

Review Article

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David L. Clough, *On Animals: Systematic Theology: 1*. London: T. & T. Clark, 2011. 240pp. £65. Hardback. ISBN: 10 0567139484.

Dr. Clough is Professor of Theology at the University of Chester. In *On Animals: Systematic Theology: 1*, Clough situates the place of animals within a broadly-defined Christian theology. Questions concerning ethics, or how animals should be treated by humans will be left to the planned second volume.

Clough opens with a 3 point explanation as to why Christians can no longer neglect the issue of the place of animals. He contends that the rise of industrial animal agriculture, the decline in the theology of exclusion, and questions about the place of animals raise concerns about the coherence of Christian theology in its present state (pp.xii-xiii). Though addressing theological issues, Clough leaves no doubt that the ethical question of what our relationship to animals should be is the driving motive behind the writing of this book.

After reviewing the ideas of Philo, Origen, and Calvin, Clough asserts “It is clear from this brief survey that it is not difficult to find Christian theologians stating that human beings are God’s sole or primary purpose in creation. It is harder, however, to find good theological argument in defense of this proposition (p. 15).” Clough argues that God’s purpose for creation extended beyond just human interests alone but that his plan included non-human creation as well. Having rejected the anthropocentric reason for creation, Clough points out the flaws in alternative views (e.g. theocentric and creation-centric views), ultimately deciding that the teleological purpose of creation was/is fellowship with God.

If creation is not all about humanity, then what is the place of animals within creation? Clough takes up this question in chapter 2. He contends that humans are more like animals than we care to accept. He calls upon

theological and scientific arguments to show that previous arguments regarding the difference between animals and humans (e.g. reason, language, feelings, responsibility, etc.) all fail to adequately account for the evidence available. With human exceptionalism defrocked, and humans and animals being just fellow creatures before their joint creator, Clough must account for the differences between them. He explores various taxonomies, but finds them all lacking. But the majority of his criticism is directed at condemning the medieval Thomist theory known as the “Great Chain of Being.” Clough asserts that this theory limits God’s freedom to create as well as supports a hierarchal society, which he seems to think is immoral (p.58).

Clough considers whether the notion of humans being made in the “image of God” can provide sufficient grounds for a taxonomy by which to understand human-animal relationships. He ultimately finds all of the suggestions to distinguish humans from animals (e.g. rationality, language, etc.) to be inadequate. Nevertheless, he does not want to assert that no differences exist between humans and animals only to point out that his “..objection is to the routine and thoughtless, theological or philosophical drawing up of a list of attributes supposedly possessed by all human beings, and excluding all non-human beings (p.72). In the end, Clough decides that the image of God refers to our function (as opposed to an ontological distinction) as representatives of God to the animals (p. 76) and exhorts us to celebrate our creaturely differences and to recognize that all creatures respond to God in their own ways.

Having established the status of animals as fellow creatures with humans the question remains as to whether animals are objects of God’s reconciling work. Clough contends that we should not overemphasize the particularity of Christ’s incarnation as a male Jew, otherwise women and non-Jewish people would lie outside of the circle of reconciliation. Instead, we should understand Christ’s incarnation as a creature (pp.83-4) because John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh, the material shared by animal creation. Clough also appeals to Colossians 1:15ff to emphasize that the incarnation had cosmic consequences noting that Christ came to put “all things” under his feet. He concludes by saying “The doctrine of the incarnation does not therefore establish a theological boundary between humans and other

animals; instead it is best understood as God stepping over the boundary between creator and creation and taking on creatureliness. (p. 103).”

Continuing the logic established regarding the purpose of the incarnation, Clough argues that the atonement includes the animal creation also. He suggests that sin is not just a human activity but that Scripture (Gen 9:5; Ex 19:13) assumes that animals bore responsibility for actions also. Clough continues that animals need reconciliation with God because of the violence present on the earth in the form of predation. It is the evil of predation that Isaiah prophesied would ultimately end bringing peace between humans and animals (Isa 2:4; 11:6-9; 65:25-6). To add further support to the significance of animals in God’s redemptive plan, Clough suggests that the Biblical identification of Christ as the Lamb of God means that Christ’s sacrifice can be identified as an animal not just human sacrifice. He writes “...Christ’s death is not merely like an animal sacrifice—it *is* an animal sacrifice. (p.128; italics his).”

