
From Ape to Zebra

On Wild Animals and Taxonomy in Ancient Israel

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From serpent similes and Jacob's sheep to the wild dogs that devour Jezebel, the Bible abounds with animal life. Indeed, the ubiquity of animals in biblical texts bespeaks a society in which animals were a critical and omnipresent feature of everyday life. Early scholarship on the Bible's animals focused primarily on classifying species,¹ but attention soon shifted to the literary and rhetorical use of animal imagery.² More recently, there has been a good deal of discussion inspired by interests in contemporary animal rights concerning attitudes towards non-human animals in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.³ To the extent that such studies have engaged the Hebrew Bible, they have tended to highlight texts that suggest kindness towards animals and kinship between man and beast⁴ or the exploitation of animals and assertions of human superiority.⁵ Nevertheless, despite such forays into Animal Studies, the placement of animals in Israelite cosmology has received little attention.

Of course, there have been some significant exceptions. In a now classic anthropological study, Mary Douglas argued that the Israelites' cosmological boundaries separating land, water, and air informed their dietary laws, which forbid the eating

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- 1 See already, Fisher 1834; Bodenheimer 1960; Bodenheimer 1962, Firmage 1992, Feliks 1962, Pangritz 1963; Pinney, 1964; Cansdale 1970; Riede 1993.
 - 2 Rimbach 1972; Klotz 1981; Süring 1984; Schwab 1991; Miller 1991; Janowski and Neumann-Gorsolke 1993; Mead 1999; Dell 2000; Borowski 2002; Borowski 2002a; Brent 2005; Labahn 2005; Doyle 2005; Davies 2008; Forti 2008; Forti 2015; Foreman 2011.
 - 3 Jacobs 1976; Feliks 1981; Stein 1980; Schochet 1984; Keel 1993; Isaacs 2000; Riede, 2002: 29-56; Hobgood-Oster 2008; Gilhus 2006; Tlili 2012. See also the many archaeological essays in Arbuckle and McCarty 2014, which examine an even wider range of cultures, from Aztec to Central Asian, for the ways that humans use animals to create, reinforce, and/or deconstruct social inequalities.
 - 4 See, e.g., Arbeitman 1992; Pury 1993 ; Simkins 1994; Kay 2001; Kalechofsky 2006.
 - 5 See, e.g., MacKay 2002.

of animals that appear to cross or confuse the boundaries.⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, in an equally influential essay, furthered our understanding of the cosmological relationship between Israelites and their sacrificial animals by underscoring their domestication.⁷ More recently, Jonathan Klawans nuanced Smith's observations by averring that Israelites identified with their domesticated animals and even empathized with them during sacrifice.⁸ As he argues, the Israelites' relationship to their animals was informed by the principle of *imitatio Dei*; the officiant metaphorically represented God, while the animal represented the people.⁹

The sacrificial rituals of the Hebrew Bible are predicated on the inequality of people and animals: the sacrificial offerings come from the animals that Israelites owned and raised, bought and sold. But this inequality is relative, not absolute. The key to understanding ancient Israelite sacrifice is to remember the analogy: as God is to Israel, so is Israel to its flocks and herds.¹⁰

Since the Israelites sacrificed only domesticated animals, the above observations naturally raise the question as to how the Israelites viewed wild animals. In the main, Bible scholars have treated wild and domesticated fauna as belonging to a single taxon with domesticated beasts perhaps standing between wild animals and

6 Douglas 1966, pp. 42-58. Douglas distanced herself from this view in her preface to the 1992 edition of the book, and asserted instead that non-kosher animals were not impure, but rather too offensive to harm. Nevertheless, many, including myself, still find her former arguments compelling. See also Milgrom 1991; Houston 1993.

7 Smith 1987; republished in Smith 2004.

8 Two additional passages sometimes understood to suggest a kinship between humans and domesticated beasts, in fact, do not do so. The first is the injunction requiring a beast (בְּהֵמָה) to observe the Sabbath along with humans (Exod 20:10). The passage simply puts into legal formulation the realization that domesticated animals cannot be expected to work when their owners are at rest. The second is Qohelet's declaration: "Indeed, the fate of the sons of man and the fate of the beast (בְּהֵמָה) are one fate. As this one dies, so that one dies; and they all have one spirit, the man has no מוֹתָר over the beast. Indeed the whole (thing) is vanity" (Qoh 3:19). Here the term מוֹתָר does not mean "preeminence," in the sense of hierarchical superiority, but simply "advantage." Thus, the passage records Qohelet's frustration that though humans and animals indeed occupy different places in the hierarchy of beings, they suffer the same end. See the comment on this passage in Midrash Rabbah Qohelet, concerning the המהב "beast": "ב'הוּעָה יִחַל הָאֵב הַנִּיאוּ: "it will not enter the life of the world to come." F. C. Fensham 1988: 88 cautions similarly not to assume that putting an animal to death for killing a human is anything more than vengeance for the death. Notions of kinship may not have played a role.

9 Klawans 2006: 75.

10 Klawans 2006: 74.

humans.¹¹ Nevertheless, there is a good deal of evidence to challenge this view. Indeed, as I shall argue, biblical texts reveal the existence of a developing cosmology that first viewed wild animals as numinous creatures closer to the divine world than to humans, but then changed during the exilic and post-exilic periods to one that placed both wild and domesticated animals below humans.

I divide my examination into four parts. In the first, I discuss evidence for the later, now dominant paradigm: all fauna as inferior to humans. In the second, I discuss evidence for the older taxonomy: domesticated beasts as inferior, but wild animals as numinous creatures between humans and God. I cull this evidence from biblical texts that depict wild beasts as divine agents; as numinous beings beyond human control without divine help; as sources of divine wisdom; and as the exclusive animals of choice when figuratively describing Yahweh. In the third portion, I establish the antiquity and ubiquity of the alternative taxonomy by surveying comparative evidence from the wider Near East. In the fourth and final section, I discuss the implications that the taxonomy has for understanding a number of biblical passages, specifically, and Israelite conceptions of divinity, more generally. Throughout, I intend to demonstrate that the Israelite taxonomy that distinguished wild from domesticated animals was as operative and influential as that which separated clean from unclean, and that, like that worldview, it had cosmological moorings.

1 Taxonomy One: All Animals Below Humans

Gen 1:26-28 offers the clearest evidence for the perceived inferiority of non-human animals:

And God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion (יִרְדּוּ) over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them: ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it (וַיְרַבּוּ); and have dominion (יִרְדּוּ) over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth.’

11 See, e.g., Smith 2004: 152-153, who remarks “...if the domesticated animal stands, in native taxonomies, between man and the wild animal, then, to invoke a more familiar scholarly idiom for sacrifice, the sacrificial animal stands in an analogous position between man and ‘the gods.’”

The verbs הָרַךְ ת “have dominion” and שָׁבַד “subdue” certainly place mankind in a superior position to the land and water and all of the creatures that inhabit them.

The second creation account reflects this cosmology as well by giving humans the power to name the other creatures.¹²

And Yahweh God said: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.’ And out of the ground Yahweh God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof. And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him (Gen 2:18-20).¹³

A third passage often cited in support of the perceived superiority of humans over animals is Psalm 8.

What is man, that you remember him?
 And the son of man, that you visit him?
 Yet you have diminished him a little more than angels,¹⁴
 And have crowned him with glory and honor.
 You have made him to rule over the works of your hands;
 You have everything under his feet:
 Sheep and oxen, all of them,
 And also the beasts of the field;
 Birds of the sky, and fish of the sea;
 Whatever passes through the ways of the seas (Ps 8:5-9).¹⁵

Genesis 1-2 and Psalm 68 offer arguably the strongest evidence for a cosmology in which the entire animal kingdom is inferior to humankind. Nevertheless, each of

12 On naming as an act of power, see Moriarty 1974; Rabinowitz 1993.

13 Yöel Arbeitman 1992: 34, argues that the term הָרַךְ in the first account does not mean “dominion,” but “rule or shepherd in a neutral sense,” and that the naming of the animals in the second account refers not to control, but to the “bond” between them. This strikes me as an apologia and/or a compensatory form of exegesis that finds little support from other biblical attestations of the term (e.g., Gen 1:26, 1 Kgs 9:23, Isa 14:6, Ezek 34:4, Lam 1:13, etc.).

14 The Hebrew has אֱלֹהִים “God,” which the Septuagint renders as ἀγγέλους “angels.” Mitchell Dahood 1966: 48, translates “gods.”

