



International Journal of Arts and Humanities: ISSN-2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access: DOI/ijah/10.54978  
*Abbreviated Key Title: Int. J. Arts Humanit.*  
ISSN: 2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access  
Volume-13 (Issue): 8, August, Pp. 294-302, 2025

*Full Length Research*

# “The Biblical Respect for Animals in the Book of Genesis”

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## Abstract

In the light of contemporary environmental concerns, it is helpful to look again at biblical texts with a new perspective. In particular, some passages can speak to animal rights issues, if we read those texts in the Hebrew rather than in English translation. Such passages may be found in the early chapters of Genesis, a portion of the biblical text which speaks in more cosmic and universal terms than other parts of the Bible. In Genesis 2 and Genesis 9 the Hebrew refers to animals as “living beings,” the same term used of human beings, and this ennobles creatures of the animal realm. Unfortunately, the English translations in both chapters use the term “living creatures” for the animals, which contrasts with “living beings” used for the humans. English translations thus denigrate the animals in relation to humans. Also, in Genesis 1 the animals are created and called to bring forth “life,” which makes them co-creators with God. This passage has simply been overlooked. Together this interpretation of these biblical passages should inspire us to a more environmentally sound approach in our treatment of the animals in our world.

**Keywords:** living being, living creature, animal rights, rule, stewardship, Adam, Noah, co-creators, covenant

Accepted 27/7/2025

Published 16/8/2025

A shorter version of this essay was presented as a paper: “The Living Soul: Environmental Consciousness Engendered by Genesis 2 and 9,” Oxford Symposium on Religious Studies, Oxford, England, July 18, 2023.

## INTRODUCTION

Biblical texts are often used and quoted to address significant social issues, and too often the passages are misinterpreted and used to justify the exact opposite of what they teach. This is so often the case with passages regarding women’s rights (Gnuse 2015b: 77-116). Sometimes passages are applied to issues that really do not address those issues. This is the case with texts that supposedly address homosexuality, but in reality other sexual actions are really described (Gnuse 2015a; Gnuse 2015:117-60). Finally, there are texts that address significant issues that are simply ignored, sometimes

because the Hebrew is not looked at closely while the English translation can mislead the reader. This is the case with passages that can be used to speak about animal rights. Some of the most important biblical texts that can address animal rights are found in Genesis 1-2, 9, which provide stories about the origin of the world up until the time of the patriarchs.

## Contemporary Environmental Crisis and Biblical Mandate

In the past few generations, we have become painfully

aware of horrific environment crises in our world: global warming (denied by conservatives in America), rising oceans (ignored by conservatives in America), crop shortages throughout much of the world, wildfires in most of the world, and the rapid loss and decline of animal species everywhere (all trivialized by conservatives in America). This essay addresses one of those issues: the value of animals in our world and how biblical passages, especially in Genesis 1-2 and 9, speak to us.

Very important texts that proclaim a high view of animal life are found in these chapters. But people and preachers do not notice them because they read the English translation and not the Hebrew.

## **Genesis 2: Shared Identity between Humans and Animals**

In Genesis 2 both humans and animals are characterized in Hebrew with the words, *nephesh hayya*’, a “living being.” We accordingly translate the words as “living beings” when referring to people, but we translate these two words as “living creatures,” when speaking of the animals. I suppose this is a logical translation. But unconsciously we maintain a significant difference between ourselves and the animals, and we inadvertently maintain human superiority over the animals. Thereby we disown our oneness with the animal realm and can subsequently see their life as having less value. We further denigrate the animals by denying intelligence to them. We proclaim that humans have intelligence, while animals have only instinct. By creating this distance, once we have denied the existence of animal intelligence, we can justify mastery over them and permit our horrid treatment of the animal kingdom, not only the destroying their ecosystems, but the very animals themselves.