In Part 3, Redemption, Clough considers animals from an eschatological perspective. Clough believes that the restoration of all things includes the animal creation as well. Following Wesley, Clough even proffers that the eyes whose tears will be wiped away as expressed in Revelation 21:4-5 will include those from non-humans. Clough repeatedly argues for the inclusion of animals in God’s redemptive plan on the basis of theological symmetry. Whatever God created in love in Genesis, He must also redeem. Whatever is broken must be open to repair.

In Chapter 7, Clough outlines what redemption and reconciliation between animals, humans, and God would look like. He describes a world of non-violent harmony where each creature is able to live its life before God without fear of predation. It is here that Clough investigates rather theoretical questions such as if a carnivore loses its predatory instinct does it remain the same animal? Clough concludes that God will work out these questions even if we cannot.

In sum, Clough claims that Christian tradition regarding human exceptionalism does not accord with the biblical witness and scientific reality. He asserts that humans must reposition themselves in a continuum with their fellow animals where each animal must have space to worship God in its own way.

EVALUATION

Dr. Clough is an example of a growing number of liberal theologians questioning the traditional view of animals within the Christian tradition. The issue of the status of animals is certainly timely as reflected in the number and attitudes of pet owners.¹ In this regard, Clough is to be commended for taking up this important contemporary topic. His tone is thoughtful and his arguments are measured and always without rancor or ill will. Clough eschews absolutist claims choosing instead to raise doubts and blur distinctions that were formerly hard and fast. Despite the importance and relevance of the issue, and his kind demeanor, Clough's treatment suffers from several severe weaknesses.

The first, and perhaps the most important, weakness of this text lies in its cursory, and arguably selective, evaluation of scripture. It is customary for systematic theologians, at least from the Christian perspective, to engage in the teaching of the Biblical text, including the passages that pose problems for their perspective. Yet, despite the controversial nature of this topic and how frequently it has been ignored, Clough appeared to deliberately avoid the difficult work of exegeting the relevant biblical texts. In far too many places, Clough spends his time discussing the ideas of Wesley, Calvin, or Barth, rather than investigating the biblical narrative in its entirety.

On the rare occasion when Clough does engage the text, his work is perfunctory and without due consideration of alternative opinions (cf. Chapter 2).² Consider Clough's use of the Creation and Flood narratives. Clough argues that that these narratives prove that: 1. vegetarianism comprised the original diet for both humans and animals; 2. God's judgment of animals suggests they may have moral culpability (Gen 3:14; 6:12-13), and 3. God's covenant with animals implies that animals can have contractual standing.

However, in his headlong rush to elevate the standing of animals, Clough

1 American Veterinary Medical Association (2012) U.S. Pet Ownership: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Statistics/Pages/Market-research-statistics-US-pet-ownership.aspx>, and, <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Statistics/Pages/Market-research-statistics-US-Pet-Ownership-demographics-Sourcebook.aspx>. Visited December 26, 2012.

2 Readers should understand that my rebuttals of Clough's interpretation of scripture in this piece are constrained due to space.

ignores alternative explanations. On point 1, he never considered whether Adam and Eve had the right to kill animals to stop crop depredation, create leather, and other products useful for human interests. The cultural mandate presented in Genesis 1:26-8 clearly shows that God commanded man and woman to press creation, including animals, into service, or in Biblical terms, to exert dominion. Particularly noteworthy is that this authority was granted prior to the Fall. Clough repeatedly claims that there was harmony in the Garden (pp.155ff). However, the story of the serpent (Gen 3) shows that this alleged harmony was not complete as Adam and Eve should have expressed dominion over the serpent by casting him out of the Garden. Oddly, none of the other creatures were mandated with this responsibility even though they had the physical, and in light of Clough's notion of animal moral culpability, the moral ability to do so. Additionally, the Garden was only a small part of the planet. Even if we concede that there was harmony in the Garden as Clough claims, it is unclear that there was no predation outside the garden.

