

# Introduction

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WHEN I INITIALLY SET OUT to study animals in an ancient West Asian context, I did so because I was an “animal person” more than I was a “people person.” The term “animal person,” however, conveys a multitude of ideas and presuppositions simultaneously. It conveys a wealth of information drawn from a social context in a complicated way. There are preconceived notions about what it means to be an “animal person” as compared to a “people person.” The “animal” descriptor distinguishes an animal person from that which is normal. Such a person is the opposite of a “people person,” though that term is often used to convey similar information, with “animal person” used more often in a negative way.<sup>1</sup> This point demonstrates a very important facet of the “animal” in modern social settings. By being an “animal person,” I am really communicating my relationship with other humans. It is a more polite way of saying, “People make me uncomfortable, I do not prefer their company, and I prefer the company of other animals.” The descriptor conveys both relationships simultaneously. This is a *use* for nonhuman animals. I *use* nonhuman animals to convey a specific understanding about my relationship to other humans through preconceived notions about the differences between “humans” and “animals.”<sup>2</sup> Humans use nonhuman animals for a variety of purposes. Most of these uses, like the previous example, are not physical, nor do they represent a physically present nonhuman animal but rather an imagined or constructed nonhuman animal.

Realizing that these preconceptions surrounded the term “animal person,” my interest has shifted from studying animals to studying the different ways humans use and conceptualize animals. While my interest is still located in nonhuman<sup>3</sup> studies,<sup>4</sup> I must, ironically, contextualize the ways in which nonhuman animals are presented and used in an anthropocentric context. As the previous example demonstrated, my use of the term “animal person” conveyed preconceived notions about humans and nonhuman animals and about my relationship with both categories.

My interest in nonhuman animals for this project focuses on how they are conceptualized by humans and used to define humans as a category. Studying nonhumans, be they nonhuman animals or otherwise, in an ancient West Asian context is difficult without also studying how the humans who portray them conceptualize them and how this portrayal of the nonhuman in and of itself creates the concept of humanness. While many scholars study nonhuman animals in biblical, Assyrian, and Babylonian texts, to the best of my knowledge very few scholars outside of environmental ethics and ecotheology have attempted to look at the way in which biblical texts construct the human category.<sup>5</sup> To be clear, this project does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of humanness within the Hebrew Bible as such a task would go far and beyond what is possible in a single book. Rather, as an anthology written over the course of hundreds of years, the Hebrew Bible presents, as I will argue, various ways of constructing humanness throughout its corpus.

Oftentimes the goal of scholarship is to account for gendered, racial, classist, and religious presuppositions, but in the context of nonhuman animals, scholars rarely account for differences between their own production of humanness and how humanness is produced within the texts they study. Much of previous scholarship has assumed that modern conceptions of what is and is not human map neatly onto the biblical texts. For this reason, this project aims to analyze certain key texts that noticeably complicate what might be considered a modern understanding of the human category. In selecting texts, I will analyze those that I believe are demonstrative of the various ways in which the human category can be constructed in the Hebrew Bible. In analyzing these biblical texts, I will often bring in ancient West Asian parallels in order to provide a greater depth of analysis, but the focus of this book is on the biblical texts themselves.

It is important to note that this book focuses on the textual representation of humanness within key biblical examples rather than on the historical reality of the ancient world. Biblical texts are ideological ones. Within the biblical corpus, divine beings exist in the mortal world, the bones of certain beings can resurrect others from the dead, donkeys can speak, and control of wild animals can be given to foreign kings as a way to demonstrate their divine election. While certainly such examples do not fully represent the historical reality of ancient peoples, they undoubtedly highlight the assumptions and presuppositions of their writers. This project, then, aims to highlight those assumptions that are present within certain exemplary texts, focusing on the relationship between the categories of human, animal, and divine within the Hebrew Bible while referencing other ancient West Asian texts where relevant. Additionally, this book focuses on the presentation of humanness within the narrative and curse texts of the Hebrew Bible with occasional reference to other genres.

Though the specific angle of my account of humanness is limited in scope, I will demonstrate through an analysis of general trends that the human can be described through the use of nonhuman beings in a variety of ways.

A secondary goal within this project is to provide the first step in creating a methodological framework in order to analyze and study both human and nonhuman animals, focusing specifically on the use of undomesticated nonhuman animals in the context of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> This framework will serve as a means to analyze the ways in which ancient texts construct humanness with regard to nonhuman animals. In creating this framework, I will engage with primary sources from the Hebrew Bible and occasionally from ancient West Asia, previous scholarship on nonhuman animals in biblical studies and Assyriology, and theoretical works that analyze how humanness is constructed.<sup>7</sup> While this approach will highlight the fact that the concept of humanness is operative and important in a number of emblematic texts, it does constrain itself to the ideological world presented in those texts. These passages may not represent a fully realized historical reality to a modern reader, but this book will treat them as if they present both a truth and a reality as would have been understood by their writers. If Samson was a historical person, for example, most likely he did not have the strength of a war-affiliated storm deity flowing through him, which was only present when his hair was long. The text describing Samson, however, seems to present him as a real historical person and the stories about him as true. In light of this, the current volume aims to answer the questions, “How do specific texts from the Hebrew Bible utilize nonhuman animals in order to produce humanness, and what information does that production yield about the human conceptions of those animals in these specific biblical contexts?”

This introduction outlines my approach to answering these questions in the following way. First, I will briefly outline the theoretical models with which I will work in order to establish a framework for constructing humanness, accounting for one’s own humanness, and studying the construction of humanness in an ancient West Asian context. Second, I will briefly describe and critique previous scholarship that has attempted to study nonhuman animals in biblical texts in order to demonstrate the necessity of my methodological framework for this topic. Finally, I will introduce the subsequent chapters of the book, briefly describing their place and their individual importance.