15 See the comment of Nahum M. Sarna 1993: 66, “. . .the human race, vis-à-vis the animal kingdom, possesses God-like qualities which place it in a unique relationship with God. . . this psalmist proclaims the distinctively Israelite conviction that God, who created nature, has given humanity the power to control it.”

these chapters also shares in common a rather late date of authorship. A long-standing scholarly consensus holds that Genesis 1 reflects the priestly contemplation of the 6th-5th centuries BCE.¹⁶ Traditionally, scholars have attributed Genesis 2 to the so-called J (Yahwist) source and have dated it to the 10th-9th centuries BCE. However, challenges to this view have been formidable since the 1970s, and now many see Genesis 2-3 as reflecting a much later period. Representative of this view are John Van Seters, Hans Schmid, and Rolf Rendtorff, who argue that the text hails from the exilic or post-exilic period.¹⁷ Several features of Psalm 8 also suggest it dates to the post-exilic period, including its dependence upon Genesis 1,¹⁸ rather pastiche-like form,¹⁹ two-fold use of the late expression “our lord” in reference to God (8:2, 8:10),²⁰ absolute monotheism,²¹ universalistic perspective,²² reflections of post-exilic wisdom,²³ and apparent reaction to a theological crisis, such as the exile.²⁴

Therefore, the most convincing biblical evidence for the superiority of humans over all animals comes from the exilic period or later.²⁵ This fact should give us pause to consider whether such speciesism was the primary worldview throughout Israelite history, or if these texts have become a lens through which scholars have read other references to animals. As Ken Stone keenly observes:

One of the issues raised by contemporary ‘animal studies’ is the question of definition, and, more specifically, how definitions of ‘the human’ and ‘the animal’ have been

16 Wellhausen 1876: 392-450; Wellhausen 1877: 22 and 407-479; Wellhausen 1899; Noth 1948.

17 Van Seters 1975; Van Seters 1992; Schmid 1976; Rendtorff 1997; Crüsemann 1981 and Pury 1993: 35, suggest a date in the 8th-7th centuries BCE.

18 See Kraus 1993: 180; Hossfeld and Zenger, 1993 / 2002: 77.

19 See Schmidt 1969: 14.

20 See Deissler 1961: 48-49 and Kraus 1993: 180.

21 See already Duhm 1899: 29.

22 See Gerstenberger 1988: 71, who remarks: “Rather, we meet with a congregational structure, with autonomous local sapiential theology. This spiritual outlook, well attested in Psalm 8, is in fact the hallmark of the early Jewish scribes and rabbis who organized Israel’s congregations after the Babylonian period.”

23 See Beyerlin 1976: 17-20.

24 Irsigler 1997: 37; Neumann-Gorsolke 2000: 61-62.

25 Some might add Ps 50:10-12, but this passage merely reinforces the taxonomic distinction between wild and domesticated animals by way of a רמורו לך argument (i.e., *a minori ad maius*); to wit, if the wild creatures that are largely inaccessible to humans already belong to Yahweh, then all the more so do the domesticated animals that the Israelites “offer” to him in sacrifice. In any event, this too is a post-exilic psalm. See Mowinckel 1966: 56; Jeremias 1970: 127; Seybold 1996: 207, 209, Kraus 1993: 279.

constructed in relation to, but also over against, one another, with ethical consequences for humans and other animals alike. Although biblical literature does come up in such discussions, knowledge about biblical ways of constructing these relations is too often limited to hasty interpretations of, for example, Gen 1:26 or Ps 8 to buttress human claims of ‘dominion’ over other animals. However, a more extensive and nuanced analysis of the various forms taken by the biblical zoological gaze may reveal a much wider range of relations constructed, not only between humans and other animals, but also between those animals and the Israelite God.²⁶

With this in mind, I submit that indeed there is evidence of an earlier Israelite worldview in which wild animals, unlike domesticated beasts, were viewed as numinous creatures that stood between God and humans.

2 Taxonomy Two: Wild Animals between Humans and God

Evidence for this older cosmology derives from biblical texts that 1) depict wild beasts as divine agents; 2) portray them as numinous beings that humans cannot control without divine assistance; 3) identify them as sources of divine wisdom; and 4) contain similes and metaphors that depict Yahweh as a wild animal, but never as a domesticated one.

2.1 Wild Animals as Divine Agents

Evidence for wild beasts as divine agents in the Hebrew Bible is abundant. In fact, wild animals often do Yahweh’s bidding.²⁷ When sailors cast Jonah into the sea, Yahweh “appoints” (מָנֶה) a giant fish to swallow him (Jon 1:17).²⁸ Yahweh “commands” (צִוָּה) ravens to bring bread and meat to Elijah in the desert (1 Kgs 17:4).

²⁶ Stone 2012: 79.

²⁷ The case of Balaam’s jenny is unique in that, though it speaks only when Yahweh opens its mouth (Num 22:28), the animal reveals nothing of the divine, but instead only inquires why Balaam has struck it. It is not until Yahweh’s angel opens Balaam’s eyes, that he perceives God behind the jenny’s actions (22:31). One might attribute the disassociation of the jenny from divine wisdom here not just to the animal’s domestication, but to the text’s polemic against foreign prophets. Nevertheless, the literary topos of a talking animal is grounded in real divinatory practice. See Noegel in press(a).

²⁸ On the association of the fish with a *tannin* “sea monster,” see Noegel 2015.

When a prophet of Judah disobeys Yahweh's command, God dispatches a lion to kill him (1 Kgs 13:24-28). Elisha's curse in Yahweh's name similarly summons two bears that devour forty-two children (2 Kgs 2:24). In the desert, Yahweh's spirit brings quails from the sea to feed the Israelites (Exod 16:12-13, Num 11:31-33, Ps 78:26-27, 105:40). When they later murmur against Moses, Yahweh sends fiery serpents (הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשָּׂרִפִּים) against them (Num 21:6). Against the Philistines he sent a plague of mice (1 Sam 6:5).²⁹ He promised to drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites with hornets (Exod 23:28). All of the creatures that Yahweh sends to plague the Egyptians are wild (Exodus 8-10). To other peoples who anger him, Yahweh sends swarms of locusts and other insects (e.g., Joel 1:4, Amos 4:9, 1 Kgs 8:37 [= 2 Chron 6:28]). Proverbs also warns that ravens will pluck, and vultures will devour, the eye of the person who despises his parents (30:17). About Israel, Yahweh threatens: "I shall put them in a forest, and a beast of the field (הַיְיָדָה הַיַּיִת) will devour them" (Hos 2:14). Yahweh similarly warns the Israelites, "I will send the wild animal (הַיְיָדָה הַיַּיִת) against you, and it will rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and diminish your number so that your roads will be desolate" (Lev 26:21-22). Yahweh also threatens apostates: "I will send upon them the fangs of wild beasts (תַּר בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂרִי) with the venom of crawling things of the dust (עֲפָר זֹחֲלֵי)" (Deut 32:24).³⁰ When thrown into the lions' den, Daniel's adversaries are devoured before they hit the bottom (Dan 6:25). In each case, it is a wild creature that executes Yahweh's plan. What defines all of these acts as divinely motivated is the fact that the animals involved are wild, and thus, beyond man's command.

2.2 Wild Animals as Numinous Creatures Beyond Control without Divine Help

According to Agur, two creatures were wondrous to behold: a vulture and a serpent (Prov 30:19).³¹ Obviously, they astonished the poet, because flight and able movement without limbs were difficult to understand in antiquity.³² Moreover, as Victor

29 The mice appear only here, though the LXX refers to them three times in the story. Josephus, *Antiquities*, vi 1, 3, also knows of their role in the account.

30 The בְּהֵמוֹת here are clearly wild, since the text hardly would describe cattle by reference to their teeth/fangs. Note too that they parallel serpents notorious for their bite.

31 Agur also admires the gait of the lion, goat, and perhaps a saluki, though the passage is difficult (Prov 30:31).

32 The proverb then lists "a ship in the midst of the sea" and "the way of a man with a maiden." These additions make it clear that, while such things bewildered the author, they are not entirely beyond human wisdom, since humans build ships and "know" their lovers.