Clough's second point, that animals may have moral culpability (pp.105f), neglected to consider whether the nature of animal culpability changed after the flood. Perhaps animals were morally culpable before the flood but not afterward (cf. 2 Pet 2:12). The Genesis 9 requirement to kill animals that killed humans could simply be common sense, particularly if an animal begins to prefer human flesh, rather than an argument regarding animal moral sensibilities. Likewise, killing an animal that had sex with a human (Lev 20:15) is more likely to punish its owner and prevent the potential for the spread of disease. Any of these alternative interpretations can account for the Biblical evidence, without requiring us to elevate the ontological status of animals. Furthermore, what should we say regarding the Balaam narratives? In Numbers 22:33, the angel states "But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live (NASB)." If animals have moral culpability, why would the angel have spared the donkey? Would not the donkey's failure to turn aside from the angel be worthy of punishment especially since the donkey could see the angel and Balaam did not?

Clough's view that predation was lacking prior to the fall is based in large part on Gen 1:29 and Gen 6:11 which suggested that the flood was God's judgment was due to violence, which Clough interprets as predation, as well as Clough's vision of the restoration of all things in the eschaton (pp. 108-9, 160, 163). But Clough's interpretation doesn't answer whether the animals were punished for killing humans, fellow animals, or animals and humans. Granted, these distinctions may not be important to Clough. However, a more anthropocentric view can be supported if we believe that God's judgment fell on animals for their predation on humans as suggested in Gen 9:2f. Note that after reiterating the Genesis 2 command for humans to multiply in number, God declares that animals will now live in fear and dread of humans and that they are given to human control. It is perfectly reasonable to suggest that this command was God's way to reinforce the hierarchy between animals and humans that was fractured before the flood.

Furthermore, the terms of the Noahic covenant remain troublesome for Clough because it reinforced the special status of humans by stating that humans can kill animals but animals may not kill humans. Wenham also observes that this is the first time *אָח* "brother" has been used since Gen 4 (cf. 4:8-11).³ Bruggemann goes further stating that "God unqualifiedly aligns himself with every human person as of ultimate value to him (cf. Matt. 6:32)...The ultimate valuing of every human person is echoed in the statement of Jesus, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7)."⁴ Finally, God's covenant with the animal creation doesn't elevate animals any more than when Moses appealed to the sun and moon when he charged Israel with covenant breaking (Isa. 1:2; Dt. 30:19). Rather, the Noahic covenant with God says more about God than it does concerning the status of animals. The final dissolution of Clough's argument comes with his failure to consider that the eschatological restoration may not be a mirror image of the original creation. The New Testament in fact suggests the earth will be renovated not restored.⁵

3 Gordon J. Wenham, Vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary*. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 193.

4 Walter Bruggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 83.

5 Douglas, J. Moo, 'Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,'

Clough's treatment of how to interpret the humanity as the image of God is troubling also. By adopting a functional interpretation of the concept (pp.66ff), Clough ignores, or at least subordinates, several important biblical concepts regarding the humanity's status. The question is, does God grant authority without also granting ability? If we answer in the negative, could this ability be the "something" that clearly separates animals from humans? Paraphrasing one of my students, Dan Martin, "The scripture speaks more about what humanity is than what humanity does." Likewise Robbins makes a compelling argument that humans mimic in Genesis 2-3 what God did in Genesis 1 thereby underscoring their unique status.⁶ So to the animal kingdom, humanity's language, reason, power, judgment, etc. form a constellation of elements to show our superiority to the animal kingdom. For those humans who are maimed and cannot exhibit those qualities, then the precise nature of their value is known to God and accepted by us. Their simply being human is sufficient to recognize their worth over the animal kingdom even if their intelligence may be lower than a raccoon's. I would argue that the ability of humans to care for even the most tragically injured people demonstrates their "god-like" abilities and self-sacrificial character that the animal kingdom cannot and does not exhibit.