## **Identifying What Is (and Is Not) “Human”**

In identifying how humans construct the category of humanness, the literature of nonhuman studies, although a large field with a variety of differing opinions

and theories, serves as a useful starting point. One cannot reduce the field to a single theory, nor would that be beneficial: different theories within the field of nonhuman studies provide different lenses through which to analyze a set of data. In this section, I will address key examples from both modern scholarship as well as the previous scholarship that has influenced it and has traditionally been associated with the field in order to establish a theoretical base from which to work. In later sections I will utilize and critique certain aspects of this theory in the field of nonhuman studies in order to demonstrate how it might be useful in understanding specific examples from the Hebrew Bible.

All scholars in the field of nonhuman studies deal in some way with anthropocentrism, but there is not a consensus among scholars for defining the term. Rob Boddice summarizes the problem succinctly: “Anthropocentrism is expressed either as a charge of human chauvinism, or as an acknowledgment of human ontological boundaries. It is in tension with nature, the environment and the nonhuman animals (as well as nonhumans per se). . . . Anthropocentrism has provided order and structure to humans’ understanding of the world, while unavoidably expressing the limits of that understanding. It influences our ethics, our politics, and the moral status of Others.”<sup>8</sup> In practice, the term is used either as a reminder of the inability of humans to think beyond a human-informed viewpoint or as a derogatory way of referring to another scholar’s work in an attempt to discredit it. While the term may be novel to some secular biblical scholars, the concept is not. Anthropocentrism is the acknowledgment that one’s background and surroundings will influence and shape the way one views the world. Anthropocentrism represents one aspect of the presuppositions scholars bring into their work, assumptions that may or may not exist in the material they study. In biblical scholarship, there are strategies for accounting for biases so that one can be mindful of how one’s gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality have shaped the conclusions one reaches. These are, at least for now, essential skills taught to developing scholars in biblical studies. The “problem” of anthropocentrism, then, should have a methodological solution that can be derived from theoretical sources. Accounting for one’s humanness, however, is a more problematic endeavor, especially when the concept of what is or what is not “human” is highly debated in nonhuman studies.

Using the term “nonhuman” demands a definition of what is “human.” For many scholars, even those within the field of nonhuman studies, “human” bears the same complexities as “religion” in that very few people are able to define it though most assume they will recognize it if they see it.<sup>9</sup> The human category, like religion, resists an easy definition. This concept is not fixed, though many historians, myself included, have erroneously assumed that their own conceptions of what is and is not human map neatly onto their objects

of study. Scholars can fall prey to a “scientific”<sup>10</sup> definition of what a human is: typically consisting of twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, being bipedal, relating as social creatures, and so forth. These characteristics, however, do not capture the ways in which the term human is used in a modern context. Language is often employed as a marker for what makes a human, but language has its own problems as well.<sup>11</sup> The ability to speak does not mark one human because muteness does not render someone “nonhuman.”<sup>12</sup> Yet humans exist as separate entities from other animals as well. Dogs can differentiate between humans and other animals and are also one of the few animals with the ability to read human facial expressions in a complex way.<sup>13</sup> As I will demonstrate below, both in scholarly and biblical contexts humans often define themselves by describing what they are not. Nonhuman studies has done much to redefine what a human is and what a human is not, though there are, as with any interdisciplinary field, various camps within the field that each define what a human is and is not in a different way.<sup>14</sup> Defining what is and what is not human is not a simple task in a modern setting, and it is not the purpose of this project to do so in a truly definitive manner.<sup>15</sup> It is, however, the task of this project to demonstrate that what is and is not “human” can vary.<sup>16</sup> Summarizing each theory also provides a basis for evaluation and adaptation for use in studying an ancient literary context.

For example, theorists such as Peter Singer, responding to the lack of non-human inclusion in ethical debate and using a Darwinian notion of human-to-nonhuman animal relatability, argued that nonhuman animals should be included in a utilitarian approach to ethics based on traits they “share” with humans: sentience, cognition, subjectivity, intentionality.<sup>17</sup> The privileging of these traits demonstrates Singer’s presupposition that they are representative of what is human. His theory is one of locality in that nonhuman animals should be included in ethical consideration due to their proximity to humans and the traits they share with them. He thus defines humans not only by sentience, cognition, subjectivity, and intentionality but also by the value humans place on the traits themselves. His theory may not be accurate in describing how every culture identifies what is and is not human—nor should any theory attempt to do so since broad-stroke generalizations tend to be inaccurate—but the theory is, at least, clear in its definition and provides a methodologically informed way of ascribing “humanness.” His thesis is also anthropocentric: predefined human values and assumed human traits lie at the center of his ethical interests. Other scholars have criticized the anthropocentrism of Singer’s theory,<sup>18</sup> but as a model it at least provides one potential methodology for ascribing and defining humanness.<sup>19</sup>

Jacques Derrida provides another way in which to view humans and nonhuman animals. While he and other theorists following him note that human and

nonhuman animals share qualities once thought to be markedly human, they tend to focus on the paradox of defining humanness. Animality is, all at once, constantly a part of humanness and on the border of the category of humanness. The human, for Derrida, is the animal that is paradoxically differentiated from the animal. In other words, the concept of the human cannot exist without the animal other. The binary exists less to categorize and more to implicitly aid a power dynamic where humans view themselves above other animals. The binary singles out one specific animal, the human, as being somehow different enough that all other animals are conflated when compared to it. Furthermore, Derrida challenges the “human” marker in general. He questions what it means to be seen by the “animal” and, having been seen, how he might respond to it, as any response he or the animal gives is unintelligible to the other.<sup>20</sup> Using this interaction as a basis, he explains that not only is the binary of human-animal problematic, but also the categories of “human” and “animal” themselves fail as categories: in order for the human to exist as a stand-alone category, it must also exist within relation to the animal, of which it is a part. Derrida notes the failure of the human marker to demonstrate any real meaning outside of self and other; ironically, the human demonstrates humanness only by existing in tension with the animal category it utilizes for its “human” boundaries. For Derrida, then, and for scholars who utilize his theory, “human” is a means of classifying the self as compared to the other while simultaneously and paradoxically recognizing the self in the other. He argues for the dismantling of the term in that it homogenizes human and nonhuman animal difference and reinforces a power dynamic that is reductive and unjust to nonhuman animals. I focus on Derrida here because I believe that the human category also exists in tension with other categories within the Hebrew Bible. Many biblical texts that I discuss demonstrate the human category by placing it in tension with the categories of divine and animal. Many biblical texts construct the idea of what a human is by stating explicitly what it is not in relation to these former categories.