Hurowitz observes, unlike other creatures, they leave no trace.³³ Yet, these creatures and their movements were not the only wild animals to suggest the awe of the numinous. Hinds and gazelles embodied divine speed, sure-footedness, and graceful beauty (2 Sam 2:18, Song 2:8-9, 2:17, Hab 3:19, Ps 18:34, Prov 5:18-19). Predators too invoked the majesty of the divine for their natural power, stealth, and fearlessness (Prov 30:30). The episodes concerning the golden calf, bronze serpent, and Isaiah's seraphim also reveal a belief in the numinous nature of these creatures (Exod 32:1-6; Num 21:4-9, Isa 6:1-7, 1 Kgs 12:26-28).³⁴ Some creatures, like the aurochs and lion were connected so closely with divinity that they adorned the temple in Jerusalem.³⁵ However, what distinguished all wild beasts from their domestic counterparts, and thus, what contributed to their *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, was their inability to be tamed. Like the wind and other numinous elements of nature, God alone controlled their actions. Hence, Yahweh's rhetorical queries to Job:

Who has sent out the wild ass free,
Or who has loosed the bands of the onager? (39:5)

Is an aurochs (אֲרִי) willing to serve you?
Or will he lodge by your trough?
Can you bind an aurochs (אֲרִי) in a furrow with a rope?
Or will he harrow the valleys after you? (39:9-10)

Does the hawk soar by your understanding,
And stretch its wings to the south?
Does a vulture soar up at your command,
Or the falcon set his nest on high? (39:26-27)³⁶

Moreover, unlike domesticated animals, which received their food and care from humans, wild creatures received their sustenance directly from God: "He gives to the beast its food, and to the ravens' young that cry" (Ps 147:9).³⁷ The Psalmist remarks: "the young lions roar at prey, and seek their food from God" (Ps 104:21). See also Yahweh's question to Job:

33 Hurowitz 2012: 573-574 (in Hebrew), suggests that the passage emphasizes the tracelessness of each subject, hence why the snake moves upon a rock, for example, instead of sand. He also argues that the אֲרִי "way" of man with a maiden is a euphemism for intercourse. Böck 2009 argues that the proverb has its origin in a riddle.

34 Observed by Glessmer, Janowski, and Neumann-Gorsolke 1993: 325-326.

35 See Keel and Schroer 2015:46.

36 For אֲרִי as "falcon," see Pope 1973: 314.

37 The belief that God feeds the wild animals also occurs in Matt 6:26.

Will you hunt prey for a lion,
 Or fill the appetite(s) of young lions?
 When they crouch in their dens,
 And sit in the lair to ambush?
 Who provides for the raven its game,
 When its young cry to God, (and) wander without food? (Job 38:39-41, cf. Joel 1:20).

Since the behavior of wild animals remains only within the purview of the divine, one must obtain divine help in order to kill or control them. Thus, Samson tears apart a lion only after *תֵּרַחַם רִיחַם עָלָיו וַיִּזְעַק* “the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him” (Judg 14:6).³⁸ David too tells Saul that he killed a lion and bear with Yahweh’s assistance (1 Sam 17:34-37). The Psalmist promises that only with divine help will you “tread upon the lion and adder, you will trample the young lion and serpent” (Ps 91:13).³⁹ Daniel tells the king that God’s angel *אֶרְיֹתָא פִּם וְסָגַר* “shut the mouths of the lions” while he sat in their den (Dan 6:22). Even when used metaphorically, one cannot harm wild animals without Yahweh’s help: “Smash their teeth, O God, in their mouth, break the cheek-teeth of the young lions, O Yahweh” (Ps 58:7). Elsewhere the Psalmist likens his besiegers to bees: “they surround me like bees, but they will be quenched like a fire (quenches) thorns. Verily, in the name of Yahweh I will cut them off” (Ps 118:12). See too the words of Eliphaz:

By the breath of God they perish,
 And by the wind of his nostrils they are finished.
 (By) the roar of the lion, and the sound of the lion,
 And the teeth of young lions are broken.
 A lion perishes without prey,
 And the whelps of the lion are scattered (Job 4:9-11).

Indeed, Eliphaz later insists that those in league with Yahweh obtain power over the wild:

You will not fear the beasts of the earth,
 For you will make a pact with the field-sprites;
 And the beast of the field will be at peace with you (Job 5:22-23).⁴⁰

38 Samson also is able to catch and control three hundred foxes (Judg 15:4).

39 The term for serpent here is *תַּנִּין*, elsewhere used for the serpent of chaos (Isa 27:1), suggesting that the verse has cosmological overtones.

40 On the translation “field-sprites,” as earth demons, see Pope 1973: 45-46.

By divine agency Aaron's rod also transforms into a snake that devours the serpents of the Egyptian magicians (Exod 7:9-12). Moses too reminds the Israelites that without Yahweh's help they would not escape the desert's fiery serpents and scorpions (Deut 8:15). Such texts again evidence the numinous nature of wild creatures and their taxonomic placement near the divine.⁴¹

2.3 Wild Animals as Sources of Divine Wisdom

Additional evidence for the numinous nature of wild beasts comes from passages that identify them as sources for obtaining divine wisdom.⁴² As Job tells his friends:

Ask the beasts, and they will teach you, and the birds of the air, and they will tell you... or speak to the fish of the sea, and they will inform you. Who does not know among these that the hand of Yahweh has done this? (Job 12:7-9).

Proverbs similarly advises the slothful: "Go to the ant, sluggard, and look at its ways, and be wise (חָכֵם)" (Prov 6:6). Elsewhere Proverbs teaches that the behaviors of the ant, hyrax, locust, and lizard make them מְחִכְמִים מְחִכְמִים "wisest among the wise" (Prov 30:24).⁴³ Wild creatures whose behavior betokened seasonal changes appeared especially wise.⁴⁴ Thus, Jeremiah prophesies:

Yea, the stork in the sky knows its appointed time,
And the turtle-dove and the golden oriole obey the time of their coming,
But my people do not know the rule of Yahweh.

41 This view continued into early Judaism, as Schochet 1984: 129, observes: "It is therefore not unusual (in rabbinic texts) to find animals playing a pivotal role in the unfolding of divinely ordained events, and God will frequently call upon fauna as His emissaries in dispensing divine justice upon mankind." All of the texts that Schochet cites involve wild animals. Schochet argues that the rabbinic period saw a "remythologization" of animal life and a reversal of the "demythologization" of animals that took place in ancient Israel (83-96). I find it more plausible to understand the rabbinic views as a continuation of the older taxonomy that remained operative in some circles.

42 The identification of snake charmers with wisdom in Ps 58:5-6, implies that they possess secret knowledge of the divine that enables them to communicate with God's numinous creatures. Had snake charmers and other ritual professionals not represented serious competition for handling divine knowledge, the priesthood would not have legislated against them (Deut 18:11).

43 On the meaning of animal imagery in Proverbs generally, see Forti 2008.

44 See Riede 2002: 1- 28.

How can you say, “We are wise (חֲכָמִים) and the law of Yahweh is with us?” (Jer 8:7-8).⁴⁵

As Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer point out: “Observation of animals offered people the possibility of becoming wise, of coming closer to the divine order (of nature) and thus to God himself.”⁴⁶ Indeed, when Yahweh asks Job “who put wisdom in the ibis and gave the wild rooster understanding?” (Job 38:36), the implicit answer is that he did.⁴⁷ In fact, Yahweh’s effort to impart wisdom to Job from the tempest refers to the behavior of no less than fifteen animals, all but one of which are wild (i.e., ibis, wild rooster, bear, lion, raven, mountain goat, hind, onager, aurochs, ostrich,⁴⁸ hawk, vulture, hippopotamus, crocodile).⁴⁹ The only exception is the war-horse, which communicates bravery in the face of frenzied battle (39:19-25).⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Yahweh quickly places the horse in an inferior position to the animals immediately prior by stating that the ostrich, the least wise among wild animals, “laughs at the horse and its rider” (39:18).⁵¹ Moreover, Yahweh’s list of wild fauna immediately follows an inventory of cosmological creations that include the earth’s foundations, the morning stars, the sea and its limits, the movement of the sun and constellations, the underworld, light and darkness, the storehouses of snow and hail, the wind, rain, and dew, and thunder and lightning. Thus, Yahweh’s speech places wild animals among his many numinous manifestations that impart divine wisdom by remaining beyond mortal ken and control.

45 On the identification of *סִרְיָן* as a single bird (“golden oriole”) here and also in Isa 38:14, see Rendsburg 1992: 151-153.

46 Keel and Schroer 2015: 50.

47 The rhetorical queries constitute a corrective retort to Job’s previous statement: “Wisdom, whence does it come, and where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of every living being, and concealed even from the birds of the sky” (Job 28:20-21). Pope 1973: 290, 302, renders “Who put wisdom in Thoth? Who gave Sekwi understanding?” He takes Sekwi to reflect an Egyptian word for the planet Mercury.

48 Job 39:14-17 explains the ostrich’s seeming lack of concern for its eggs by asserting that God deprived it of wisdom and understanding. Nevertheless, the bird still teaches wisdom to Job, and it remains superior to the horse. Cf. Lam 4:3 in which the ostrich provides a simile for a cruel person.

49 Keel 1978 argues that the list of animals represents the “Master of Animals” motif found in artistic remains (discussed below).

