

Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love. By Elizabeth A. Johnson. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. Pp. xvii + 323. \$32.95.

Job 12:7–9 provides the title for this splendid dialogue between a Darwinian account of the origin of species and the Christian story of God’s unfailing love and mercy:

Ask the beasts and they will teach you, the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this (NRSV).

Johnson shows how to behold the evolving earth as charged with the grandeur of God.

J. begins by retelling the story of Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species*, updating its findings by incorporating contemporary improvements on the theory as needed. She teaches us scientific amateurs who thought we knew the evolutionary story how little we actually knew. The terrible beauty of this story emerges clearly. The grandeur of Darwin’s profound vision is spelled out in lucid, passionate prose.

J. then lays out a trinitarian theology that uses the Thomistic notion of primary and secondary causality (her terminology is “ultimate” and “proximate”) to show both the interplay of law and chance in God’s world and the unbounded divine love of the Creator for creation. Her view of the relation of God and the world is akin to the profoundly Athanasian, trinitarian view of Denis Edwards (*Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, and Ecology* [2014]). J. argues that it is the loving God that “moves the origin of species . . . nearer to creatures than they are to themselves, acting immanently throughout the matrix of the freely evolving community of life” (180).

Two brilliant chapters on the groaning of creation and God’s redemptive presence in and to creation follow. J. never brushes the reality of natural evil out of the story, but faces suffering and death head-on. “Affliction arose from below, so to speak, rather than being imposed from above by direct divine will” (191). Unlike many theodicians whose deity is functionally unitarian, J. profoundly and intensely tells of the trinitarian God creating, indwelling, and divinizing creation. All creation groans—but always and everywhere with and in the One who is the promise of the “hope that living creatures have a destiny in glorified life with God” (234).

Humanity must come properly to love and respect our evolving, God-loved earth. J. reminds us of the ecological sin we wreak on the creation and, ultimately, against the Creator who loves it into being. Because of human activity, species are being killed off at an alarming rate (for mammals, for example, the extinction rate since 1600 is about 45 times what it had been [249]). A final chapter explores the creaturely community and displays the imperative for ecologically sane policies and practices. The human community cannot use and dominate the creaturely community without self-destruction, because we are fully part of that community.

J. differentiates neutral observers who stand outside what they observe (like William Paley or the explorers who come across a clearing in John Wisdom’s famous “Gods”) from committed beholders (like Darwin and, I would add, herself) who stand within

the awesome realm they love, see, and reflect on. This crucial epistemological distinction not only creates the space for the dialogue of theology and evolution to be fruitful, but also shows us how to be properly observant and generous as we develop our own thinking.

J.'s trinitarian God is not an arbitrary potentate who intervenes here and there to fix a few of the many messes in the world, but the profound, immutable Love whose greatest gift to the beloved creation is the fecund, immanent creativity and novelty that results from the interaction of evolving law and unpredictable chance. A miracle is not divine violence done to thwart the laws of the created world, but the very Presence that unflinching and intimately loves the creation into relatively autonomous being.

This work in systematic theology does not directly address the reasons one might offer to argue for accepting this view of God and the world. But as Bertrand Russell noted over a century ago, the world that science shows us portrays life that is painfully brief and ultimately meaningless. What J.'s dialogue with Darwin shows is that the beauty of the tree of life and the tangled bank teeming with life forms need not be observed as a hopeless beauty signifying nothing, but can be beheld as a tragic beauty created by Love, sustaining a hope for ultimate meaning. One can bet on God and yet accept the world that contemporary evolutionary theory displays without sacrificing either faith or reason. For compellingly showing how we Christians today can reasonably shape our deepest commitment, we are all very much in J.'s debt.

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Asketischer Protestantismus und Kapitalismus: Schriften und Reden 1904–1911. By Max Weber. Edited by Wolfgang Schluchter, assisted by Ursula Bube. Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/9. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2014. Pp. xx + 994. €389.

That Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is world famous does not mean that it is not misunderstood. That it is frequently misunderstood is amply demonstrated by the long history of mistakes in interpreting his thesis, a history that dates to the book's initial publication in 1904 and 1905. Now we are fortunate to have the volume in the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe that is devoted to the first publication of *Protestant Ethic*. We are fortunate because it is a critical edition and because it is edited by Wolfgang Schluchter. Probably no one who knows as much about Weber's sociology of religion as S. who, with assistance from Ursula Bube, had put enormous effort into introducing and editing the early version of the *Protestant Ethic*.

S. reminds us that many of the problems with understanding the *Protestant Ethic* can be traced back to Talcott Parson's 1930 translation of it. S. does not dwell on the errors in the translation because they are sufficiently well known; rather, he concentrates on the fact that in Parson's edition the *Protestant Ethic* appears as a book, whereas it was originally published as two separate essays. Furthermore, the publications of the essays were separated by almost a year, during which Weber made a