

18 *Tyrants, Stewards – or Just Kings?*

1. All biblical quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise stated.
2. So, for example, those who think that women are the weaker sex find in Genesis 2 that the first woman was created to be the man's 'helper'. Others might notice that the first man couldn't manage without help. Likewise, it is sometimes cited as evidence of the absolute inferiority of animals that when God brought all the beasts and birds to the man 'no suitable helper was found'. What impresses me is that the writer even entertains the idea that it might have proved otherwise. The story may be *faux naïf* – of course the man is not going to mate with an elephant – but there is no trace of irony in it.
3. Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1: *Genesis 1–15*, Word Books 1987, p. 9.
4. Borne out by Col. 1.16 (and arguably Prov. 8.31).
5. For a full discussion of this latter point, see Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, SCM Press/Harper 1985, pp. 5ff.
6. God also commands them, as well as us, to 'be fruitful and increase in number'.
7. Note that, according to Gen. 5.2, the name *adam* is given by God to the whole human race.
8. My italics. The translation is from Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*.
9. Prov. 8.39f. might be the proof text here – and note that though, once again, our kind is singled out, the parallelism of Hebrew poetry at the same time aligns us with the whole of creation.
10. Thus, the great nineteenth-century naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace wrote of the birds of paradise he saw in New Guinea: 'I thought of the long ages of the past, during which the successive generations of these things of beauty had run their course, year by year being born and living and dying amid these dark and gloomy woods with no intelligent eye to gaze upon their loveliness, to all appearances such a wanton waste of beauty. It seems sad that . . . such exquisite creatures should live out their lives and exhibit their charms only in these wild, inhospitable regions. This consideration must surely tell us that all living things were *not* made for man. Many of them have no relation to him' (*The Malay Archipelago*, 2 vols, Macmillan 1869, quoted by David Attenborough in 'The Natural World Special: Attenborough in Paradise', broadcast 8 April 1996, BBC2).
11. See e.g. Josh. 24.27; Ps. 19.1–4; Isa. 55.12; Rom. 8.22.
12. Ben Elton would seem closer to the spirit of the Bible when he observes in his comic novel *Stark*: 'Everything pales in comparison to a creation of this awesome magnitude. What is the Taj Mahal or the Golden Gate Bridge to

- a living force with arteries so huge a child could crawl along them? Yet they [are] being wiped off the face of the earth to make soap.'
13. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, T. & T. Clark 1964, p. 195. Of attempts to locate the *imago Dei* in various mental and spiritual faculties, Wenham observes: 'It is impossible to demonstrate any of these suggestions. In every case there is the suspicion that the commentator may be reading his own values into the text as to what is most significant about man' (*Genesis 1-15*, p. 30).
  14. See 'Discourse V', *René Descartes: A Discourse on Method*, trs. John Veitch, Everyman edn, Dent 1912, Part V, pp. 43-46. Montaigne's point still stands: 'The defect that hinders communication betwixt them and us, why may it not be on our part as well as theirs? 'Tis yet to determine where the fault lies that we understand not one another; for we understand them no more than they do us' (*Essais*, trs. Charles Cotton, 1693).
  15. To my mind, the writer is clear that two preternatural events occur in this incident, which he indicates with the formula 'The Lord opened . . .'. God first enables the ass to speak, and, second, enables Balaam to see what she sees. That the ass has something to say seems to be taken for granted. Of course, one can dismiss the story as a fable; but even fables have their own integrity. It is interesting, too, that the angel tells Balaam so pointedly, 'I would certainly have killed you . . . but I would have spared her.' These last five words, like the curious verse which concludes the book of Jonah, undermine our assumption that the lives only of human beings matter in themselves.
  16. There are references in scripture to the fact that (some?) animals have no understanding or reason, e.g. Ps. 32.9, II Peter 2.12. I take it, however, that these are using a popular perception to make a different point. (On the same basis, I do not believe that Prov. 6.6 ff. actually means that the ant is as sensible as the writer implies.)
  17. Karl-Erik Fichtelius and Sverre Sjölander write: 'The intricate combination of phenomena necessary for a complex language like ours could very well exist in other animals, for example dolphins . . . But it may employ a logic that is entirely foreign to us, and treat information in a way that seems to us backwards' (*Man's Place: Intelligence in Whales, Dolphins and Humans*, Gollancz 1973). Certainly, dolphins have demonstrated a much greater capacity to imitate and apparently understand human speech than we have to either imitate or understand theirs.
  18. *Essais*. Douglas Adams sardonically observes in *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Heinemann 1986): 'Man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much – the wheel, New York, wars and so on – whilst all the dolphins had ever done was

muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man – for precisely the same reasons.’