Thirty years ago I used to argue with a colleague of mine in the Philosophy Department, who maintained that that animals had only instinct. I told him that zoologists had given up that term, “instinct,” and now spoke of degrees of “intelligence” among the animals. He was not persuaded. He would say, “Animals have only instinct, they do not have intelligence; they cannot reason or do philosophy.” I would respond, “Your college freshmen can’t do philosophy either!” The argument was a stand-off for years.

The biblical text describes animals, “living beings,” as our brothers and sisters, and if we “rule” over them, it is the stewardship of older brothers and sisters over younger brothers and sisters. Genesis 2:7, 19 says:

“. . . then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.”

We must notice immediately that God creates animals out of the dust of the ground in the same careful and caring fashion as the human being was fashioned. We all come from the dust of the ground. When I attended grade school in a parochial school, I was taught that people were significant because God took very special care to craft them out of the dust of the ground, whereas the animals were simply called into existence by the command of God. This combines the narrative in Genesis 2 with its image of creation from the ground with a reading of the rather terse account in Genesis 1, which describes day six of creation when God calls the animals into existence. That interpretation of Genesis 1 taught to children overlooked the more detailed narrative in Genesis 2, which described how the divine craftsman carefully made the animals in the same way as the human (Provan: 36). Conservative Christians too often cobble biblical passages together to hear what they want to hear instead of listening to what the text really says to them.

I was told that since “man” was created after the animals, he was superior to them according to Genesis 1. I was later told that since the “man” was created before the “woman” in Genesis 2, this is why men are designed by God to rule over women. Ten-year-old Bobby then said, “but our interpretations of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are contradictory.” I was told that this is what our church taught and I should not challenge our church’s beliefs as a mere child. (This is how conservative Protestants keep the peasants in line. I guess we really don’t believe in *sola scriptura*, “scripture alone,” but rather *sola traditione ecclesiae*, the “tradition of the church alone”).

In the text quoted above, animals are described as a “living creatures” in verse 19, with the Hebrew words, *nephesh hayya*’, words that should be translated as “living beings.” In Gen 2:7 the Adam is a *nephesh hayya*’, but this is translated as “living being” or a “living soul.” The King James Version says “living soul” and the New Revised Standard Version says “living being” for humanity in verse 7, but “living creature” is used for the animals in verse 19. English translations that are most commonly used thus create a significant gap between people and the animals.

When I was young, clergy told us that animals did not have souls, and that this was the difference between us. Some even said that perhaps the existence of a human soul is what gave us the “image of God.” (As a Hebrew scholar today I can now say that was totally wrong.) Those statements smack of gross human imperialism, differentiating ourselves from the animal realm. According to the biblical text, animals and humans both are “living souls.” Whatever the “soul” is, we have it, I suppose, . . . but so do the animals, . . . if we read this biblical text closely (Wright: 225).

Genesis 2 emphasizes the oneness of human beings and the animal realm. We share common identity in the life imparted to us by God, and we share this planet given to us for a home. This is so much like the evolutionary

theory, which conservative Protestants condemn, but the evolutionary theory speaks of humanity evolving out of the animal kingdom and thus being one with the animals, as the biblical text implies.

### The Concept of Rule as Stewardship

By declaring people and animals to be kindred, Genesis 2 appears to contrast with Genesis 1 where people are given the commission to rule the animals and plants (Bauckham: 21). We should really say that we “rule” the animals and plants by divine grace, and we are concomitantly one with the animals and plant realm. This “rule” is stewardship guided by concern and care, not an imperial rule. When the man and the woman were commissioned to “rule,” they were vegetarians and lived in a garden; they did not start strip mining and hunt animals.

The Israelites and the later Jews truly understood the idea of “rule” over animals. They were simple farmers who housed their livestock on the first floor of their two story homes. They would kill and eat their livestock for food, but they would respect those animals and their lives. They viewed blood as the source of life in animals and humans, so when they killed an animal for food, they would drain the blood of that animal before eating the meat (kosher laws). They certainly did not kill animals in the wholesale and wasteful fashion that we have so often done in our modern world.

