Nicola Hoggard Creegan, *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xi+206 pp. $52.20 (hbk).

Faith Glavey Pawl
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

Nicola Hoggard Creegan's 2013 *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil* insightfully explores how evolutionary science challenges traditional attempts at theodicy and offers a novel interpretative scheme for responding to those challenges. In it she brings an impressive depth and breadth of research—theological, biblical, and scientific—to the recent conversation in philosophy and theology concerning animals and the problem of evil. Creegan argues that the image of nature as being "red in tooth and claw" challenges our ability to see God in nature. Her book is concerned not only with the problem of non-human animal (henceforward animal) suffering, but more generally, with restoring confidence in the Christian's ability to sense God's goodness in the created order. To do so, Creegan draws on Jesus's parable of the wheat and tares to paint a picture of evolutionary history where goodness and evil are intimately mixed, and the boundaries and interconnections between the two are often beyond our ken.

In the opening chapters, Creegan canvasses some of the standard theological approaches to understanding the fall, both historical and existential, and says that theodicies that rely on the Adamic fall are at odds with Darwinian science. Accounts of the fall that understand the narrative as historical, she says, are contradicted by evolutionary history. Existential accounts that read the fall not as an historical event but as a commentary on human nature, "devalue the empirical and the historical," (20) and thus sidestep engagement with evolutionary science.

The problem is not *merely* that death and suffering predate our earliest human ancestors—as if that were not a big enough problem itself. In addition, Christian theism faces further challenges in light of our animal past and in light of what we have learned about other species. Arguing that we can no longer insist on a sharp divide between humans and non-human animals, she contends that animals bear the marks of what she calls a proto-morality. The underlying traits that make possible not only empathy, but also violence and greed, can be found in many other extant species, and were presumably present in our pre-human ancestors. She calls to mind warring chimpanzees and cats that toy with their prey for prolonged periods before the kill. In light of changes in how we view animal behavior, Creegan suggests that, "if sinfulness at least in latent form begins with animals, then the traditional story of creation, fall, and redemption can no longer hold" (23).

The consequences of this apparent conflict between science and religion are devastating, since as she claims, "the theodicy of Adam and Eve … has been the glue

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that has held Christian theology—and to some extent Western society—together" (15). Throughout the rest of the book she works to preserve a deep understanding of fallenness that nevertheless does justice to contemporary evolutionary science, and argues that Christians ought to seek a "new natural theology." Following Jürgen Moltmann, she says Christians ought to look to the natural world with the expectation that the "the creation will bear witness to the purposes of God if we know how to look" (19), even in light of the evidential challenges posed by evolution.

Creegan goes on to assess various responses to what she calls evolutionary evil. In her third chapter she addresses philosophical responses, but warns that readers interested in the philosophical field of play ought to look to Michael Murray's *Nature Red in Tooth in Claw* for a more extensive treatment.[1] Readers should heed her warning, since her coverage of philosophical views is rather thin—an understandable omission given the scope of the problems she is trying to address. She only discusses M. Murray's book, Alvin Plantinga's free will defense, and one criticism thereof.[2]

In the fourth and fifth chapters she assess various theological responses. She distances herself from deistic and process theologies of evolution on the grounds that they are not orthodox (57). She then pays special attention to the work of Christopher Southgate, Celia Deanne-Drummond, and Sarah Coakely, and her treatment is a valuable resource for philosophers unfamiliar with the theological literature on the ramifications of evolution for theology.

In the middle chapters of the book, Creegan presents her own view by turning to the biblical parable of the wheat and tares (or weeds) from Matthew 13. In the parable, the sower sows good seed, and the enemy comes in the night and sows tares in the same field. When the tares come up with the wheat, the sower's slaves ask the master if they should uproot the tares. The sower responds that in so doing, the wheat would be lost. Only in the final harvest will the two be sorted.

Traditionally, this parable is read as a commentary on the Kingdom of God, but Creegan follows Jacques Maritain and Reinhold Niebuhr in extending its meaning beyond the spiritual realm. Maritain and Niebuhr see in social, intellectual, and political history the same dynamic of evil mixed with and upholding the good. Maritain, for instance, points to the tremendous value of scientific advancement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the tragic fruit such advancement bore in the development of an overly-mechanistic worldview. Revolutions—intellectual and political—bring about advancement and regression, justice and injustice, often in the same sweep. It can be perilous, she says, to try and root out the evil, because evil props up so much of the good. Analogously, Creegan thinks that a similar interplay of harmful and life-giving forces are at work not only in human history, but also in the evolutionary process.