In line with this dismantling strategy, Giorgio Agamben argues that the human as a modern concept is a social construct: one that is manufactured and traceable to specific trends in Western thought. In a twist of irony, he argues that the modern conception of the human and its removal from the animal category resulted from Darwin’s evolutionary theory, which is generally thought to bring humans closer to nonhuman animals. According to Agamben, the development of evolutionary thought led to the concept of the “missing link,” a semimythical creature that served to link humans to their nonhuman counterparts. For Agamben, this creature has never existed. Instead, the “missing link” is a concept: an idea that humans create that in turn creates humans. The link is necessary because it demonstrates that humans must be “linked”

to animals, an exercise that ultimately exists to demonstrate their separation. He calls this function the anthropological machine, which establishes an empty space “within which—like a ‘missing link’ which is always lacking because it is already virtually present—the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being, must take place. Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision.”<sup>21</sup> This process, which he refers to as anthropogenesis, is one born out of ontology<sup>22</sup> and is constantly updated in order to fit and exclude various other categories of existence as nonhuman. While Derrida notes that the human-animal dichotomy serves to reinforce a power structure in which humans dominate nonhuman animals, Agamben notes that the anthropological machine, as he calls it, requires affirmation in performance: dismissing it marks one as nonhuman and vulnerable.<sup>23</sup> Humanness is not a singular category in need of dismantling but a malleable performative process of exclusion and power.<sup>24</sup> For the purpose of analyzing ancient texts, I find Agamben’s definition helpful. In viewing humanness as a performance and a category that one must actively participate in, Agamben’s theory helps to demonstrate the practices that are preserved in ancient texts that might exclude people from the human category.

Being removed from the category of “human” or “man” is a process that is found not only in ancient texts but also, as Sylvia Wynter argues, in modern Western society. Wynter critiques the concept of “man” as a dominant framework for understanding humanity, arguing that it is a construct rooted in Western colonialism, racism, and capitalism. She traces the origins of this construct to the European Enlightenment, which established a secular, rational, and Eurocentric notion of “man” as the ideal human subject. This version of “man” excluded non-Western peoples, women, and the oppressed, effectively dehumanizing them and justifying their exploitation through colonization, slavery, and social hierarchies. Wynter’s central argument is that the dominant conception of the human is fundamentally tied to coloniality, a system of power that subordinates non-European peoples and cultures. She asserts that “man” is not a universal representation of humanity but a specific, historically contingent figure produced through European modernity and colonialism. This figure of “man” is linked to Western notions of power, being, truth, and freedom that underpin global systems of domination and inequality. Wynter argues for the need to “unsettle” or dismantle the colonial concept of “man” and replace it with a more inclusive and plural understanding of the human, one that recognizes diverse ways of being and knowing. She calls for a new framework that moves “beyond man,” challenging the foundational logics of race, gender, and class that sustain global hierarchies.<sup>25</sup> Wynter’s theory

is particularly helpful in the study of ancient texts because it demonstrates, as noted also by Agamben and Derrida, that categories do not exist as a neutral force but instead are often utilized to oppress and support a power structure that is presented as “natural” and “intuitive.”

The previous examples demonstrate that the concept of what is and is not human is exactly that, a concept, one that is not constant, consistent, or easily permeable.<sup>26</sup> Echoing this, Margo DeMello, in her introduction to human-animal studies,<sup>27</sup> does not offer a definition for what is human. She critiques the redundancy of the title “human-animal studies” and how it propagates a human superiority over other animals.<sup>28</sup> She even offers a few examples of what other scholars have called “human” or “animal,” but she never defines either category nor evaluates the scholars she presents. Much like “religion,” “human” or “humanness” is so pervasive and so difficult to pin down that even scholars whose works rely on a clear understanding of the terms often fail to define them.

“Human” is such a problematic term that Donna Haraway takes another approach. She argues that the search for human uniqueness is no longer tenable as a scientific endeavor and should be abandoned. According to her, humans have no special quality that separates them from other animals, and she urges scholars to dismiss this line of thought in order to pursue more fruitful theoretical foundations.<sup>29</sup> Her dismissal of the term warrants consideration. If “humanness” neither conveys useful information as a categorical marker nor exists in the context that is being studied, the term should be abandoned. Her call for complete dismissal demonstrates that one should question one’s own categories of classification. While her contribution to the theoretical definition of “humanness” is to abandon the definition entirely, or at least to discard the term as a rhetorical device in order to demonstrate the ways in which it is problematic, I believe she offers a first step to studying the human category in a biblical context.<sup>30</sup>