### Theological Implications for Modern Conservation

The biblical text declares that we and the animals are one, we are both “living beings.” We need to affirm that today, which so many great Old Testament commentators in the modern era (including John Skinner, Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westermann, Ephraim Speiser, and Gordon Wenham) and preachers do not. Animals are becoming extinct or endangered rapidly in our world, and we need to affirm our oneness with them. It is tragic when English translations and commentators fail to tell us the message we need to hear. Created from the dust of the ground, animals and humans share common kinship and origin. We have a bond with all life on this planet (Bergant: 93). The biblical text declares that humans alone were created with the “breath of life,” whatever that means. It could mean that God has a personal relationship with humanity, but not with animals (Fritsch: 28; Richardson: 67). However, that does not give us superiority over the animals; rather, it imparts to us responsibility toward the animals. We are imbued with a divine-like responsibility to care for animals. Our “higher position” means “responsibility” for caring for animals (Anderson: 161).

Gen 1:29-30 records that both animals and people are created on the sixth day. God says that plant life is food first for people and then for animals. Thus, humans and

animals live upon the earth and share the same “dinner table” on which God provides us daily fare (Anderson: 130). We have messed up the dinner table. We have turned most of our planet into wastelands by improper farming, we have bulldozed and logged the forests of the Amazon rain forest and Southeast Asia that sheltered countless animal species and converted carbon dioxide into oxygen for us to breathe. For generations we Americans killed animals for sport (beautiful and exotic birds in the south and buffalo in the west). We need to be sent away hungry from the table. Of course, this may occur in the mid-twenty-first century when much of the human population will starve.

We drive animals into extinction, and not only do people not care, many make jokes about it. When I discuss the loss of so many animal species, people will say to me, “animals go extinct all the time, new species arise, and that’s simply nature in action.” When I say that we are losing biodiversity, and the loss of knowledge that can produce new drugs, I hear, “are you one of those liberal environmental freaks?” Well, yes I am an environmentalist because I read the Bible as well as *Scientific American*. When I talk about environment issues, I have an in-law who begins to scream about how much he hates environmentalists with their “woke” attitudes. There is no communication where it is most needed; the battle is lost in America.

The normal extinction rate of animals is said to be about one species per million annually. Currently we lose about one thousand species per million every year. We are destroying species at a 1000 times the natural rate. We lose a species every eight hours

(Bouma-Prediger: 29-30; Bauckham: 215). Between 1974 and 2014 we lost one-third of our wild animals (Bouma-Prediger: 29-30; Bauckham: 215; Moo and White: 34-35).

There are perhaps 100 million species, and between 10,000 to 100,000 go extinct annually. That rate will increase as “key species” in the chain of life go extinct and cause other species to disappear in a cascade in a particular eco-system. We will lose at least one million species in the oncoming years. Two thousand species of amphibians may disappear. Already in 2008 one out of four mammal species, one out of eight bird species, one out of three amphibian species, and seven out of ten plant species were in danger of extinction. Land space is lacking for 500,000 species.

When I use the expression global warming, folk with whom I speak begin yelling about liberal lies. Nevertheless, despite their protestations, the temperatures are rising. A rise of 1.5 to 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit will kill off an estimated 20% to 30% of the animal species (Houghton: 196-97). Extinction of species is caused by global warming, overharvesting, pollution, habitat destruction, overhunting, and war (Horrell: 5; “Extinction”; UNESCO; Van Dyke: 97). As of 2016 in our world there are 200,000 wild wolves but more than 400 million domesticated dogs. There are 400,000 wild lions

compared to 600 million house cats; 900,000 African buffalo to 1.5 billion domesticated cows; and 50 million penguins to 20 billion chickens. Over 90% of all large animals in the world are domesticated animals (Harari: 83-84). Domesticated animals reflect our human expansion into the natural world that excludes the wild animals. We have powerful and destructive technology, bad economic and political systems, and a bad set of attitudes (Horrell: 5; Martin-Schram and Stivers). Business people run the world, not scientists; greed drives humanity, not common sense (Bauckham: 230).