[1] Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[2] The criticism Creegan considers is found in John Bishop and Ken Perszyk, "The Normatively Relativised Logical Argument from Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 70:2 (October, 2011): 109–26.

Appropriating the wheat and tares paradigm, Creegan tells us God is not the author of evil, and God is not to be blamed for permitting or failing to remove evil in the world because the evil is so intimately bound up with the good. The tares are holding up the wheat. She takes this to be importantly different from claiming that God allows evil for the sake of securing some goods, though the distinction does not come through as clearly as she might like.

In Creegan's able hands, the parable also serves a second purpose in addressing the problem of animal suffering. It sets up a sort of epistemic boundary. We are not in an ideal position to see where the good ends and the evil begins, or how the two are connected. Thus, our limited position explains why it can be so difficult to see the hand of God in nature. She makes it clear that the situation is not so bad that we can never see evil for what it is, or recognize the good either. The former is essential to her project because she thinks Christians are called to join the work of redeeming what is fallen. The latter is essential because she thinks that in order for Christians to be rationally justified in maintaining their theism, they must be able to see God's goodness in the natural world.

Here her work bears on the kinds of questions raised in the philosophical literature on skeptical theism—the family of views that respond to evidential arguments from evil by pointing out the limitations of human knowledge in the domain of value. I suspect that skeptical theists could profit from looking at Creegan's wheat and tares paradigm, and she could benefit from exploring skeptical theistic responses to objections about the difficulty of circumscribing the limitations of our knowledge.

After presenting her reading of the wheat and tares, Creegan puts the scheme to good work by evaluating recent trends in evolutionary science that combat what she calls a "hyper-Darwinian" view of the world. She says that the dominant narrative of evolution has long focused on death and pain, and on the randomness of natural selection. No wonder it is so difficult to see God's goodness at work in the natural world.

Aware that her attempt will raise suspicion of an intelligent design agenda, she says her goal is rather to chart a course between "the Scylla of hyper-Darwinism and the Charybdis of purposeful theism" (97). Citing phenomena like cooperation and symbiosis, she makes the case that there are other forces behind the unfolding of evolution—more positive forces than merely pain, death, and randomness. For example, viruses have played a dual role in the evolution of animal species. While viruses have caused disease, suffering, and extinction, it now looks like viruses have played a key role in the development of the human genome. Virus fragments make up 9% of the human genome, and may explain "the creativity and fluidity of genomes," and explain why "speciation and rapid change are able to happen at all" (113).

In very cautions terms, she makes the case that there is now more logical space for seeing what she describes as a "teleology ordered toward life" in evolution, even within Darwinian orthodoxy. Evo Devo, the field of evolutionary biology that looks to embryonic development for clues to evolutionary development, hints that the forces similar to those that guide embryonic development might in some loose sense guide the development of species. And citing recent work on emergence in

biology, she argues there is more room to see reality as layered, and to see top-down causation in the evolutionary process. The resulting picture, she argues, leaves more room to see the hand of God, and sounds a lot like wheat being upheld by tares.

I highly recommend Creegan's final two chapters, wherein she reimagines the fall and sketches some of the practical implications of her vision of animals and their place in the created order. She offers a balanced, thoughtful reflection on the Christian's responsibilities as steward of creation. She makes the case that though animal suffering predated human fallenness, the sins of humankind have greatly exacerbated the suffering of animals—so much so that the suffering of animals cries out for our active participation in the redemption of the evils that inflict the animal kingdom. Of particular interest is her portrayal of a redeemed version of domestication, where human contact draws out of animals a more perfect version of themselves.

This is not simply a book about animal suffering (and perhaps not even primarily about animal suffering). It is a book about all the evidential damage Darwinian science allegedly does to Christianity. How do we make sense of the fall if our pre-human ancestors already had proclivities to sin, or something sufficiently sin-like? How do we hold a coherent theology of creation if the evolutionary process is random? Why should the mechanisms of evolution be so ugly if the author of creation is the God of love? Why would a loving God who cares for all sentient beasts permit those individual beasts to suffer? How can we make sense of the extinction of millions of species of animals? This is a lengthy and diverse set of problems that Creegan tackles.