50 Since horses continued to exist in the wild and resisted domestication, perhaps the Israelites viewed them as partially wild. Cf. the comparison of horses to wild animals in Hab 1:8.

51 The horse mostly has a negative connotation in the Bible. See Keel 1993: 183. On the meaning of animal imagery in Job, see Miller 1991.”

2.4 Wild Animals in Similes and Metaphors for Yahweh

When metaphorically describing Yahweh's actions, biblical texts always use wild animals instead of domesticated beasts, not just because some contexts demand comparisons to violent predators, but because these animals remain beyond the rule of humans.⁵² Thus, figurative comparisons also include a vulture watching over Israel like desert nestlings (Deut 32:11-12), "birds hovering" over Israel to protect it (Isa 31:5, cf. Ps 91:4), and the wild aurochs:

His firstling bullock (שׁוֹר), majesty is his;
And his horns are the horns of the aurochs (אַרְיֹת).
With them he shall gore the peoples all of them,
Even the ends of the earth (Deut 33:17).⁵³

Balaam makes a similar comparison:

God who brought them out of Egypt,
Is for them like the lofty horns of an aurochs (אַרְיֹת) (Num 23:22).

Indeed, Yahweh bears the epithet אַרְיֹת "wild bull of Jacob" (Gen 49:24; Isa 1:24 (of Israel); 49:26; 60:16; Ps 132:2; 132:5).⁵⁴

52 Wild animals also appear in figurative descriptions of gods in Ugaritic texts. In CAT 1.6 vi 17-21, one finds: "Mot is strong, Baal is strong, they gore like aurochs. Mot is strong, Baal is strong, they bite like serpents. Mot is strong, Baal is strong, they pull (each other) like wild steeds." In CAT 1.5 i 14-20, Mot asks, "Is (my) appetite the appetite of a lion of the wasteland, or the desire of the narwhale of the sea, or that of an aurochs for a pool, or a hind for a spring? Truly, truly, (my) appetite devours in heaps. Indeed, truly with two hands I will devour them." In Assyrian royal inscriptions, wild animals serve as similes and metaphors for the king's bravery, cunning, and speed, whereas domesticated animals characterize the humiliated actions of the enemy. See Marcus 1977. Strawn 2005: 237-238, observes that biblical texts do not compare Israelite kings to lions. However, see 2 Sam 1:23: "Saul and Jonathan... were swifter than vultures, they were stronger than lions," and Prov 28:15: "As a roaring lion, and a ravenous bear; so is a wicked ruler over a poor people."

53 On the identification of Yahweh and El with the aurochs, see Wyatt 1999: 180-182, who also notes the parallel between אַרְיֹת "wild aurochs" and עֶזְלָא "calf" in Ps 29:6 (181). The accounts of the golden calf (Exodus 32) and Jeroboam's calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:25-33) also have the wild aurochs in mind. In Ugaritic texts, El bears the epithet tr "bull," again likely the aurochs (e.g., CAT 1.1 iii 26, iv 12, v 22, etc.). The bulls that appear in ritualized pharaonic hunting scenes also are aurochs. See Borowski 1998: 191.

54 The Ugaritic cognate *ibr* can mean wild bull or horse. See DULAT 8, s.v. *ibr*.

Indeed, employing domesticated fauna as similes and metaphors for Yahweh would disparage him, as it would identify the divine with creatures that the Israelites understood as controllable. Since animal husbandry was a central form of economic activity in Israel, and therefore a major factor in social formation, the Israelites increasingly regarded domesticated animals as ignorant and inferior. This attitude is apparent in Hosea's prophecy, which refers metaphorically to Ephraim as a *פִּוֹתָהּ יוֹנָה* "witless dove" unaware of the net Yahweh spreads over it (Hos 7:11).⁵⁵ Isaiah uses the image of the lazy dog to illustrate the ignorance of Israel's watchmen (Isa 56:10). See also the Psalmist's admonishment: "Do not be like a horse (or) like a mule, which has no understanding, in whose mouth are a bit and bridle" (Ps 32:9). Asaph's confession also reflects this viewpoint: "I was brutish and I did not know. I was (like) cattle (*בְּהֵמוֹת*) before you" (Ps 73:22). Note too Bildad's question to Job: "Wherefore are we considered like cattle (*בְּהֵמוֹת*), and stupid in your eyes?" (Job 18:3).

Perhaps nowhere is the sharp taxonomic distinction between wild and domesticated creatures more evident than in Isaiah's messianic prophecy of a time when predators and prey coexist peacefully.

And a wolf shall dwell with a lamb,
 And a leopard shall lie down with a kid,
 And a calf and young lion and fatling together,
 And a little boy shall lead them,
 And a cow and a bear shall feed together,
 Their young shall lie down,
 And a lion shall eat straw like the ox.
 And a weaning child shall play over the hole of an asp,
 And a weaned child shall put his hand over a cobra's den (Isa 11:6-8, cf. 65:25).

The employment of wild and domesticated as categories in merisms shows that the Israelites viewed them as opposites. What marks Isaiah's future as divinely ordained is the taming of the untamable, the collapsing of cosmic categories, and the controlled extension of the numinous into everyday life.

The wild embodies divinity. Hence, Job's complaint to Yahweh: "You hunt me like a lion, and again you show yourself miraculous to me" (Job 10:16). Isaiah too compares Yahweh to "the lion and the young lion roaring over its prey" (Isa 31:4). See similarly Lam 3:10: "He is to me a bear lying in ambush, a lion in secret places." It is in this light that we should understand the use of term *קִמְעוֹן* twice in reference to God's "dwelling" (Deut 33:27, Ps 76:3), a term usually reserved for the "lair" of

⁵⁵ These birds were domesticated in columbaria and used for sacrifice (Lev 1:14).

wild beasts (Job 37:8), especially lions (Amos 3:4, Ps 104:22, Job 38:40, Song 4:8).⁵⁶ The prophets also portray Yahweh as possessing a lion's roar (Isa 31:4, Jer 25:30, 25:38, Hos 11:10).⁵⁷

Amos too likens the Day of Yahweh to an attack by wild beasts: "As if man flees from the lion, and meets the bear, and enters the house and leans his hand on the wall, and the serpent bites him" (5:19). According to Hosea, Yahweh will punish the unfaithful like ferocious mammals:

I will be like a lion to them,
Like a leopard I will lurk by the path.
Like a bear robbed of her cubs,
I will attack them and rip them open;
Like a lion I will devour them,
A wild animal (I) will tear them apart (Hos 13:7-8).

Jeremiah similarly describes Yahweh's vengeance against backsliders:

Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them,
A wolf from the desert will ravage them.
A leopard will lie in wait near their towns,
To tear to pieces any who venture out (Jer 5:6, cf. 4:7-8).

Moreover, when Yahweh destroys a city, it becomes a liminal place that he settles with numinous creatures like wild animals and demons.⁵⁸ Thus, Isaiah prophesies of the fallen Babylon:

Wildcats will lie there,
And owls will fill their homes,
And there will be the young of ostriches,
And demons will dance there,
And hyenas will howl in their palaces,
And jackals in their palaces of delight (Isa 13:21-22).

Note similarly the creatures that enter the ruins of the nations:

56 Noted by Jindo 2010: 231, n. 199.

57 See Strawn 2005: 58-65.

58 See Othmar Keel 2003: 216-228; Janowski and Neumann-Gorsolke 1993; Keel and Schroer 2015: 46. On the early rabbinic association of animals with demons, see Schochet 1984: 94-95.

And the aurochs will descend with them,
 And the bullocks with the bulls...
 The desert owl and screech owl will possess it,
 The great owl and the raven will nest there...
 It will become a haunt for jackals,
 A home for the young of ostriches,
 Wildcats will meet with hyenas,
 And a demon will call to his fellow.
 There (the demon) Lilith will lie down,
 And find for herself a place to rest.
 The owl will nest there and lay eggs and hatch,
 And gather under her shadow.
 There also the falcons will gather,
 Each with its mate (Isa 34:7-16).⁵⁹

The association of wild animals with desolation informs Job's lament: "I have become a brother to jackals, and a companion to ostriches" (Job 30:29), and that of the Psalmist: "I am like a desert owl in the wilderness, I am like an owl of the wasteland" (Ps 102:7). It also provides a context for the Psalmist's description of a ruined Israel: "a boar of the forest tears it up, and a creature of the field ravages it" (Ps 80:14).