We are barbaric. In Indonesia hunters will kill a nursing mother orangutan to steal the infant orangutan for sale in the marketplace as a pet (Van Dyke: 102). In zoos we view signs animals that declare how a particular animal is endangered in the wild. But these signs only reveal the tip of the iceberg, and we fail to understand how extensive animal endangerment is in the world. Our planet has experienced five great extinctions over hundreds of millions of years that signaled the end of significant evolutionary periods of time, such the asteroid that killed dinosaurs sixty five million years ago. Humans are creating the sixth extinction (Bauckham: 215).

Humans are destroying biodiversity on this planet. Genesis 1 celebrates that biodiversity when it sings about how creatures swarm in the oceans and the skies, and how the animals reproduce according to their "kinds." We may view that in terms of simple animal reproduction, but from our modern scientific perspective we might see it as a reference to "speciation," the evolutionary emergence of new species in the great process of developing life (Bauckham: 219). Humans desperately require the biodiversity that occurs in our world. One third of our medical prescriptions come from plants and fungi in tropical rainforests, and even more medicinal products could be derived from unknown species of plants. Sadly we may never discover those remedies. Our brothers and sisters in the plant and animal world reach out to help us with the gifts that God has given them, but we cruelly destroy their efforts. We should share the earth, the dirt with them, but we refuse. We consume 60 billion tons of non-renewable resources every year, and we adversely affect 75% of the land and 60% of marine environments.

Genesis 2 commands us to protect the animals. According to Gen 2:15 God placed the "man" in the garden to "till" it and "keep" it. God placed the new little creature into a special garden with the responsibility to till the garden and garner food for himself and his family. He should keep, guard, and protect it. This clarifies Genesis 1 where it says that people are to "rule" the animal realm and to "subdue" the earth. They are to tend, guard, protect, and keep the earth with its creatures (Bouma-Prediger: 147- 48). Ancient Israelite peasants understood this, for the garden is like a peasant's little plot of land on which he works for a subsistence level of living, food for his family and pasturage for his animals.

We are created to be one with the animals on the sixth day, created together on the sixth day. Together we eat

the vegetation. We were all made from the dust of the earth according to Genesis 2. Finally, God has made a covenant with all of us humans and animals alike, in Genesis 9.

### **Covenantal Relationship with Animals in Genesis 9**

After the flood God made a covenant with Noah in Gen 9:1-17. However, most readers do not seem to notice that the covenant is made with both people and animals. Humans are co-partners with the animals in that covenantal relationship. Have we broken that covenant? Have the animals broken that covenant? Gen 9:9-12, 15 reads: (9) "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, (10) and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. (12) God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations" . . . (15) "I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh."

Read the text and observe how many times the words "living creatures" occur, the same words used in Genesis 2 to describe people and animals. Again, the animals are called "creatures" and not "beings." Verses 10, 12, and 15 mention living creatures, and in verse 10 the birds and domestic animals are directly mentioned (Hamilton: 316). A small cheer goes up from the animals surrounding the ark. Since the text does not mention what are the obligations of the animals in this covenant, we can never know if they broke the covenant. But the rest of the Old Testament repeatedly speaks of how people broke their covenants with God. We should respect that animals are co-recipients of the covenant with us, and we apparently are on equal terms as we stand before God (Rossing: 584). If humans really respected animals as covenant partners, we would not have slaughtered so many of them over the years. In this covenant relationship God assures animals of their continued existence with the promise never to destroy them with a flood again (McKeown: 64), but we humans broke that part of the agreement with the destruction of both animals and their eco-systems in the modern era.

Humans and animals share in the rights of the covenant made with Noah

(Bauckham: 25). People may rule the animals according to verse 2, but we must counter this with the insight that we are partners in the covenant according to verse 10. Humans and animals are promised that God will not again destroy the earth, but people today have decided to do just that (Anderson: 149; Neumann-Gorsolke: 269). We broke the covenant, the animals did not.