More importantly, a great number of Biblical passages suggesting that humans have special value before they are even born (i.e. Isa 44:2; 49:1; Jer 1:5; Lk 1:44). Even if Clough dismisses those verses by stating that they refer to God's omniscience rather than humanity's dignity, how should we understand the role of the Holy Spirit? Joel 2:28f prophesies the Spirit being poured out on humans, not animals. Other references to the Spirit regularly refer to the indwelling of the Spirit in humans, not animals. Jefferey Niehaus argues the Spirit's place is analogous to temple and idol theology of the ancient world, where the god can only indwell a statue of similar form to itself.⁷ To follow the analogy, the Holy Spirit indwells humans because only humans are appropriate vessels for that spirit (Job 34:15 notwithstanding p.85).

Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 49:3(Sept 2006) p. 467.

6 Robbins, John, "The Church Irrational: Part 2," *The Trinity Review*, 309b (2012, Nov-Dec), pp.5-6.

7 Niehaus, Jeffrey J.. *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008).

Clough also tries to place great emphasis on the bible's use of the word "flesh" to tie humans, animals, and Christ together (Chapter 4). In effect, Clough argues that since the Hebrew word for flesh (*basar*) is semantically tied to the Greek word (*sarx*), and since John 1:14 connects *sarx* with Christ, then "The doctrine of the incarnation does not therefore establish a theological boundary between humans and other animals; instead, it is best understood as God stepping over the boundary between creator and creation and taking on creatureliness." (p.103). The problem for Clough is that *sarx* is a complex word with multiple meanings depending on the context.⁸ For example, Beasley-Murray says, "The Logos in becoming σάρξ participated in man's creaturely weakness (the characteristic meaning of "flesh" in the Bible)."⁹ Furthermore, the verb in the verse shows that God was pitching his tent among humans,¹⁰ a decidedly human behavior. Clough's blurring of these distinctions could open him up to the charge that he committed the error of "illegitimate totality transfer" which occurs when the exegete infers the meaning of a term in one location and inserts it where the term is used in another location without due consideration to the context¹¹.

Clough's neglect of scriptural passages that suggest a rather steep and hierarchal distinction between humans and animals is notable. The list of ignored texts is long but includes those listed above as well as 1 Tim 4:1-5 where Paul makes a forceful case that humans can eat all sorts of animal products and that opposition to this teaching is demonic and 2 Peter 2:12 where animals are called unreasoning and suggests that at least some animals were made to be captured and killed. Perhaps more to the point is Clough's neglect of the actions of the historical Jesus. While contending that the Cosmic Christ wants to redeem the animal creation, Clough ignores Luke's description of the historical Jesus acting as a rather efficient killer of fish (Lk 5:4f). In fact it seems strange contradiction that Jesus,

8 Eduard Schweizer, σάρξ, σαρκικός, † σάρκινος, vol. 7, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 98-111.

9 George R. Beasley-Murray, *John, Word Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 26. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), p. 14.

10 Ibid.

11 D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 62.

who would allegedly die for all creatures (though Clough is silent about the demonic realm), would exhibit such lack of concern for pigs¹² about to become demon possessed and drown (Luke 8:33) as well as increase humanity's ability to consume animals by revoking Old Testament dietary laws (Mk 7:19). Part of this oversight is due to Clough's misunderstanding of Colossians 1:20 (p.86). Paul is not discussing universal reconciliation but pacification as Christ will not be restoring the evil spiritual powers, he will be forcing their submission.¹³ Why Clough chose to neglect these questions in favor of those related to whether animals participate in the resurrection only he can answer (pp. 168ff). But readers are poorer because Clough chose to investigate the obscure and speculative rather than the obvious and difficult.

Clough could have improved the biblical basis of his argument enormously by simply using inclusive teleological anthropocentrism as a foil¹⁴. Its argument that God cares for the animal creation because it suffers from the curse brought upon it by human sin has much scriptural support. Consider the possibility that humanity is the keystone species to creation, meaning that as humanity goes, so goes the environment. When we fail to obey God, the environment, including animals suffer the consequences.¹⁵ Likewise, when we obey God, the environment receives the blessings. Thus, redemption focusses on humans because we are the key to the puzzle. Fix us, and the rest is repaired. This is why Christ became man and not a generic creature. This writer hopes that Clough corrects some of these lacunae in his next book on ethical considerations with animals.