In understanding the reliance of the human category on the nonhuman (Derrida), the interconnectedness of nonhuman animals to humans (Singer), and the performatively powerful self-creating aspect of the human category (Agamben), a scholar gains a better understanding of the preconceptions that surround the “human” category in a primarily North American or Western modern context (Wynter). Understanding one’s biases is critical in scholarship, and Haraway’s call to deconstruct the category of human, at least temporarily, is necessary if one seeks to study how people construct “humanness” in an ancient context. While that deconstruction may serve as a starting point for the study of nonhuman animals and the concept of humanness in an ancient context, it does not offer a methodological way in which to approach the study of humans and nonhuman animals in a historical context. Boria Sax, in his

own survey of the human category, notes that Plato once defined a human as a featherless biped and was, in response, brought a plucked chicken.<sup>31</sup> Though Sax's use of ancient West Asian examples is highly problematic and tends to harmonize difference for the purpose of a singular unified theoretical outcome, his theory is useful. Sax notes that humans produce the concept of human and humanness through tradition, rhetoric, and stories.<sup>32</sup> Using Derrida's theory of difference to account for the difference between cultures, and even various texts within those cultures, prevents the homogenization of concepts to which Sax, and other scholars, including myself, often fall prey. If one uses Agamben's theory of the enacted and performative aspect of humanness while utilizing Haraway's call to destabilize one's own concept of what marks the "human,"<sup>33</sup> one can, through written examples of enacted humanness, begin to track patterns in how certain texts define and perform the human category through the use of and interaction with nonhumans.<sup>34</sup> Humanness, just like religion, is an enacted process, one that is characterized differently depending on who is defining it and that person's status within a constructed power dynamic. Accounts of humanness, then, just like accounts of religion, should be written with an understanding of that power dynamic. In other words, one cannot study nonhumans, be they nonhuman animals or otherwise, in an ancient West Asian context without also studying how those nonhumans are created by the humans portraying them and how that portrayal also creates the concept of humanness. For this reason, this book attempts to analyze the human category within key biblical examples.

Here I again disagree with a complete dismissal of the human category. Whether or not the human category is one that is unique is irrelevant. The creation of uniqueness, even if it is an imagined quality, is important. Studying the production of humanness, what constitutes its production, what that production excludes, how that production is enforced, and how that production situates a person within a specific context will always be important objects of study. There is an irony here that pervades much of nonhuman studies. Earlier in this chapter, I claimed to be interested in the study of nonhumans, and yet, like so many in the field of nonhuman studies, the majority of my argument has consisted of defining what is and is not human with little to no mention of the nonhuman. This was an active choice because—and here I disagree with more than a few scholars—there are no nonhumans in ancient West Asian texts just as there is no pipe in René Magritte's famous painting of a pipe.<sup>35</sup> In order to understand the nonhumans within biblical texts, one must first understand how those texts construct the human category.

This concept presents a problem if one attempts to study nonhuman animals rather than the humans that produce them. Nonhuman entities are always presented through a human filter that, as Agamben suggests, serves

as a performance of humanness. Etienne Benson summarizes the problem eloquently:

To the extent that historical sources are understood in conventional terms, that is, as textual or linguistic documents or records, the dilemma is clear. Such sources can provide rich descriptions and important insights into historical changes in human attitudes toward and relationships with animals, as the growing literature of animal history amply demonstrates. But they suffer a profound limitation from the perspective of the historian who wants to tell a multivocal, multiperspectival story in which the voices and perspectives are not exclusively human. Textual sources seem always to arise from the experience or activity of one particular kind of animal—the writing animal, the human.<sup>36</sup>

It is for this reason that this project focuses on the ways in which humanness is produced through the use of nonhuman animals. Without understanding how various texts use these nonhuman animals, one cannot study the nonhuman animals themselves. For Benson, however, the conclusion that animal agency is not represented in writing or cannot be represented in history due to the lack of animal self-representation is false. Benson argues that the act of being recorded is an act of agency. He believes that in order for a human to record a nonhuman animal, a nonhuman animal must have some active trait that convinces the human observer to record it. In the same way, he argues, domestication is as much a relationship between two species as it is the changing of one species by another. While I agree with his conclusion that the production of nonhuman animals in texts is nuanced and complex, I disagree with certain parts of his argument.<sup>37</sup> Not all beings recorded in ancient texts are representative of what modern scholars would call “real” creatures though the distinction between real and fantastical, imaginary, or fake may or may not exist in the texts. Demons, for example, are very real in the apotropaic texts that represent them, but the reality of the demons in those texts did not stem from the observation of a modern nonhuman creature. Physical interaction and observation, then, cannot be regarded as highly as Benson would like. While I agree that humans record certain qualities of nonhuman animals in ancient texts and that recording is less of an exclusively human endeavor than previously thought, the endeavor is still infused with human perception and preconception and need not stem from physical interaction or observation of a nonhuman animal.<sup>38</sup>

To be clear, I agree with Benson that nonhuman animal representation in texts is not completely anthropocentric, but it is influenced by human preconceptions, and those preconceptions may or may not be shaped by the

nonhuman animals they affect. Although Benson's theory, as I will show below, has other beneficial uses in examining how nonhuman animals are constructed in literary texts, I disagree with Benson's overall conclusion for theoretical and methodological reasons. While trying to preserve nonhuman animal agency as much as possible, his conclusion is representative of an approach that blends his own ethical questions with a certain representation of ancient cultures. His approach is representative of a trend in scholarship, one that attempts to use ancient cultures to "prove" one's own ethical position. The approach attempts to ascribe agency to nonhuman animals in texts, but many biblical texts do not demonstrate a concern for animal agency.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes, as was the case with horses, nonhuman animals do not have agency in the texts that describe them. Ascribing agency to nonhuman animals in those texts requires one to overlook aspects of a culture that do not mirror one's ethical principles. The approach is backward and dismisses the agency of the culture from which the literature originates by situating one's own goals within that culture. This is a problem that has existed in biblical studies since its inception. I am not arguing that theological/ethical/moral interpretations of biblical texts should not exist but that these interpretations should not pretend to provide an accurate account of biblical texts within their ancient context. I believe many biblical texts support an ethical standpoint that is far different from my own, and my goal is to highlight these differences so that I may accurately represent the patterns I find within the literature. I am also not arguing that biblical texts support a unified understanding of humanness or that all texts agree on what is moral merely because they are ancient. I simply wish to highlight that Benson's approach, which aims to provide animals represented in literature with more agency, differs from that of his source material, which often does not care about nonhuman animal agency. His approach assumes that all nonhuman animals have agency in literature despite what the data might indicate just as in the past archaeological digs were funded in order to "prove" the authenticity of biblical texts. Both endeavors assume a conclusion before the data is evaluated.<sup>40</sup>