Humans oppose environmentalist prophets who speak out to warn us of the coming disaster. Global Witness reports that between 2002 and 2013 almost one thousand environmental activists around the world were murdered for opposing mining, deforestation, and illegal animal killing. The annual rate of murder went up by 20% in

2014. What more powerful sign is there that we have a major environmental crisis? (Brazal: 63). I am fortunate, I only get screamed at, and I have only received two vague death threats by email (for my article on homosexuality).

Noah carried one pair of every species in the ark. One pair implies future reproduction. So if Noah took animals into the ark to insure their future reproduction and survival, we might say that he was the first person to be dedicated to biodiversity (Block: 131-32). Modern humanity is not truly dedicated to biodiversity; we defy the divinely intended guideline to protect the reproduction and preservation of the animals, which Noah undertook. Truly, the animals need to take us to the divine court and bring lawsuit against us for breaking the covenant in Genesis 9.

Noah brought animals aboard to restock the earth after the flood (except for the unicorns and the dinosaurs). He became the “arch-conservationist who built an ark to preserve all kinds of life from being destroyed” (Wenham: 33). Noah appreciated their animal-hood and their life force. Bringing them in two by two affirmed their reproductive capacity to continue the life of their species. Noah engaged in what we would call species survival, what we tried to do with the “Endangered Species Act” in the United States (Block: 131-32; Rossing: 584). Unfortunately, the efforts of that act are currently being ignored by our current government. Noah becomes a modern symbol for saving endangered species. Noah apparently had no problem being a co-covenanter with the animals. If, indeed, he killed them for food in later years, he did it with anguish, remembering how they floated together a boat in a time of global disaster. When he later killed an animals for food, did he think of the animal parents of that creature whom he tended in the ark? Do we have anguish when species pass out of existence?

### Genesis 1: Animals as Co-Creators

In Gen 1:20-22, 24-25 we discover that animals are co-creators of life with God, (20) And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth and across the dome of the sky.” (21) So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. (22) God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” . . . (24) And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every

kind.” And it was so. (25) God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

God gives a command to the waters to bring forth creatures of the ocean and for the birds of the air to fill the sky on day five. God blesses the sea creatures and the birds, telling them to multiply and fill the earth. The verb for “swarming” (shrtz) implies the “swift chaotic hither-and-thither motion of small animals such as insects, mice, and fish,” but it also has the strong overtones of abundant fertility (Wenham: 24). This verb evokes the scene of abundant, swift movement, a dynamic and exciting image of the waters as they are filled with life (Westermann: 136). It envisions the wiggling, throbbing, thrashing life in our oceans. Bible readers often think that the blessing to multiply and fill the earth was given only to human beings, but it was given to all life forms. Humanity shares our planet with the creatures as they increase and fill the world with offspring.

Observe that this reproductive capacity, shared by animals and humans, is a blessing, not a command. The call to reproduce is not limited to human beings, but is a blessing bequeathed to all the animals.

Furthermore, the sea creatures are called “living beings” in the Hebrew, the very same words used for people in Gen 1:20 (Provan: 36). They are the same words, *nephesh hayya*’, used in Genesis 2 and 9. As always, we render an English translation of “living creatures” here in Genesis 1 instead of “living beings,” demonstrating once more our human imperialism. We share the same creaturehood with the animals, and we should share the planet with the other breeding and reproducing creatures (Skinner: 28; Bouma- Prediger 2010: 138; 2020: 59-60).

Our world is filled with life in the seas and the skies, the number of species is overwhelming. A typical four square mile area of rainforest in our world contains 125 mammal species, 400 bird species, 100 reptile species, 60 amphibian species, and 150 different kinds of butterflies (Bouma-Prediger 2010: 10). We team with life.

It is on day six that we humans and the animals together are said to produce life on our planet, and this function of making life is a divine gift. We receive our gift after the critters in the oceans received theirs. God gives the same imperative to people and animals, and affirms our common identity. We and the animals share the divine task of creating life, like God, and we thus share with them in the divine nature. Though Genesis 1 was written two thousand years before the rise of the modern scientific worldview, our text appreciates the power of earth’s creativity. Significantly it dovetails nicely with the modern understanding of the biological process of evolution and species diversification, which sadly conservative Protestants adamantly deny. In our modern understanding of evolution we can observe that not only do animals reproduce their own kind, but they generate new species (Rossing: 581).