In sum, Israelites perceived domesticated animals as unintelligent beasts subject to human control, but wild animals as embodiments of divine wisdom and subject only to Yahweh. Thus, they deemed only wild animals appropriate for describing Yahweh's actions figuratively.⁶⁰ Since the Israelites could not tame wild animals or control their actions, they perceived them as motivated entirely by the divine, and thus, their behaviors could be interpreted as divine signs and could offer opportunities for divine lessons.⁶¹

59 Kay 2001: 91-93, sees such texts as conveying nature's dominion over humans.

60 Doyle 2005: 41-54, argues that the author of Psalm 59 envisions Yahweh as a wild dog who protects the sufferer from the wicked, whom he also likens to wild dogs. If one accepts his view, then we have another example of the use of a wild animal in metaphoric reference to God.

61 On the early rabbinic use of animals in magic and divination, see Schochet 1984: 90-94. For such practices in the Greek world see Ogden 2014, and Struck 2014.

3 Comparative Evidence from the Ancient Near East

The alternative taxonomy examined above appears to have been a vestige of a much older and far more pervasive cosmology, one shared by the more ancient and dominant cultures of the Near East that viewed the animal kingdom generally as close to divinity.⁶²

Egyptians, in particular, regarded animals, both wild and domesticated, as highly numinous beings.⁶³ One sees this especially in the zoomorphic depictions of many Egyptian divinities, which Jan Assmann argues, "...point to a preanthropomorphic and thus probably also prepersonal phase of the form of the numinous."⁶⁴ Not only did the Egyptians worship animals as manifestations of gods, they mummified and buried sacred cats, falcons, crocodiles, and bulls as votives.⁶⁵ Animals also played important roles in oracles, dream interpretation, and incubation. Thus, we hear of the oracular powers of "The Face of the Ibis," "The Bull Who is in Hermothis," and the "Ram of Mendes," to name a few.⁶⁶

The sacredness of animals explains why, unlike Genesis 1-2, the earliest creation myths in Egypt make no mention of their creation. They already were manifestations of the divine world.⁶⁷ A myth inscribed on the walls of the Temple at Esna does attribute the creation of the animal kingdom to the ram-headed god Khnum, who fashioned the animals, birds, reptiles, and fish from clay on his potter's wheel. However, this tradition dates to the Graeco-Roman era.⁶⁸

In Mesopotamia, most gods were anthropomorphic, with a couple of exceptions (e.g., Niraḥ and Nintu).⁶⁹ Nevertheless, many gods were associated with wild animals, especially the lion and aurochs. Statues of these animals also protected gateways and other entrances as apotropaia.⁷⁰ In the Hittite world, the "animals

62 Based on artistic representations in which animals and humans appear to share and blend visual space, Ataç 2010, argues that the Assyrians perceived a close kinship between man and animal.

63 See Brunner-Traut 1987.

64 Assmann 2001: 101-102.

65 Teeter 2002.

66 Ikram 2005: 8.

67 Cf. Greek traditions for animals as metamorphoses of humans. See Campbell 2014.

68 See Hallof 2011.

69 On hybrid animal-human gods in the Greek world, see Aston 2014, who suggests some patterns in the types of powers such gods possess, such as prophecy and associations with death.

70 See recently Watanabe 2016.

of the gods” were invariably wild and included the leopard, lion, bear, boar, wolf, deer, gazelle, and wild goat.⁷¹ The fact that wild beasts became a primary feature of Near Eastern art from the earliest times, even though the peoples of this region were the first to domesticate animals, is a testament to their perceived numinosity.⁷² As JoAnn Scurlock observes:

Animals were thus at least potentially suspended between the natural and the supernatural and, therefore, an obvious choice as messenger to carry information (via divinatory sacrifice) and requests (via occasional sacrifice) back and forth from earth to heaven... Thus, both conceptually and practically, animals formed a bridge between man and the supernatural beings with whom he desired (or dreaded) contact.⁷³

Numerous omen compendia in Mesopotamia reveal a belief that the gods motivate the movements of animals.⁷⁴ Interpreting their actions properly provided experts with access to divine knowledge. The learned ritual experts of Egypt and Mesopotamia also could translate the sounds that animals make into human speech.⁷⁵ Mesopotamian extispicers read animal entrails for heavenly missives.⁷⁶ In the third and second millennia BCE, some animals, like scorpions, snakes, and wild dogs, even personified evil spirits. The Mesopotamians’ divinatory traditions and their close association of gods with aurochs and lions spread throughout Anatolia and the Levant.⁷⁷

As with Egyptian creation myths, the Babylonian *Enūma eliš* appears to have no taxonomic interest in animals. It reports the origins of the gods and the creation of the cosmos up to and including humankind, but it makes no mention of the animal kingdom, other than the fantastical beasts that assist Tiamat in battle or the hybrid draft animals that pull Marduk’s chariot.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, since the Mesopotamians often depicted hybrid creatures alongside those found in nature,

71 Archi 1988; Collins 2002: 328.

72 This is supported by the artistic remains. See van Buren 1939.

73 Scurlock 2002: 403. The Hittites share this view, as noted by Lebrun 1984: “Parmi les animaux sauvages, seuls ont clairement une réalité divine originelle—parce qu’étant susceptibles d’être habités par l’esprit divin—le taureau, le cerf, le fauve” (102).

74 Leichty 1970; Freedman 1998; Freedman 2006. See also the animal omens on the unpublished Tablets 41-48.

75 Lambert 1970; Oppenheim 1974; Preisendanz and Henrichs 1974; Black and al-Rawi, 1987; te Velde 1988; Noegel in press(a).

76 Jeyes 1989.

77 See Caubet 2002.

78 On the import and meaning of such winged creatures, see Noegel in press.

it is plausible to think that, as was the case in Egypt, wild animals belonged with the gods and their fantastical beasts.⁷⁹ Some other texts (not creation myths) do mention the creation of animals, but in every case they sharply divide them into two categories—wild and domesticated—the former always preceding the latter in order and importance.⁸⁰ This matches the lexical traditions, which also separate wild and domesticated animals into distinct categories.⁸¹ Literary texts also contain references to divinities who appear in the form of animals or possess the power to transform people into animals.⁸² Thus, the evidence again demonstrates that the ritual experts of Mesopotamia perceived wild creatures as numinous beings. Moreover, as Scurlock observes:

Learned speculation had it that certain wild animals had arisen from the death of gods. “The wild ass is the ghost of Illil; the wolf is the ghost of Anu. Bel made him roam the plain. The gazelles are his daughters. Bel made them roam the plain. The dromedary is the ghost of Tiamat. Bel cut off her horns, cloved her [feet] and docked her tail. Bel bound her and showed her to mankind that this not be forgotten.”⁸³

Literary depictions of wild animals in Mesopotamia also show them as acting under divine aegis. Thus, we hear in the *Song of Erra*:

I (Erra) let outlandish beasts into the shrines,
I block access to any city where they appear,

79 Note the remark of Caubet 2002: 229 “No strict distinction was made between real animals and those that do not exist in nature.” An Assyrian fragment (K. 3445+ Rm. 396) reports the creation of *naḥirū*, perhaps “narwhales,” and another fragment (D.T. 41) classifies the creation of living creatures into two categories: wild and domesticated. Unfortunately, both fragments give us little information as to how or when the animals were created. Steinkeller 1992: 259-267, also observes that an Early Dynastic lexical tradition groups the human-faced bull with wild animals.

80 For example, an incantation for rebuilding temples known as the *Founding of Eridu* (BM 93014) mentions the creation of earth, mankind (with help of the goddess Aruru), wild animals, the Tigris and Euphrates, and all sorts of plant life, and only afterwards, domesticated animals. In *Enki and the World Order*, Enki makes the land luxuriant and then multiplies the wild animals, including wild sheep. He then puts the god Šakkan in charge of them. In a fragment from the *Fable of the Spider* (DT 41), the gods create the animals of the steppe, which they then divide into animals of Šakkan (i.e., wild animals) and urban beings. See Lambert 2013: 367, 372-373, 401, 516-519.

81 Veldhuis 2014: 109-111.

82 For example, Enlil appears as a raven in the Sumerian tale of *Enlil and Namzitarra* I: 2-25, and Ishtar is said to have turned Dumuzi into a bird in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* VI:46-50.

83 Scurlock 2002: 362, citing Livingstone 1989, no. 39 rev. 11-16.

I send down beasts of the highlands,
 They bring the stillness of death to the thoroughfares,
 I cause beasts of the steppe not to stay in the steppe,
 But to traverse the city street.⁸⁴

Numerous Mesopotamian artistic portraits of gods standing upon wild beasts also demonstrate their perceived closeness to divinity. On a relief from Malatya, one finds seven deities in procession before an Assyrian king, each atop a wild or fantastical creature.⁸⁵ Scholars typically have understood the creatures as defining the gods' powers or as divine avatars, and their placement beneath divine statues as an expression of the gods' control over nature.⁸⁶ Yet, we also may view the creatures' identification with particular gods as specifying the source of their divine agency,⁸⁷ and their placement directly beneath divine feet as conveying their place in the cosmos explicitly just below the gods, and implicitly above humans.