As previously mentioned, this project aims to evaluate the human category in biblical texts by examining the ways in which that category is placed in tension with the categories of nonhuman animal and divine being. In saying "in tension with" rather than "apart from," I wish to highlight the fact that in many biblical examples, the human category is not so easily recognized. Many texts hybridize human qualities with nonhuman qualities in order to produce a hybridized being. I argue that, within these examples, one can more easily recognize what traits are associated with humans and thus can more easily construct the human category. For this reason, I provide here a discussion of the human category and its place within nonhuman studies. The theory, which

I will call hybridization theory, was popularized by Donna Haraway even though she does not summarize it fully. Her works suggest that the hybridization of two different categories (human and machine, for example) into a new and different category (a cyborg) serves as a tool to destabilize the previous categories.<sup>41</sup>

Haraway's theory, which often uses playful and flirtatious language, is utilized by many scholars within the field of nonhuman studies in an attempt to destabilize modern conceptions of human and nonhuman. I agree in part with Haraway's goal on an ethical and scholarly level: the destabilization of modern categories not only allows one to redress systems of power that privilege a specific elite but also helps to remove the influence of those categories from scholarship. This goal, and the theory behind it, has a large following in nonhuman studies. The theory is praised for its "infinite possibilities and cyborg multiplicities, defined in and through the technologies that now construct our experiences and therefore ourselves."<sup>42</sup> Even the playful language of Haraway and her theory is replicated through other scholarship and is, according to some scholars, required.<sup>43</sup> For scholars who follow Haraway, hybridity is a way to rebel against and challenge normative expressions of power. As previously mentioned, I believe that hybridization is a process that exists within a multitude of contexts, including that of my primary interest here, the biblical narratives. I also introduce it here because I believe that Haraway, and those who follow her theory, are incorrect in their analysis of hybridization, its goals, and its effects on those being hybridized. I believe their use of it, while often communicated in playful, flirtatious language, is dangerous as hybridization is a process enacted on humans and nonhumans through existing power structures.

Hybridization is often physically violent in both ancient and modern contexts,<sup>44</sup> regularly manipulating, humiliating, or ending the life of the victim on whom it is inflicted. Though Haraway explicitly mentions the violent origins of the cyborg hybrid, I believe hybridization enforces an existing power structure and relies on the very categories Haraway claims it destabilizes. In order to hybridize something, one must accept the two or more categories that are being hybridized. With Haraway's cyborg, one has to accept on a theoretical level that there are two *distinct* categories, human and machine, that can be fused. Without the acceptance of these categories and the acknowledgment of their categorical markers, the hybrid cannot exist as a category: it would be merely a new category rather than a hybridized category. This hybridization, since it mixes categories, generally exists in practice in one of two ways. Either a being in one category hybridizes itself with another, appropriating the other to itself, or a being takes two different categories regardless of the beings within those categories and fuses them together. It is not a process of

rebellion but a process of control by those with agency that is generally used against those who lack it, as I shall explain below.

Hybridization is prevalent in biblical texts and, like the hybridization of nonhuman animals in a contemporary context, is most often employed as a means to enact physical violence. Hybridization, in a stroke of irony, is not a means of rebellion against a hegemonic power, as Haraway suggests it could be, but a means of that very same power to quell rebellions.<sup>45</sup> Hybridization is a tool of the powerful used to subjugate the less powerful. It was a common practice for Assyrian kings to take their captured prisoners of war, generally rival kings, and hybridize them. Aššurbanipal regularly hybridizes his enemies in the royal inscriptions, which describe the way in which he interacts with rivals:

Through my entreaties that I continuously made to Aššur and the goddess Mullissu in order to conquer my enemies, I pierced his jaw with the . . . held in my own hands. I put a lead-rope through his gums, placed him in a dog collar and made him guard the door of the eastern gate of the citadel of Nineveh, whose name is the Entrance to the Place Where the World Is Controlled. So that he might sing the praise of Aššur, the goddess Ištar, and the great gods, my lords, I had mercy on him. (RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 011)<sup>46</sup>

Aššurbanipal hybridizes his enemies as a means of physical and psychological torture.<sup>47</sup> On a theoretical level, this torture demonstrates the flaw in Haraway's theory. By taking a foreign king and torturing him in such a way, Aššurbanipal demonstrates the categories with which he interacts: king, human, dog. Aššurbanipal shows that the rival is not a king because kings capture and torture their enemies; they do not get captured and tortured. He even robs the rival of his humanity by assigning to him characteristics that are representative of a dog—wearing a collar and being fastened to a chain—and places him in a space that only nonhumans occupy: the guard position at the gate. Hybridization is an act that redefines the rival.<sup>48</sup> He is no longer a king, no longer a human; he is now, through this process “doglike,” formerly a king and formerly human. This process, however, relies on the very categories it employs and *utilizes* those categories rather than disrupting them. The hybridization process is one that affirms what a king is, what a human is, and what a dog is in this context. Aššurbanipal physically places the rival in a position where he is more dog than human or king.

This process is mirrored in the Hebrew Bible as well. The tribe of Judah captures Adoni-bezek and cuts off his thumbs and big toes, to which he responds, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to pick up scraps

under my table; as I have done, so God has paid me back" (Judg 1:7). Thumbs and big toes are removed to make kings less like humans.<sup>49</sup> For the authors of this text, one aspect of humanity is the opposable thumb and the large toe on the foot. These appendages are removed to prove that the king is not a king. Though the text does not explicitly compare Adoni-bezek to a dog, the removal makes the former king more like a dog that is fed scraps from the table. This is yet another example of hybridization.<sup>50</sup> People are physically and continuously tortured in order to be hybridized. The dog-man does not seem to suggest, as Haraway's followers do, that "hybridity is a privileged concept in the linear reproductive model that produces the same, allowing 'difference' to proliferate; the hybrid also displaces emphasis on the original and challenges the traditional understandings of nature."<sup>51</sup> This is not to say, however, that hybridization is not a useful concept or theory. It is both. Because of this, I argue that Haraway's implementation of the theory is flawed and in need of revision. Hybrids rely on the validity of their parent categories. I could not describe myself to others as an "animal person" without those surrounding me understanding the two categories and accepting their meaning within a social context. In analyzing the category of human in specific biblical texts, one purpose of this project is to provide that revision.