“Swarming” on day five can be viewed as an allusion not only to the reproduction by each species but the evolution of new species, or speciation. “Swarming” can be the process by which oceans and the world as whole creates biodiversity, an important part of the life process on our planet (Brunner, Butler, Swaboda: 59). The animals who co-create are not only good, but their reproductive and creative capacity means that they have an intrinsic worth of their own in God’s greater created order, and they are not dependent upon humanity for their value.

The oceans team with life. Biblical authors did not live by the Mediterranean or any other large body of water. The Sea of Galilee was the only body of water with which they were familiar. So when the author of Genesis 1 speaks of the “swarms” of life in the ocean, the author had no idea how many different kinds of creatures lived into those oceans. The sea abounds with critters, some beautiful, some not so beautiful (I won’t say ugly), some of them large, some of them small, but all are wondrous creatures. They sing to the glory of God in their own way. Some, like whales and porpoises, actually do sing in some fashion, which now amazes us. Those whales would have been included among the “sea monsters” that the author of Genesis 1 mentions on day five. If the biblical author ever saw a whale, its size would inspire him to declare it to be a monster.

The ocean is amazing and wondrous. Tragically, we overharvest the fish and the whales and dump pollution in the water. In the twentieth century our harvesting of fish reduced the overall population of fish in the sea by 89% (Smil: 619; Brunner, Butler, Swaboda: 200). What will happen in the next half century as we harvest fish even more aggressively.

The acidic level of the oceans is rising and killing some of those amazing animals. The acidity of the oceans is up 30% since pre-industrial times (Moo and White: 38). The acid erodes coral reefs and destroys habitats for some of the most beautiful creatures in the ocean. Those swarms of life described on day five are becoming less. Our source of food from the ocean is diminishing, when ironically we said that the increased population of earth could use food from the seas to supplement the increasingly inadequate harvest of grain from the land.

As carbon dioxide from the air is absorbed by the ocean waters, the oceans become more acidic. In the pre-industrial age the carbon dioxide in the water was 280 parts per million; but now it is 400, and that is the limit for safety. Carbon dioxide forces carbonic acid in the water that kills fish and dissolves coral reefs. It creates dead zones, devoid of fish, in large areas. Many of these dead zones are close to coastal areas and the life in them has been killed by the pollution in the rivers that flow into the greater bodies of water (Guebert: 149-50; Brunner, Butler, Swaboda: 52, 55-56). I live near the mouth of the Mississippi River, where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico (not the Gulf of America, as Trump claims, for heaven’s sake). In the oceans world-wide acidity is measured by pH level; the lower the pH, the more acidic the water is.

The oceans have dropped from 8.2 to 8.1 in the past thirty years, which is an increase of 30% acidity. The Caribbean presently has the worst level of acidity. It is estimated that by the end of the century the oceans will be 30% more acidic. This acidity will cause the shells of oysters, clams, sea urchins, and corals to dissolve. It also causes some fish to lose sense of location and thus lose their habitat, and other fish lose the ability to sense a predator nearby (“Ocean Acidification”). We are murdering our animal brothers and sisters in the oceans.

In addition, with global warming (I hear my in-law screaming at the use of that term) the oceans get warmer and this causes many species of fish to migrate more to polar regions away from equatorial regions. This places a burden on those who earn a living by fishing (Daley). Overabundant whaling nations is threatens the existence of certain species of whales. The oceans are huge and full of life, but humanity is harming the oceans aggressively and in many ways. We have lost half of our coral reefs since 1870, and one third of the remaining reefs are disappearing now (UNESCO, IPBES).

