equality are comfortably familiar. It might also appeal to those who are accustomed to applying human limitations to God, but it is not necessary to reconfigure the particularities of creation or the breadth of God’s peaceable kingdom in order to form Christians to care for and hope for nonhuman animals. God’s saving grace is not constrained by having created human but not nonhuman animals in the image of God, and Christians’ care for nonhuman animals need not be constrained by the differences of creation. The particularity of human creation and salvation through Jesus Christ does not indicate a lack of divine care for nonhumans, but the requirement that God’s relationship with all creatures be the same in order to be abundantly good risks projecting onto God the limited imagination of humans. God is not afflicted with the human struggle to see beyond equality toward particular, preferential treatment of the neediest. If people interpret scriptural and doctrinal accounts of creation as signs of lesser divine attention to nonhuman animals, then we need to do a better job of witnessing to God’s unlimited, ever-abundant, and beyond-equal generosity.

THE PARTICULARITY OF FLESH

Clough's move from divine-human incarnation to divine-flesh incarnation suggests further limitations for God and animals, despite his efforts to widen the reach of the incarnation. He observes that the efficacy of Christ's incarnation and redemption does not depend on gender, geography, or century; but at the same time he seems to suggest that identifying God incarnate primarily as human diminishes at least our vision of how nonhuman animals might participate in Christ's body through life, death, and new life. He worries that an overemphasis on the humanness of the incarnation seems to limit the realm of salvation to humans, in a like-only-saves-like model. He responds by shifting the incarnation and salvation emphasis from human to flesh, such that divine-human-saves-human becomes divine-flesh-saves-flesh: all flesh can participate in Christ's body through fleshly life, death, and new life. This change trades one like-saves-like (divine-human-saves-human) for another (divine-flesh-saves-flesh), and risks losing both the particularity of the incarnation and the corresponding particularity of those redeemed.

As far as we can tell, creatures only come in particularity, nameable and unique as well as dependent and interrelated. Creatures are not redeemable because they fit into the generic category of enfleshed beings, but because God creates and redeems in particularity. Animal particularity involves humanness, nonhumanness, gender, size, race, location, and all the other details of life. The primary focus on flesh risks literalism in the interest of creaturely commonality: Which creatures are sufficiently fleshly to count as creatures (microbes, insects, vertebrates, mammals)? Does the degree of fleshliness determine the degree of participation in redemption? God creates and redeems God's creatures, according to God's mercy and to their particular createdness; fleshliness is a shared, but not determinative factor.

THE PARTICULARITY OF JESUS CHRIST

We risk losing track of the particularity of Jesus Christ in the midst of an inclusion and expansion method of calling humans to account for their relationships with nonhuman animals. The substance of the incarnation does not, in itself, determine the efficacy of the resurrection; and at the same time, the particularity of the incarnation matters. At no time is Jesus Christ present without being both uniquely divine and uniquely human, with all the particularity that is the eternal creator, the God of Israel, the One God, the Holy Trinity, the Son of the Father, and the human son of Mary who suffers, dies, is buried, resurrected, and ascended. The breadth of salvation comes through God's most particular engagement with created life and death, which means the life and death of an identifiable and recognizable distinctive being—one sort of animal and not another, one ethnicity and not another, one number of limbs and not another, some genitals and

not others. This is how we know who God is, who we are, and how to be with each other. The uniquely particular fully human and fully divine incarnation of God, Jesus Christ, need not be chiefly identifiable as flesh in order to redeem human and nonhuman animals, but Christ is both infinite God and utterly particular incarnation, which therefore includes a particular body. The breadth of salvation comes through God's most particular engagement with created life and death.

THE PARTICULARITY OF IMAGINATION AND HOPE

Finally, I wonder if this attention to redeemable, redeemed animals can tell us anything about human hopes for redemption. The division between human and nonhuman animals is not the only problematic division in a theology of animals. Humans divide up animals of all sorts for a number of self-interested reasons. Humans with ample agency, freedom, and power (e.g., published scholars) divide up other human and nonhuman animals based on how much they can provide us and how much they ask of us. In this way, we distinguish between those who embody what we find most appealing about human and nonhuman animals, those who do not meet our expectations and hopes, and those who produce the material goods we desire. The first group might include beautiful human babies with promising futures and adults who are independent and productive, as well as nonhuman animals we can communicate with and wild animals we regard as exotic and noble. It is easy to imagine redeemed life with these animals.

The second group comprises the less appealing human and nonhuman animals, the ones who cannot participate in and support us in the life to which we aspire, the ones we dismiss and ignore, those who ask more from us than they offer to us. This group includes those at the beginning and end of life whose prospects for productive lives are dim, those with profound disabilities, and those whose purpose we cannot perceive. We call some of these humans "beastly" or "animals!" We call some of these nonhuman animals "threats." Yet another group includes those on whom the more affluent depend for affordable daily life comforts: those who make clothes, electronics, and toys; those who prepare food and clean away waste; and those whose bodies we use for research, clothing, and commercial food.

Users and consumers rank other human and nonhuman animals according to their appeal and benefit to our immediate desires, a ranking which then determines the quality and length of their lives at our hands—their access to medical procedures, food, housing/habitat, freedom, and safety. These are difficult discernments that we regularly face when caring for each other in a world of competing desires and limited resources. When our eschatological vision too nearly matches that world of competing desires and limited resources, both our daily practices and our vision of redemption

suffer. Here we return to the book's claim that right belief leads to right action, with the additional observation that perverse desires and practices can distort the belief that might lead to more just practices.

Clough's theology of animals reminds us that humans and nonhumans share much, including the cosmic effects of Christ's salvific incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, even if we do not yet know all of those effects. Human and nonhuman animals also share the effects of this-worldly neglect and abuse when some creatures deem that others' worth is insufficient. The hope of the resurrection lies not in our selfish desires, beliefs, or practices, but in the exceeding abundance of God's gifts of creation and redemption that are in no way constrained by our own limitations. The possibilities for renewed care for all of creation now rests on the perfect particularity of Jesus Christ, who creates *and* saves, holding *all things* together in their redeemable, redeemed particularity. Through the uniquely particular Christ "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross" (Clough 2012, 130; 1 Colossians 1:17 and 1:20). I thank David Clough, for this book, for this conversation, and for the next volume to come.

NOTE

This paper was presented at a joint session of the Christian Systematic Theology Section and the Animals and Religion Group focusing on discussion of David Clough's book *On Animals: Volume 1, Systematic Theology* at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, MD, November 24, 2013.

REFERENCE

Clough, David. 2012. *On Animals: Volume 1, Systematic Theology*. London: T&T Clark.