I utilize Haraway for another reason: maintaining categorical differences, which I argue is important for understanding the human category within biblical texts, runs the risk of essentializing both humans and nonhuman creatures. Haraway correctly warns against essentializing: taking certain creatures, be they human or nonhuman animal, and reducing them to a certain set of qualities. This respect for difference was argued in Derrida's work as well. Just like humans, Derrida noted that not all nonhuman animals are the same even if they share a species. The acts of one are not necessarily representative of the acts of others. First, in the modern theoretical realm, I believe that Weisberg is right to note a difference between essentializing a species and allowing for what she calls "species integrity." Modern genetic hybridization is not liberating; it more matches the ancient West Asian example I gave earlier, where one creature is transformed into something else with little regard to its agency. She prefers the term "essences" to "essentialities" because:

to study essences is not to study immutable forms, but rather to recognize how beings unfold within the always changing historical and material conditions; it is to study the vicissitudes, nuances, and particularities that constitute material and embodied life *in the world*. . . . By suggesting that animals ought to be permitted to be what they are, I am not positing some romanticized ahistorical figure of the untouched animal. . . . Rather, the goal is to create conditions for the *mutual* unfolding of *both*

human and animal subjects as internally coherent and unified, but also intersubjectively intertwined, sensuous beings—that is to say, *animals*.<sup>52</sup>

What she demonstrates on a methodological level is that nonhuman animals have categories that can serve to preserve their well-being. She demonstrates that a certain level of categorization is necessary to respect differences between species. In terms of my interests, she demonstrates that categories and classification have meaning as long as one is cognizant of the preconceptions behind the boundaries that construct them.<sup>53</sup> What I also argue, however, is that the conception of what is and is not human in many biblical texts does not necessarily match that of the scholar studying it. In the study of humans and nonhuman animals in the Hebrew Bible, it is important to define what constitutes a human in those texts. As I have noted, however, very few scholars have done so with respect to nonhuman animals, which not only limits their own scholarship but also misrepresents the texts they study.<sup>54</sup>

### **Previous Scholarship: How Biblical Scholars Use or Do Not Use Nonhuman Theory**

As I have noted previously, to the best of my knowledge no scholar has undertaken a comprehensive study of how humans construct humanness in the Hebrew Bible, especially with respect to nonhuman animals. In this section, I will engage with a few scholars who have set out to study nonhuman animals from different perspectives in order to show the validity and utility of my project's theoretical and methodological framework.

Although I will be critiquing some of their arguments, the following scholars have on the whole presented well thought-out and well-argued pieces of scholarship. My criticism of specific points of their scholarship should not be seen as an attack against them but as suggestions to clarify certain aspects of their work. With that in mind, I offer a critique of Brent Strawn's book *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?* In his book, Strawn draws primarily from metaphor theorists to establish a theoretical framework from which to study lions as they are presented in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>55</sup> For the most part, Strawn pays close attention to the problems with studying animals in an ancient literary context. In attempting to find the "natural" lion within the text, he writes, "Unfortunately, even this apparently simple task is complicated by the fact that there are few purely naturalistic presentations of lions in the Hebrew Bible. That is, even those passages that seem to describe the behavior of real lions may often be employed in the service of a larger literary and/or theological point."<sup>56</sup> Strawn also observes that his own category of "naturalistic" is flawed in that the natural

and metaphorical are often mixed in the literary texts. In line with my response to Benson, who argues for animal agency within literary texts, Strawn notes the difficulty of finding “real” lions within the text. A version of Benson’s theory helps to alleviate Strawn’s problem as Benson lends more power to the traits described by the authors of the texts than do other scholars. Just as the demon is real to the practitioner of apotropaic rituals, so for these authors the lion’s traits are real. Strawn’s search for the “real” lion, then, is anachronistic since the lion in all of its descriptions is real. Benson’s theory is ideal for this purpose if one divorces the lion from its physical traits and emphasizes the reality of the described traits, even if they do not exist in a modern context. For example, “real” lions probably did not move into the land and consume people due to a lack of Yahweh worship after the fall of the Northern Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> Nonhuman theory in this case helps to ease what Strawn sees as a tension: the difference between the natural and the metaphorical.

Strawn assumes that these categories function in the context that he studies but immediately admits that they do not work as easily as he would like. Strawn’s differentiation between the symbolic lion and the natural lion also tends to force readings of certain texts. For example, he writes: “Certainly the most remarkable lion-killer was Samson. He dispatched a roaring lion with ease. . . . This could be a good reason to consider this an atypical, symbolic, lion. At the very least, the person who can do this sort of thing in this sort of way is certainly no typical person!”<sup>58</sup> For Strawn, the feat of killing a lion with one’s bare hands is too extraordinary for a human, and while in agreement I would like to highlight the assumptions Strawn makes in this simple, almost throwaway line. He assumes that since the feat of killing a lion with one’s bare hands is not something a human could do, then the example must be symbolic rather than natural. Further, Strawn presumes that the categories of natural and symbolic are adequate to describe the texts he studies, though he has already noted the problems with using them. My biggest point of disagreement, however, is that he takes for granted what is and is not human. Though I will argue later in this project that Samson is not human in order to demonstrate the problematic human category that scholars often impose onto ancient texts, that point is irrelevant here. My criticism of Strawn’s argument is that it assumes what is and is not human without defining humanness within the context of the study and then uses that modern assumption to analyze ancient texts, reaching for symbol and metaphor when it is unwarranted. There is no evidence in the Samson narrative that the lion is anything but a lion.