19. As Carl Sagan noted: ‘They have behaved benignly and in many cases affectionately toward us. We have systematically slaughtered them’ (*The Cosmic Connection*, New York: Doubleday 1973).
20. *Elephant Memories: Thirteen Years in the Life of an Elephant Family*, Elm Tree Books 1988.
21. J. Cousteau and Y. Paccalet, *Whales*, trs. I. M. Paris, New York: Harry N. Abrams 1988.
22. E. S. Savage-Rumbaugh, *Ape Language: From Conditioned Response to Symbol*, New York: Columbia University Press 1986, p. 25.
23. Cited in *Third Way*, May 1994, p. 11. Frans de Waal cites many examples of apparent altruism in other species in *Good Natured: The Origin of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1996.
24. See Ps. 104.21, 27, and many other references, and Gen. 9.8–17, Hos. 2.18.
25. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, IVP 1993, p. 446.
26. C. S. Lewis, ‘Religion and Rocketry’ in *Fern-Seed and Elephants’ and Other Essays on Christianity* ed. Walter Hooper, Fount edn 1975, p. 88.
27. Thus in Gen. 2.7 the first man is created as a body into which life is breathed, not (as Plato would have had it) as a soul which is then embodied. The importance of this – and the contrast with Plato’s doctrine of the soul – cannot be overemphasized. It is his body (which is unique) which makes *adam* human; the breath of God (which he shares with every other animal) gives him life. Note too that when *adam* first sees the woman he welcomes her not as a kindred spirit but as ‘bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ (2.23).
28. Even if we spiritualize this vision – and it is interesting to ask ourselves why we should want to – it is notable that the biblical paradise is a place where human beings live in harmony with their traditional rivals and enemies. Today we are more likely to visualize paradise as a place from which every wolf and cobra – and every wasp and spider – has been exterminated.
29. Quoted in I. Hart, ‘Genesis 1.1–2.3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis’, *Tyndale Bulletin*, 46/2, November 1995, p. 317.
30. Ibid.
31. Perhaps because many leading green Christians are scientists, their statements are often distanced and dispassionate. They speak in terms of vast, impersonal abstractions, of ‘creation’ or ‘the environment’ (a word which Christians should reject, since it defines the earth entirely in relation to

us). Animals seem to be seen as adjuncts to the earth, no more than a vital component in its self-regulating mechanism – essential to the ecosystem, valuable biodiversity.

Thus *An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* (published 1994 by the Evangelical Environmental Network) seems to envisage ‘the creation’ as something other than us, ‘in which we are embedded, and through which . . . we are sustained’. It goes on to issue the vague and strangely bloodless call: ‘We urge individual Christians and churches to be centers of creation’s care and renewal, both delighting in creation as God’s gift, and enjoying it as God’s provision, in ways which sustain and heal the damaged fabric of the creation which God has entrusted to us.’ What a chasm there is between this kind of language and the passionate and particular words of scripture! Even Paul, the most metropolitan of biblical writers, personifies creation in Rom. 8 as a woman in labour, and feels her struggle between agony and hope. Evangelicals especially seem to be unsettled by too much enthusiasm for trees and whales (though we are comfortable enough quoting the opening words of Ps. 19). I suspect that this is because we are afraid of conceding too much to the New Age movement – yet it strikes me that every book of the Bible I have quoted here was written at a time when paganism was a much greater threat to the purity of the faith than it is now.

32. One such privilege is illustrated in I Sam. 26.7–11 and II Sam. 1.1–16. There is an obvious parallel here with Gen. 9.5 f.
33. See also Deut. 17.14–20.
34. Long life, wealth, and security could well stand as the three primary motivations for humankind’s abuse of other species.
35. It is striking that the wisdom of the king demands empathy: his judgment shows that he has understood both the love of the real mother and the bitterness of the one who has been bereaved. One might compare Prov. 12.10a: ‘A righteous man cares for the needs of [AV: ‘regardeth the life of’] his animal’, which implies understanding gained through sympathetic observation.
36. II Cor. 4.4; Col. 1.15; Heb. 1.3. See also II Cor. 3.18.
37. Col. 1.16 f.; Heb. 1.2 f.; Rev. 5.13 f.