Artistic depictions of animals in Syrian art similarly underscore the numinous character of animals, as Annie Caubet observes:

The image of the animal is on a par, at least, with that of the human being; animal images occupy a pre-eminent place in the evocation of the divine, itself in the forefront of artistic representations; and as a result, animals in art have an essentially symbolic role.⁸⁸

One way that Assyrian kings sought to display their control over the numinous powers of the wild was by building botanical and zoological gardens; controlled paradises filled with exotic species of plants and animals.⁸⁹ Another way, one also practiced by the Egyptians, was through the ritual of the royal hunt.⁹⁰ In Mesopotamian contexts, one finds depictions of the ruler hunting lions or aurochs, whereas

84 The translation is that of Foster 2002: 277.

85 For a sketch of the relief, see Jastrow 1911: 112-113, Fig. 3. Even the bulls upon which Enlil and Adad stand possess wings, thus marking them as non-domesticated. Only Shamash stands upon horses that appear to be harnessed. The horses likely metonymically represent his chariot that draws him through the heavens. On the relationship of Shamash to horses, see Scurlock 2002, and Borowski 2002(a): 370, 409, respectively. On the horse as partially wild, see above.

86 Collins 2002.

87 See, e.g., Lambert 1981.

88 Caubet 2002, 211.

89 Foster 2002, 286.

90 It is likely that the ancients also viewed the art of falconry as controlling the numinous. In Ugaritic texts, the goddess Anat practices falconry (*CAT* 1.18 iv 28-29). On falconry

Egyptian reliefs show pharaoh hunting aurochs or hippopotomuses.⁹¹ The hunts in both contexts conveyed the king's ability to maintain the cosmic order.⁹² Implicit in the hunt is the belief that the ruler possessed this ability by virtue of being an agent of the gods or a god himself. Thus, in Mesopotamia and Egypt too one could not exercise power over wild creatures without divine support.

A final demonstration of the perceived numinosity of animals in the wider Near East is an artistic motif known as the "master of animals," in which a figure holds animals at bay in each hand.⁹³ The motif appears with many variations: the figure can be male, female, mortal, or divine, and the animals can differ, though typically they are wild or mythological. In Egyptian contexts, the motif appears in the form of "Horus on the Crocodiles" on magical cippi used to heal people of animal poisons. On the stela, a young Horus stands upon crocodiles while holding creatures in each hand that belong to the liminal world of the steppe: serpents, scorpions, a lion, and a hare.⁹⁴ The master of animals motif constitutes a performative charm for controlling what humans cannot—the numinous wild. It encapsulates the moment when the divine controls the untamable on man's behalf.⁹⁵

4 Conclusions

4.1 Placing God's Creatures

The combined evidence demonstrates the existence of two different worldviews in ancient Israel with regard to the place of wild animals in the cosmos. The first, which sees wild animals as numinous creatures connected to the divine world, was a vestige of an older cosmology, the likes of which appear in Egyptian and

in Mesopotamia, see Salonen 1973, 82-83, 207-208. On the Hittite practice, see Canby, 2002.

91 The netting of birds also conveys control over chaos in Egyptian artistic scenes. See Teeter 2002.

92 On the various cosmic, social, and cultural functions of the hunt, see Chikako E. Watanabe 1998.

93 See the essays in Counts and Arnold 2010; and Schroer 2014, 141-143.

94 See Teeter 2002, 352-353, with a photograph (353). Other images of gods holding or standing upon wild animals can depict the animals in their service. See Quaegebeur 1981.

95 Caubet 2002, 231, cautiously suggests that the motif depicts "contrary forces opposed in an eternal battle essential to the balance of the world."

Mesopotamian texts and artistic remains, and well beyond.⁹⁶ It was the dominant worldview for most of Israelite history. Nevertheless, it differed with regard to its understanding of domesticated beasts, likely due to the central role that animal husbandry played in early Israel.⁹⁷ The second taxonomy, which became the dominant view in later Jewish and Christian theology and in current scholarship, places the entire animal kingdom beneath the feet of humankind. This taxonomy, I aver, was a later development, the result of a number of paradigm shifts that altered the Israelite cosmological landscape (discussed below).

We may diagram the older, long-standing taxonomy as follows:

God > wild animals > humankind > domesticated animals

#The placement of wild animals between humans and God naturally raises the question of their location vis-à-vis angels, whom the Israelites also taxonomized between God and themselves. I propose that we may diagram the taxonomic relationship thusly:

God > angels > wild animals > humankind > domesticated animals

The diagram illustrates from right to left a line of diminishing human power and control.⁹⁸ Since angels and wild animals share taxonomic space above humans, but below God, they both represent entities forbidden from worship. Thus, the prohibition in Exod 20:4-5, composed at a time when Israelite religion was monolatristic, covers both groups:

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down unto them, nor serve them (cf. Deut 4:16-18).⁹⁹

96 One finds a similar understanding of animals as numinous beings in Brazilian, ancient Indian, Mayan, Native American, and Chinese cultures. See Smith 1972, 391-413 (re-published as Smith 1978); Stella, Doninger, Michell 1989; Sharer 1994; Morrison 2000, Sterckx 2002. See also the useful and diverse essays in Willis (ed.) 2005.

97 Whitekettle 2009 argues that the dietary law concerning animals like donkeys, horses, and mules in Lev 11:26 probably was integrated into the legal system during the monarchic period when Israelites first witnessed the integration of horses and mules into the community. Whitekettle's contribution provides additional evidence for the changing zoological taxonomy during the monarchy.

98 As Dan 6:23 makes clear, angels would remain above wild animals in the taxonomy.

99 The tension with regard to worshiping angels finds expression in Exod 20:4, Hos 12:4-5. Later we find it in Col 2:18, Rev 22:9, and in nascent Judaism as well (*1 Enoch* 48:5, 62:6,

In addition, the four types of beings in the older taxonomy share parallel power relationships correlating to rank and type. Thus, in the same way that angels follow Yahweh's orders, resemble humans, and remain outside of human control, wild animals obey God's command, resemble domesticated animals, and remain untamable.

The Israelites also knew of other numinous creatures like demons and cherubim, which I contend fit properly in the taxonomic space between wild animals and angels or perhaps alongside the wild beasts:

God > angels > demons/cherubim > wild animals > humankind > domesticated animals
or
God > angels > demons/cherubim/wild animals > humankind > domesticated animals

Such a placement makes them more divine than human, but also more wild animal than human. Hence, their often hybrid forms.¹⁰⁰ The numerous *Mischwesen* in Mesopotamian texts and artistic remains bolster the accuracy of this contention, for many combine human forms with wild animals, and yet attribute to them divine or semi-divine status. Scurlock explains:

In ancient Mesopotamia, evil spirits were imagined as 'mixed beings,' human in strength but essentially animalian in character, that is to say in human form but with the hands and feet and especially heads of animals.¹⁰¹

It is into this taxon that I suggest we also place the לַיָּתוֹן, Leviathan. Though the Israelites viewed it as primordial and a threat to humans and the cosmic order (Isa 27:1, Job 40:25-41:2, Ps 74:14), they also understood it as one of God's creations, and thus, well within his control (Gen 1:21, Ps 104:26).

4.2 Rethinking Other Wild Animals in Biblical Texts

Since the older taxonomy was the dominant view operative in the Israelite imagination until the exilic period, we may nuance our appreciation for what wild animals might signify in other biblical texts. In particular, we may look anew at the creatures as acting under divine aegis and as potential sources of divine wisdom.

62:9, Tosefta *Hullin* 2:18).

100 The conception of demons as human-animal hybrids continued in Judaism. See Viložny 2015.

101 Scurlock 2002a, 361.

Perhaps most obvious in this regard, the taxonomy lends weight to the argument that the serpent in Eden embodies divine wisdom.¹⁰² As the narrator informs us, Yahweh created him with more cunning than all the other wild animals (Gen 3:1), a quality elsewhere associated with knowledge and discernment (Prov 12:16, 14:15, 14:18). The serpent also has secret knowledge that besides him only God possesses. Indeed, had not the serpent passed on divine knowledge of the fruit of the garden, humankind would not have been able to fulfill God's intention to be made fully in "God's image" or to obey his command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:26-28).