The next example follows the previous in demonstrating the strength of modern assumptions with respect to ancient texts. Oded Borowski surveys a great deal of the animals that appear in the Hebrew Bible but summarizes lion

hunting in the following way: “Were the kings of Israel and Judah also engaged in hunting lions? There is no recorded answer to this question, but this is very feasible since they had all the necessary ingredients and the ambition to be considered as great and powerful as the other kings of the ancient Near East.”<sup>59</sup> While he admits the speculative nature of his argument, I disagree with him: there is a recorded answer to his question. Multiple texts demonstrate the relationship Judah and Israel have with lions, and what is more, many of those texts explicitly link the nations with the hunted nonhuman animal and often with the lion specifically. For instance, many psalms consistently refer to the speaker as a hunted nonhuman animal.<sup>60</sup> These psalms share a stark resemblance to the hunting imagery of Assyria and Babylon,<sup>61</sup> references made more explicit by Ezek 19, where Judah and Israel are both compared to lions hunted by nations practicing a royal lion hunt. Thus Israel and Judah portray themselves as a hunted lion in their own ideology. The only other reference to lion hunting in the entirety of the Hebrew Bible is not associated with a king.<sup>62</sup> Each reference to a royal lion hunt in the Hebrew Bible portrays the Israelite or Judahite kings as the hunted lions. In addition, no Judahite or Israelite king is ever praised as a hunter, much less a hunter of lions. Hunting as a kingly quality is consistently attributed to Assyrian and Babylonian kings in the Hebrew Bible. Borowski’s search is muddled because he does not take into account the ways in which lions are presented in the specific context of the Hebrew Bible. He homogenizes the text of the Hebrew Bible with those of other cultures in ancient West Asia, even when those same biblical texts explicitly present a different ideology. Strawn is guilty of this as well, as he only passingly notes the mortality of lions despite the large role they play in the hunted king of royal ideology.<sup>63</sup>

Both of these authors demonstrate a tendency in scholarship that I myself have been guilty of on multiple occasions: they harmonize texts into a cohesive whole. Strawn sees the lion’s power as its most defining quality and because of this casts some lions, like Samson’s, as symbolic rather than real. Borowski assumes that the various royal ideologies of ancient West Asia would seek to mirror each other, overlooking the fact that many biblical texts accept the royal ideology of their overlords, casting their own kings as victims or hunted animals. Because the Hebrew Bible is an anthology spanning hundreds of years, one must let each text speak for itself, even when defining specific animals like the lion or the human. What is and is not leonine can be different from text to text, and likewise the definition of what is and is not human can differ as well. This variability of what can be human causes problems for a great many scholars. Folklorist Boria Sax, for example, classifies Enkidu and Gilgamesh as human<sup>64</sup> even though Gilgamesh is part god and explicitly separated from humans in the text while Enkidu, for his part, is made from clay and born in

the context of nonhuman animals. Yet both characters are, at various points within the text, humanized.

As has been shown repeatedly throughout this chapter, what is and is not human is complicated. Here I would pose the question: Should a king in an ancient West Asian context be considered a human? A king does things humans cannot. He often has a special connection with divine beings that humans do not normally have. He has special power over and knowledge of nature, which also links him to divine beings. He can command and subjugate and, in an Assyrian context, hunt lions. Hugh Pyper notes that, “Iconically, the Mesopotamian king is never more kingly than when in single combat with a lion,”<sup>65</sup> and yet, despite this overwhelming difference, Pyper still classifies the king as a human. I question this classification. While I do agree that humanness, as a quality, is sometimes emphasized in kings in biblical ancient West Asian texts, other texts emphasize their nonhuman qualities. For example, in his destruction of a city Sennacherib surpasses natural destructive forces:

I destroyed, devastated and burned with fire the city and its buildings, from its foundations to its high places. I removed bricks and earth, all of it, from the inner and outer walls, the temples and buildings, and threw it into the Arahtu River. I dug a canal into the midst of the city and leveled their site with water. I destroyed even the outline of the foundations and surpassed the Deluge in my destruction. So that in the future, the site of that city and its temples will be unrecognizable. I dissolved it in water and annihilated it as if it were a meadow. (RINAP 3, Sennacherib 024, vi 7–vi 16)

These traits and actions are not human. Though Sennacherib could be ascribed “humanness” in other texts, defining him as human in this instance does not add to an understanding of Assyrian kings but introduces an unnecessarily modern conception of what is and is not human to a context that does not need it. To the modern reader, Sennacherib is most assuredly a human, but I seek to understand him in his ancient context in order to answer the question, “Would those who viewed Sennacherib in his victory have seen or thought of him as human?” I do not believe they would have. Though I strongly disagree with Haraway and her dismissal of the human category, in certain cases North American scholars infer and rely on the category too heavily and impart modern, primarily North American, conceptions of it anachronistically.

This anachronism is also prevalent within biblical studies as the texts are still authoritative for certain people. I turn next to Ken Stone and his book *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*. Though his book offers useful insights into the ways animals are used in various biblical texts,<sup>66</sup> I believe it

sometimes falls prey to a pattern that forces his own ethical goals into the biblical texts themselves. His aim, as he himself notes, is to explore “the possible significance of animals and animal studies for biblical interpretation by starting from specific points of departure in the Hebrew Bible, in contemporary animal studies, and in the literature of biblical interpretation.”<sup>67</sup> The book has a moralizing tone; it deals with modern conceptions of animals and uses textual depictions from the Bible as the basis for confronting those modern conceptions. Stone also engages with historical conceptions of animals presented in the Hebrew Bible. The presentation is, at times, theological in that it discusses how the Hebrew Bible can be used to influence modern behavior, or at least how the Bible can be read “in line” with modern conceptions about animals and animal rights. At other times, the book claims to represent a historical viewpoint of an ancient culture, while still at other points the book presents specific views from specific texts within the Bible. To be clear, my issue is not with any one of these approaches; they are all valid ways of interacting with the biblical texts. Sometimes, however, the goals bleed into one another.