Second, Clough's effort to avoid firm distinctions can make understanding what he really believes difficult to grasp (pp. 24, 76). For instance, I understand his point that humans may not be as special or different from animals than we may think, but how should the status of

12 Pigs are purportedly intelligent animals as stated without supporting reference by Bernard Rollin, 'Why is Agricultural Animal Welfare Important? The Social and Ethical Context,' In T. Grandin (ed.), *Improving Animal Welfare: A Practical Approach* (Cambridge, MA: CAB International, 2010), pp. 19-31.

13 Douglas, J. Moo, 'Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 49:3 (Sept 2006), p. 473.

14 This is particularly important given Clough's need to set aside the view point (pp. xix-xx).

15 See E. Calvin Beisner, *Where Garden Meets Wilderness: Evangelical Entry Into the Environmental Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

humans be explained? Blandly stating that animals and humans need to fulfill their work for God in their own ways fails to help. I would think that an answer to the aforementioned question is critical to any discussion of ethics that he plans to discuss in his forthcoming second volume.

More troubling is Clough's selective research. Systematic theologians typically engage thinkers with profoundly different perspectives than the author. His lack of engagement with Evangelical exegesis and interpretation as well as an inclusive teleological anthropocentric theologians such as myself¹⁶ was unfortunate despite his preference for this version of anthropocentrism over others (cf. pp.xix-xx). Perhaps, I am being too hard on Clough. After all he is not an Evangelical and does not hold to its view of scripture and so he is not likely to be interested in our views¹⁷.

Nevertheless, I am at a loss to explain why Clough ignored the ideas of non-evangelicals. Clough fails to engage Paul Waldau's thesis, in *The Specter of Speciesism*, that provides a detailed argument that Scripture is pervasively anthropocentric. Given Clough's claim that the purpose of his book was to reject the idea that God's purposes in creation were all about us (i.e. humans, p.4) one would expect that a discussion on the testimony of scripture would be made. In regards to Mark 1:13 (p.42 fn 53), Clough appeals to Richard Bauckham's¹⁸ animal friendly interpretation but fails to mention John Paul Heil's detailed rebuttal¹⁹? Likewise, Clough, though an adherent of evolution (p.82), did not consider evolutionary arguments for human exceptionalism, such as the one made by Petrinovich²⁰.

Despite these deep and important criticisms, Clough's book has some value. He does engage a number of theologians who have commented on animals, including Philo, Origen, Basil, Anselm, Calvin, Luther, Barth, and

16 Stephen M. Vantassel, *Dominion over Wildlife? An Environmental-Theology of Human-Wildlife Relations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock) 2009.

17 He states in the introduction that he wants to avoid "...creating a list of heroes and villains among biblical texts and theologians in regards to animals..."(p. xv). However noble this goal, isn't the purpose of a Christian theology to at least be faithful to the entire testimony of Scripture? In practice, his approach is rather proof-text oriented.

18 Richard J. Bauckham, (1994). 'Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age,' in J. B. Green & M. Turner (Eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 3-21.

19 John Paul Heil, 'Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 68(1), 2006, 63-78.

20 Lewis Petrinovich, *Darwinian Dominion: Animal Welfare and Human Interests* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).

others. Barthians should note that Clough spends significant time with Barth, whom Clough rehabilitates. Furthermore, Clough's questions are a valuable check for the historic view of humanity's status in relationship to the plan of redemption. At minimum, Clough confirms the claim of others, such as myself, that humans are not sole value in creation. Finally, Clough does highlight a number of scriptures whose teaching on animals that many Christians have overlooked. So in this regard, his points can be a meaningful corrective to those guilty of ignoring scriptural testimony regarding animals. Unfortunately, those willing to read the entire biblical witness will have to conclude that Clough's view does not do justice to the whole story.