The taxonomy also bears implications for our understanding of the angel's message to Hagar that she will bear an אָדָם פָּרָא "onager of a man" (Gen 16:12). The metaphor indicates that he will enjoy a nomadic life close to divinity. In fact, the narrator confirms this later: "God was with the lad, and he became great, and he lived in the steppe and became a mighty archer" (Gen 21:20). Far from being a forsaken figure, Yahweh blesses Ishmael by making him the progenitor of twelve princes and a great nation (Gen 17:20, cf. 16:10).

The episode in which Jacob's sons deceive him into thinking that a wild beast devoured Joseph also takes on added meaning (Gen 37:31-33). Since the Israelites associate the attacks of wild animals with Yahweh's wrath, we may understand their ruse as an ironic attempt to convince Jacob, not just that Joseph had died, but that his death was an act of God.

The taxonomy also contributes to the debate as to whether שֶׁבֶף in Lev 2:11 denotes honey from bees or fruit. Fruit honey would appear to find support in 2 Chron 31:5 (cf. Neh 10:36), which includes it among the first fruits of agricultural produce. On the other hand, bee honey was sacrificed to gods in Ugarit, Greece, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia.¹⁰³ The evidence gathered herein would suggest that the prohibition against sacrificing שֶׁבֶף concerns bee honey, since it is the product of wild animals, and thus it exists outside the domesticated world of sacrifice.¹⁰⁴

The perceived closeness of wild animals to the divine also explains why the Philistine priests and diviners needed to select cows that had never been broken with a yoke to transport the stolen ark back to the Israelites (1 Sam 6:7). Their untamed state insured that the path they took would be divinely inspired and

102 See already Renz 1938-1939; Joines 1974; Meyers 1983; Bal 1987. Cf. Matt 10:16.

103 The Ugarit *nbt* "honey" appears as a sacrifice in CAT 1.14 ii 19. The Akkadian cognate *nūbtu* "honeybee" shows that it means honey from bees (CAD N/2 309, s.v. *nūbtu*). Milgrom 2009, 189, discusses the evidence for bee honey as a sacrifice in Greece, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia.

104 Milgrom 2009, 189, regards bees as domesticated creatures. However, apiculture does not tame bees, but merely harvests their product.

not a learned behavior.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the episode offers a realistic depiction of an act of animal divination.

The taxonomy also elucidates the narrator's description of David's warrior Benaiah as having killed a lion in a snowy pit. Since one cannot kill wild animals without divine aid, the reference appears to be more than a gloss on his heroism (2 Sam 23:20). It paints him as divinely aided, and thus it colors the remark that follows immediately afterwards:

...and he slew an Egyptian, a giant man; and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear (2 Sam 23:21).¹⁰⁶

It further suggests that we should read Benaiah's other actions, including his killing of Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei, in a positive light (1 Kgs 2:25-46).

Though the seraphim that appear in Isaiah's theophany (Isaiah 6) are hybrid creatures, they also personify divine wisdom.¹⁰⁷ Not only do they warn the prophet that he has breached sacred space and heal him so that he may enter the divine assembly, they enable him to learn Yahweh's secret agenda. In addition, his experience with the seraphim prefigures Yahweh's message to the people, for it both prepares Isaiah as a divine mouthpiece and emphasizes the importance of admitting one's sin in order to see and hear divine wisdom. Moreover, this would fit the long-standing observation that Isaiah employs wisdom themes, forms, and vocabulary.¹⁰⁸

A final demonstration of the ways in which recognition of the older taxonomy sheds light on biblical texts is the narrator's mention of the wild apes and peacocks that Solomon's navy brought him from Tarshish (1 Kgs 10:22, 2 Chron 9:21). They represent not just international wealth and power, but sources of numinous (foreign) wisdom. In fact, the narrator immediately follows the list of exotica by

105 McCarter 1980, 134-135, also draws attention to the divine test and adds that since the animals would be prepared for sacrifice, they had to be pure (untrained).

106 The motif of killing an enemy with their own weapon also appears in the account of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17:51) and in the Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe, 140, both of which regard the hero as divinely empowered. Observed by Zeron 1978, 20-27, who also argues that the list in Samuel was composed during or after Solomon's reign when Benaiah commanded his army.

107 The Leviathan also might embody divine wisdom. It not only represents the numinous awe of the sea (Gen 1:21, Ps 104:26), Yahweh includes it among his created beasts that offer Job lessons in divine wisdom (40:25-41:26). In fact, the creature concludes, indeed bookends, the list of numinous features of Yahweh's cosmos from the earth's foundation to its wild fauna.

108 See Whedbee 1971, 150-153; Jensen 1973; and Hartley 2006, 173.

summarizing: “So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (1 Kgs 10:23). The statement recalls the previous description of Solomon’s wisdom, which included knowledge “of beasts, of birds, of creeping things, and of fishes” (1 Kgs 5:13).¹⁰⁹

4.3 Wildness and Divinity in Ancient Israel

The combined evidence also bears a number of implications for our understanding of Israelite conceptions of divinity. As one moves along the axis of the older taxonomy from domesticated animals to God, one moves increasingly into the wild. One tends to think of the wild as chaotic and thus, contrary to God, who establishes order in the cosmos.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, divine order and wildness are only mutually exclusive categories for humans, for whom the forces of nature are beyond control. In fact, a number of texts depict Yahweh as the embodiment of all things wild. Not only do they portray him as the supreme force behind the natural elements (e.g., Ps 18:8-16; Job 38:4-35),¹¹¹ they characterize proper worship of him with the wild. Thus, sacrificial altars constructed for him must be made of natural (unhewn) stone (Deut 27:6).¹¹² Furthermore, as is well-known, numerous traditions place Yahweh’s origins in the wilderness. Even when worship became an urban reality, the temple’s interior recalled Yahweh’s connection to the wild by evoking the primordial wilderness of the Garden of Eden with its luscious flora and fauna, including aurochs, lions, and cherubim.¹¹³ Thus, the Israelite conception of the sacred is not merely a separation from the mundane,¹¹⁴ but a separation from civilization—a oneness with the wild. It is likely that this conception informs the ascetic tendencies of some of the prophets who appear to prefer the liminal land of

109 See similarly, the *Proverbs of Ahiqar*, which often draw lessons from the behavior of animals. See Lindenberger 1983.

110 Pury 1993: 21-24; Keel 1978; and Schroer 2014, 141, understand the “Master of Animals” motif as depicting mastery over chaos.

111 On the relationship between Yahweh and natural phenomena, see Simkins 1994, 144-147.

112 Perhaps this also explains why his priests also must keep their hair and beards uncut (Lev 19:27, 21:5).

113 Levenson 1998, 90-99; Hurowitz 1992; Hurowitz 1999; Hurowitz 2007; Bloch-Smith 1994; Barker 2008. Conversely, see Wenham 1994.

114 Thus, Douglas 1966, 53, “Holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires different classes of things shall not be confused.”

the desert to the city.¹¹⁵ Insofar as they fit the paradigm of a “wild man,” as Gregory Mobely contends,¹¹⁶ perhaps we may see in every such figure close proximity to divinity, whether it be Enkidu, Samson, or Elijah.¹¹⁷

Having mentioned prophets, it is pertinent to observe that most of the biblical evidence for the older taxonomy comes from prophetic texts (Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea) or narratives involving prophets (Moses, Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah). To the former belong prophecies that employ wild animals as similes and metaphors for Yahweh enacting his wrath. To the latter belong cases of wild beasts summoned to help prophets survive (ravens, fish) or to invoke divine punishment (frogs, swarms, lions, bears, mice, locusts). Such prooftexts suggest that the taxonomy was meaningful to Israelite prophets. Conversely, the primary evidence for the taxonomy of animal inferiority represents the result of priestly redactors of an exilic or later date (i.e., Genesis 1-2, Psalm 8). This distribution reinforces the argument that the two taxonomies derive from different social settings and times in Israelite history: the earlier one represents the perspective of a semi-nomadic past that remained operative for prophets during the monarchy, whereas the later one reflects exilic and post-exilic priestly thinking.

The remaining passages that reflect the older worldview include statements from wisdom texts concerning wild animals as sources of divine knowledge (Job, Proverbs), and claims of divine support in fending off ferocious beasts (Judges [Samson], Samuel [David], Psalm 91). The didactic books of Job and Proverbs are exactly where one might expect to find references to animals as sources of divine wisdom. In fact, both Job and Proverbs make extensive use of animal imagery as a means of imparting wisdom.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, dating these two books is notoriously difficult, with some arguing for a monarchic date and others positing exilic or post-exilic dates.¹¹⁹ If one dates them to the later periods, then the older taxonomy found within them might reflect its persistence among some non-priestly groups after the monarchic period. Indeed, neither Job nor Proverbs represents a priestly outlook. Alternatively, if the books are pre-exilic compositions, they simply rep-

115 See Simkins1994, 131-144, for the various ways that Israelites understood sacred geography.

116 Mobely 1997, 226; Mobely 2006.

117 Enkidu's birth was supernatural (created by Aruru), Solomon had Yahweh's support, and Elijah, of course, was a prophet. The other wild men discussed by Mobely also have strong connections to the divine world.

