

Waldau, Paul and Kimberley Patton (Eds). *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 686pp. \$60.00

In many ways *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics* is a key volume for the Geography of Religion and Belief Systems. One might say that it does for the sub-field what Emel and Wolch's (1998) *Animal Geographies* did for social and political geography: it develops geographic concerns *through* (rather than simply about) the animal realm in such a way as to display the centrality of this "more-than-human" world to all facets of life, including spiritual and ecological alongside political, economic, cultural, aesthetic and somatic.

Yet with the notable groundbreaking achievements, we find it surprising that the discipline of geography seems to have been overlooked as a realm of potentially valuable academic inquiry. "Geographic concerns" are present – e.g., the regulation of human-environment relations, the co-constitution of identity and space, the social construction of self and "other" through places and/or through nature – but these concerns have been couched as the interests of a grouping of multi-disciplinary scholars from which geographers seem to be an omitted class. This absence does not really limit the volume's applicability to the geographic study of religion, but it does restrict vital theoretical input to the very task that the volume claims to inaugurate.

A Communion of Subjects is a collected volume through which over forty scholars explore issues as diverse as animal sentience, biotechnology and religious sacrifice. Indeed, despite the absence of geographic scholarship, the volume offers, through a multiplicity of epistemological perspectives, a thorough and thoughtful collection of works from scholars of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Daoism, Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, as well as numerous indigenous traditions. Many of the individual chapters sensitively detail one or more of these world religions focusing on specific issues relevant to both written texts and placed practices. These chapters are individually fascinating; moreover, when assessed as a whole, another type of contribution comes to light especially relevant for geography: a new and epistemologically pointed pattern of phrasing and language.

Geographers in and outside of the study of religion (e.g. Bondi 1997, Kong 2004, Slater 2004) have insisted on the need to pay attention to academic expression and phrasing for a variety of ethical, political, and intellectual reasons. The rationale for the new pattern of words and phrases that develops in this volume is twofold: not only does it aid in clarifying the multiple roles that animals play in religion, but also, and more broadly, it allows for a robust, persuasive mode of argumentation (which is in continual development by the originators of this volume) regarding an urgent need to take better care of the Earth. This new language is perhaps epitomized in repeated phrases like "interconnectedness" or "a multiplicity of intelligences" but it extends well beyond these examples and, due to its manifold voices (e.g., biologists, theologians, veterinarians, philosophers) would seem to be translatable across diverse epistemologies. Yet, while varied, this new language has not developed randomly; it has emerged from the particular

challenge extended by cultural historian Thomas Berry that all scholars begin to address animals, and indeed all aspects of the universe, as “a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects.” Each of the contributors uses this challenge to weave a new means of scholarly exchange that could prove useful for geography in both a pragmatic (communicative) and a rhetorical (persuasive) sense.

The volume is too long to comment here on each of the essays separately. The works have been organized into eleven parts, supplemented by an introduction (from both editors) and a conclusion by scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker, whose Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE) at Harvard provided much of the impetus for the book. Part I serves as a grounding of sorts, with essays that attempt to outline the interdisciplinary field of ‘Religion and Animals’ and suggest some points of contention. Parts II-V most directly detail the role of animals in the world’s varied religious traditions, ending with a discussion of philosophical and cultural merging of East and West. Parts VI, VII and VIII cover animals in myth, ritual and art, respectively, using these themes to touch such foundational questions as: How have animals been central to the human construction of meaning? How can personhood and animal-*being* be understood in the context of hunting, sacrifice, and ritual? And, what does it mean to conceive of a mutuality of knowing between humans and non-humans? Finally Parts IX-XI examine relationships between animals, science, and ethics including consideration of life sciences, agriculture, animal ‘mentation,’ law, and social and environmental policy. Essay abstracts are offered at the beginning of the volume for all papers from the eleven parts; while potentially useful, these abstracts are organized alphabetically, making the logic of the volume’s structural organization hard to detect.

The editors of *A Communion of Subjects* note that the volume is a small beginning and encourage more work in the delineation of the field of Religion and Animals. Hopefully, this future work will find ways to cross over with geography. We will take a few moments here to note some of the potential fields of cross-fertilization we encountered in the book. First, potential linkages are evident throughout the volume with recent geographic work on emotion and affect in religion (e.g., Holloway 2006). Although the contributors tend to discuss emotions and feelings in classic representational or humanistic ways, the tone of the volume as a whole maintains a keen awareness of a more-than-representational, affective relationality between humans and non-humans, which is (or could be) “put to task” in religious/spiritual settings to carry humanity through difficult eco-social challenges¹. Associated with this attention to affect is a fluctuating attentiveness to bodily and sensory (haptic) ways of knowing in the volume. Although some contributors focus on mental epistemologies, maintaining a (mind-body) dualistic approach, others (especially John Grim in his eloquent discussion of indigenous understandings of “being known” by animals) introduce alternative theoretical lenses by making room for nondualistic cosmologies.

Beyond recent trends of affect and embodiment this volume makes available numerous new linkages between the geography of religion and topics of concern in other geographic sub-fields. At the top of the list may be the in-depth discussion of agribusiness and the politics of the agro-food sector, a topic of increasing concern to

social and political geographers, which FORE frames as an issue of religion and spirituality². Equally important may be the volume's discussion of ecofeminism, which reveals a need to pay attention to the interlocking oppressions of humans and non-humans in the study of religion. Finally, multiple assertions, such as E.N. Anderson and Lisa Raphals's suggestion that Daoist thinking could be crucial for ecosystem management, illustrate the volume's continual, inviting flow of somewhat haphazard or rhizomatic associations made among and between varied topics, approaches, and subfields in the geographic study of religion and beliefs systems.

Cited Works:

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- Holloway, Julian. 2006. Enchanted Spaces: The Se'ance, Affect, and Geographies of Religion. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 96(1).
- Kong, Lily. 2004. Cultural Geography: By Whom, for Whom? *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 22.
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¹ Mitch Rose's (2002) Landscape and labyrinths (*Geoforum* 33) and others broadly following non-representational theory (NRT) have used the term "put to task" to refer to the catalytic capacity of the material world to create varied forces that may inspire a diversity of actions.

² FORE conferences held in 1998 and 1999 at Harvard University and Yale University, respectively, were two of the first to integrate the issue of agriculture as a central issue in the study of religion and ecology. Those and subsequent conferences witnessed the conception and planning of this volume, with the integration of agriculture as a key theme.