People pollute the oceans horribly. Every year four hundred tons of heavy metals, toxic waste, and industrial waste are thrown into streams, rivers, and oceans. Plastic pollution has increased ten-fold from 2015 to 2019. People throw an estimated eight million metric tons of plastic debris into the oceans every year (Baker 2000a: 12). In the Pacific Ocean there is a 2.4 square island called Midway, home to the Midway Atoll Wildlife Refuge, a habitat for millions of birds. Since 2014 several hundred thousand albatross chicks lie dead on the island and are stacked in heaps every year. These little birds are choked to death by bits of plastic gathered as food by the parent birds from the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Their stomachs contain cigarette lighters, bottle caps, and tampon applicators, in addition to the massive amounts of plastic (Brunner, Butler, Swaboda: 49). Where did all the crap in the ocean come from, and how did it float to the middle of the Pacific Ocean?

We have increased CO2 levels to make the oceans acidic and warmer, changing currents and weather patterns. We have dumped 8 million tons of waste annually, in addition to agricultural and industrial runoff. By 2050 the oceans will have more plastic than fish (Baker 200b: 48).

The denizens of the sky and the oceans create life; the world cooperates with God in the production of life (Brown: 40-41). The miracle of life began in our oceans eons ago when the simple life forms undertook mitosis and divided. Eventually sexual reproduction developed to continue the production of life. Through those ages God was there directing the process of life and the birth of life. Eventually humans evolved and emerged, gifted with the ability and intelligence to appreciate the wondrous activities abounding in our world and especially the miracle of life. We and the animals produce life; we and the animals share with God the production of life. Genesis 1 declares in this grand hymn of creation that God creates

life by command, but that animals and people create life by reproduction. (Protestant Evangelicals spend their time arguing about how these are literal twenty-four hour days, but they don't read the account to observe the beauty it proclaims.)

Oceans have teeming with life for people for centuries, but in the modern age we are killing the oceans. Created by God to be givers of life, the oceans are dying. Can we not hear the oceans cry aloud to us as we strangle them with pollution? The skies of America once were filled with beautiful birds, until we shot many species into extinction. The skies of our land are now filled with pollution, once bringing us the life-giving oxygen for our bodies, but now tinged with carcinogens. Can we not hear the skies cry aloud also? Created by God to bring forth life, the oceans and the skies have been assaulted by humanity and their life giving capacity has been choked. Genesis 1 tells the story of how there should be harmony between God, nature, and humanity (Brown: 45). But instead the denizens of the sea and the aviators of the skies have to cry to God to deliver them from humanity. They cry and they cry! Would that we could heed their cries!

## CONCLUSION

The narratives of Genesis 1–2 and 9 present a profound theological vision in which humanity and the animal world share a common origin, identity, and destiny under God's creative and covenantal purposes. Far from endorsing human domination in the exploitative sense, the biblical language of "rule" and "subdue" is best understood as a call to responsible stewardship—an ethic grounded in kinship, mutual dependence, and divine trust. By recovering the original Hebrew term *nephesh hayya* ("living beings") and recognizing its application to both humans and animals, we dismantle the artificial hierarchies that have long justified the neglect, abuse, and extinction of other species.

This reading affirms that animals are not mere background elements in the biblical story but active participants in God's covenant and co-creators in the ongoing generative work of the earth. Such a vision challenges contemporary readers to confront the dissonance between biblical stewardship and the modern ecological crisis marked by habitat destruction, climate change, and mass extinction. Genesis' theological framework calls for an ethic that safeguards biodiversity, honors the intrinsic worth of non-human life, and acknowledges the interwoven destiny of all creatures.

In a time when human activity threatens the stability of life systems on a global scale, the Genesis narrative offers a counter-vision rooted in covenantal fidelity and ecological justice. It invites humanity to stand not as conquerors but as caretakers, restoring balance to the relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of creation. If we take seriously the scriptural witness, then

our moral responsibility extends beyond anthropocentric concerns to embrace the flourishing of all living beings. To fail in this stewardship is not only an ecological tragedy but also a theological betrayal of the divine trust granted to humankind in the beginning.

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