The breadth of concern in her project is both a virtue, and a liability. Evolutionary science, particularly in the "hyper-Darwinian" style she so adeptly criticizes, does undermine many pieces of the Christian story about evil, and there is little point to oversimplifying the situation. At the same time, it can be difficult to follow the thread of the dialectic when the challenges and questions she addresses cover such a range. Though I suspect that Creegan's wheat and tares paradigm is supposed to help us see our way though all the problems listed above, I think it succeeds in addressing some far better than others.

How does Creegan's wheat and tares paradigm succeed then as a speculative theodicy for animal suffering? She claims, "… we can only be confident of God's care and presence if there is some way of 'explaining' the presence of evil, or at least adjudicating whether evil comes from God, from some evil power or from human action" (99). Creegan argues that neither God nor humans are responsible for most of evolutionary evil, and she takes this to be sufficient for showing that God is off the hook for the origin and persistence of evolutionary evil. Or at least this move is supposed to be sufficient to restore the believer's confidence in God's care.

The natural question then is what (or who) *is* the source of evil? Here Creegan is decidedly cautious. She does not want call the author of evil "Satan" or the "Evil one." What she does say is that her reading of the wheat and tares parable

> … does not tell us the whole story. It does not tell us who or what is evil: the ontology of evil will always be inscrutable. Images and metaphors and scenarios from the past—Satan or the Evil one or prehuman fall do not serve

> us well today, but the reality behind and beyond them persists. We find ourselves at the edge of the historical and the narrative, in the era of what Barth calls saga or myth (93).

At the same time, she criticizes those who follow Karl Barth in attributing the devastating consequences of opposition to God's plan to *das Nichtige.* Nothingness, she says, is not personal enough (76). I take it she thinks the initial source(s) of evil have personal agency. In any case, since the source of evil is beyond the epistemic limits of our history, it is difficult to assess whether attributing evolutionary evil to the reality behind the myth actually gets God off the hook or assures believers of God's care. Whether or not it will is going to depend on the details, which she tells us are inscrutable.

Here two worries arise from leaving the genesis of evil unexplored, the first of which she directly anticipates and addresses. Perhaps the wheat and tares universe she describes is too dualistic—a neo-Manichean fix for the modern Darwinian. Is the source of evil ontologically independent of God and a genuine rival? Is it possible that the tares will win out in the end?

Creegan argues instead for a sort of "provisional" dualism, where the believer can be assured that God will be victorious, and where Christians are invited to participate in the fight against evil. "Sovereignty is not that God is more powerful than anything else in the universe, which in some simple sense must be true but that God has a more subversive power over evil" (127). What she attempts to do, quite admirably, is to give sufficient weight to scriptural evidence concerning the depth of evil in the created order, without sliding into some bad sort of Manichean dualism. Whether or not she succeeds is best left to the theologians to decide.

The second worry is more philosophical in in nature. In her quick discussion of Plantinga's free will defense, she sides with critics who suggest that God might not have been justified in creating a world where fallenness was so likely, given the considerable risk of horrendous evil (51). But likewise, didn't God take a risk in creating a world where the tares would get sown with the wheat, even if the sowing of the tares was not God's choice? Whether or not God took too *great* a risk in creating a world so vulnerable to the enemy's interference will depend to some extent on the details concerning the genesis of evil, and we are in the dark concerning those details.

If God did not know that horrendous evolutionary evil was possible or likely, God's omniscience, and perhaps God's ability to redeem the fallout, would be in jeopardy. If God did know that horrendous evil would be possible or likely, then the objection raised against Plantinga's defense applies just as well to Creegan's. And where with greater-good defenses and theodicies like Plantinga's we have at least some intuitive grasp of why God's risk might have been justified, in the wheat and tares world we have but a promissory note.

In the end, what is so promising about Creegan's project is not so much what it offers by way of a theodicy for animal suffering, but rather the framework it offers for making strides in how we might think about divine hiddenness, and in particular the way God's loving care of creation is obscured not only by the suffering of animals, but also by all that is troubling about the evolutionary process itself. And as

Creegan ably makes the case, it is reasonable to think God's goodness is disclosed in the evolutionary process too. For these reasons, and for the scientific insight and moral clarity Creegan brings to the conversation regarding animal suffering, I highly recommend this book.