118 See Miller 1991; Forti 2008.

119 On the difficulty of dating these books, with useful summaries of the arguments, see Hartley 1988, 17-20; Habel 1985, 40-42; Whybray 1995, 150-157.

resent the taxonomy of their day.¹²⁰ As for Judges (Samson) and 1 Samuel (David), they have similar compositional histories and share a theme of ambivalence, if not outright criticism, towards the developing monarchy,¹²¹ which has led many to attribute their creation to prophets. If Moshe Garsiel is correct that a disciple of Nathan the prophet produced the initial composition of Samuel,¹²² then once again prophetic concerns are at work. Psalm 91 too is widely understood to originate in prophetic discourse likely composed during the monarchy,¹²³ and thus, it long has been used as a performative charm against demons.¹²⁴ Therefore, most of the evidence for the earlier worldview suggests the influence of prophets, and most (if not all) of it dates to the pre-exilic period.

4.4 Shifting Taxonomies

The change in taxonomy examined herein is only one paradigm shift amongst many that took place during the exilic and post-exilic periods. This era also saw the formation of absolute monotheism, an increasingly urban culture,¹²⁵ the increase in

120 See Hartley 1998, 17-20; Dell 2004; Carr 2011, 401-431.

121 Boling 1975, 32-34; McCarter 1980, 18-23. The author of 1 Samuel places David's claim of divine support in his own mouth (1 Sam 17:34-37), perhaps reflecting an ambivalence towards David's rule.

122 Garsiel 2010, 36-37.

123 Scholars generally view Psalm 91:14-16 as prophetic speech. Gesternberger 2001, 82; and Hilbers 2005, 205-209, adds: "...the proposal that Psalm 91 preserves prophetic mediation, delivered by a priest or prophet in a liturgy, is most likely" (209). The LXX, Targum, and some Hebrew manuscripts attribute the psalm to David. According to *Numbers Rabbah* 12:3 and *Midrash Tehilim* 91, Moses composed Psalm 91 while ascending to heaven in an effort to protect himself against demons.

124 On the long history of Psalm 91 as apotropaia, from Qumran (11Q Apocryphal Psalms), to rabbinic uses (TB *Sheb* 15b, BY. *Erub* 10:26, BY. *Shabb* 6:8), amulets, Aramaic magic bowls, and well beyond, see Nicolosky 1927; McIntosh 1973; Breed 2014.

125 Urban life in post-exilic Israel was not comparable to that in the great capitals of Egypt and Mesopotamia, though the returnees certainly had acculturated to urban life while in Babylon. Though Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures also were urban, the older taxonomy survived there, because it posed no theological problems for polytheism. Fohrer 1970, 60, similarly opines that Israel's semi-nomadic tribal past informs the use of animal metaphors. Jacobs 1976, 149, also attributes the decreased emphasis on the God-human-nature nexus in Israel to increased urbanism and secularism. However, he adopts a structuralist approach and examines his data according to very different categories that I find less useful here.

power and status of the priesthood,¹²⁶ the diminished influence of the institution of the prophet,¹²⁷ and the rise of Jewish law and other sacred scriptures as the new focal point of worship. Also undergoing transformation at this time were a general impression of man's intensified control over the wider world through military achievement and international contact, and the rise in the number of extinct species in the first millennium BCE.¹²⁸ These shifts fundamentally changed Israelite religion and contributed to the creation of the new worldview that lorded humans over animals.

The formation of absolute monotheism likely was the primary catalyst for the changing view towards animals, as it eliminated any hint of untidy plurality that existed in the former system. The deeply engrained cosmological conception of "as above, so below," now came to mean that just as Yahweh alone governs humankind, so also must humans in the image of God govern the entire animal kingdom. Infused with this refined sense of cosmological order, the priesthood gave it voice, most distinctly in Genesis 1, 2, and Psalm 8. The priests also understood Israel's older scriptures through the lens of their own cosmology, in much the same way, I submit, that modern scholars have read biblical references to wild animals through the lens of Genesis 1, 2, and Psalm 8. In fact, evidence for this interpretation comes from these very texts, which betray signs of negotiation with the former worldview.¹²⁹

Thus, in the first creation account, God forms the human after making the animals, and an entire day after creating the sea creatures and birds. The order explicitly grants wild creatures a more primordial place. The sequence also moves from lesser to greater human control: due to differing degrees of access, subduing fish and birds is naturally more difficult for humans than controlling land animals and other humans.¹³⁰ Moreover, the creation of the human on the same day as the

126 Kessler 2008, 142-147, observes that Zech 6:9-15 sets up the high priest to have an equal role alongside the Davidic ruler. Accounts of the temple's rebuilding also feature Jeshua, the priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, working in concert (Ezra 3:2, 3:8, 4:3, 5:2).

127 Jassen 2007, 14, observes that "segments of Second Temple Judaism questioned the continued viability of prophecy after the biblical period."

128 The late first millennium BCE saw the extinction or extreme endangerment of the wild aurochs, elephant, hartebeest, hippopotamuses, cheetah, bear, onager, ostrich, oryx, and gazelle in Mesopotamia and the Levant. Lion and fresh water crocodile populations also diminished greatly, but they did not become extinct until after World War I. See Gilbert, 2002.

129 de Pury 1981, similarly argues that the authors of Genesis 1-3 recognized a lack of an ontological distinction between humans and animals.

130 Cf. "Certainly, one spreads the net vainly in the eyes of any bird" (Prov 1:17).

earth creatures places them in the same taxonomic space. Such issues certainly would have raised questions concerning the relationship of human to animal had not the priestly narrator clarified man's hierarchic dominance.

In Genesis 2, Yahweh forms the human before making the wild animals. Nevertheless, the negotiation with the old paradigm is evident in two ways. First, Yahweh creates humans and animals from the same material. This implies a kinship between the two, even a shared essence.¹³¹ Second, it is clear that Yahweh intended to find the human a mate from among the newly created animals. Though the plan fails, the narrator entertains the possibility that it might have succeeded, thus reflecting the perception, and rejection, among some, that humans share a certain amount of taxonomic space with the animal kingdom.¹³²

Signs of negotiation with the older worldview also appear in Psalm 8. This is most apparent in the fronting of the merism צֶמֶה וְאֵלֶּפֶיִם “sheep and oxen” before the merism יְדֵי בְּהֵמוֹת “beasts of (the) field” (8:8), and the “birds of (the) sky and fish of the sea, whatever passes through the courses of seas” (Ps 8:9). Inherent in the list—a direct reversal of the order of creation in Genesis 1—is a successive increase in inaccessibility, and thus a diminishing ability to control what Yahweh has placed below human feet. Observe also how the placement of כֻּלָּם “all of them” only after the “sheep and oxen” implies that the remaining list of wild animals might represent only some of them, perhaps only those that could be hunted, trapped, and netted. Indeed, the author's addition of וְגַם “and also” immediately after כֻּלָּם, makes the wild animals that follow appear as an exegetical gloss; a theological reconsideration of their place in relation to humans.

The demotion of wild animals in the taxonomy of God's creatures inversely resulted in an elevated position for humans. Humans were now one step closer to the divine, just beneath the angels. The privileged reconfiguration represents an additional feature marking the development from Israelite religion to formative Judaism, and it likely also played a role in changing conceptions of angels in Late Antiquity.¹³³ Moreover, even if the old taxonomy resurfaced from time to time in the exilic or post-exilic periods (perhaps in Job or Proverbs), it could not survive the attraction of the new worldview. Indeed, the later influence of Hellenism and the allure of Ptolemaic anthropocentrism would forever seal its fate.¹³⁴

131 On the shared essence of humans, animals, and the land, see Noegel 2016.

132 Observed by Stein 1980.

133 On the increasing accessibility of angels in early Judaism, see Davidson 1992; Mach 1992, 115; Michalak 2012), 56-58.

134 Views concerning animals varied among Hellenistic philosophers. Aristotle viewed them as ignorant of justice and incapable of speech, and thus inferior. Stoics argued

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that they lacked reason and emotions, and so humans may use them justly for their own needs. On the other hand, Plutarch understood animals as sentient and rational, yet not as sophisticated as humans. On the various views, see Bodson 1983; Calder 2011; Newmyer 2014.

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