Stone’s chapter on dogs demonstrates this problem succinctly. If his goal was to use biblical examples of animal treatment and representation to help inform a modern perspective, then he was somewhat successful, but in this chapter I believe he tries too hard to “save” dogs in the biblical texts that describe them. He notes, “Cross-cultural evidence, including evidence from modern Western societies, demonstrates that the use of canine references as insults (‘dog,’ ‘bitch,’ etc.) frequently coexists with affection towards actual dogs.”<sup>68</sup> Stone actively and explicitly brings biases from modern Western societies into his analysis of an ancient context. To be sure, Stone does note the trend in biblical scholarship that accounts for the Hebrew Bible’s particular distaste for dogs, as many of the biblical texts describe dogs in a negative light. Also, in Stone’s defense, one passage may portray dogs in a more positive light. Job 30:1 compares humans to dogs but preserves the idea that dogs are domesticated and have a function: “And now those younger than me make a joke out of me, those whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock.”<sup>69</sup> While the dogs in this passage are actively used to belittle a group of people and thus to me are represented negatively, they do have purpose and are domesticated.<sup>70</sup> Other than Job 30:1, there is little to no evidence in any biblical text that dogs were viewed in a positive light, which means that the chapter also falls prey to the same anthropocentrism that Stone warned against and carefully nuanced in his introduction by conflating dogs with all other “animals.”<sup>71</sup> Under Stone’s logic, if a passage includes animals then it must include dogs, but his study offers no textual evidence to support this.

This is not to say that conceptions of animals in the Hebrew Bible cannot be used to inform modern debates about nonhuman animals, their rights, and

human relationships with them. As Beth Berkowitz demonstrates in *Animals and Animality in the Babylonian Talmud*, study and consideration of the context presented in literary texts can add a considerable amount to modern debate.<sup>72</sup> Though I cannot comment on her treatment of rabbinic texts, I can remark on her methodology. Berkowitz claims to account for animality<sup>73</sup> because “it means returning to late antiquity and to the roots of contemporary religion, to find that it is a time neither of irredeemable speciesism nor of romanticized harmony between man and nature. Ancient texts like the Talmud allow us to take biopolitics back to its formative years, to reveal how animals came to occupy the margins of personhood and how their only partially suppressed subjectivities formed the backdrop for the emergence of the human self.”<sup>74</sup> I believe that the methodology of Berkowitz’s study is fruitful: her goal is to carefully read an ancient text and see how it can inform a modern discussion while recognizing that it may not do so in a way that fits in with North American ethical values. This nuance grants agency to what she is studying: rather than forcing a passage to say something it does not, Berkowitz attempts to let the text speak for itself through a strategy of microreading.<sup>75</sup> This methodology, which allows texts to present views that may be at odds with modern ethical goals, is important even when dealing with religiously authoritative texts; it allows for a more accurate, nuanced understanding of the text and the time period in which it was produced. Even though Berkowitz notes the difference between modern and rabbinic views on animals and even studies how animals in rabbinic texts fit into the performance of humanness, her book is devoted to rabbinics, as it should be. It does not yet have a counterpart in either biblical studies or Assyriology.

## Chapter Summary and Description

In this section I will give a brief summary of the chapters in this project. Each chapter will present new information pertaining to nonhuman animals and the construction of humanness in ancient West Asia but will also rely, to an extent, on the information established in the previous chapters. The larger goal, of course, is to collect data concerning humanness in biblical narratives, focusing specifically in later chapters on curse narratives, and to structure that data in such a way that it helps inform future scholarship on the topic of non-human animals.

Chapter 1, “Difficulties in Defining the Human in Biblical Texts,” will demonstrate the difficulty in providing a universal definition of the human in biblical texts. It will attempt to survey the wide usage of *ʾādām* in the biblical corpus, especially where it is put into direct comparison with nonhuman entities. Later, this chapter will compare and contrast the presentation of

humanness in four texts: Gen 1 (which many scholars consider informative on the role of humans), Ezekiel, Qohelet, and Job. I utilize these examples because they demonstrate a variety of ways in which the biblical texts might understand the human condition. In utilizing these texts, I am not arguing that they account for all expressions of humanness, merely that they represent different and nuanced understandings of the category itself. Genesis 1 conceives of humans as superior to nonhuman animals and more closely related to divine beings, though they are not the same. Passages in Ezekiel demonstrate a disconnect between the deity and humans, even humans who are selected for divine purposes. In some ways, Qohelet differentiates between humans and animals in that humans are able to obtain wisdom (though for the text this is a relatively fruitless endeavor), but it also demonstrates commonalities between them. Job establishes an understanding of humans that places them below nonhuman animals in certain circumstances.

Having established these markers and problems, chapter 2, “Human Spaces, Shared Spaces, and the Space of Nonhuman Entities,” will look at the spaces that are attributed to human and nonhuman entities. What I hope to demonstrate within this chapter is that many biblical texts (though not all) utilize spaces in order to categorize different types of beings. There are spaces that are defining for humans, spaces that are defining for nonhuman animals, and liminal spaces of interaction where multiple entities may interact. Within this chapter, I also analyze one particular space, that of the wilderness, and show its complex representation throughout the biblical corpus. While I assert that the wilderness is most often presented as a space associated with nonhuman entities or as a dangerous space for humans, other examples demonstrate a link between the space and the benevolent treatment of human characters by divine beings. In the appendix of this chapter, I note that horses exist not in a specific space but within a specific context. Both chapters 1 and 2 will provide a theoretical framework from which to analyze both human and nonhuman entities throughout the remainder of the project.

Chapter 3 is a short chapter that discusses the role of kings in the presentation of humanness in biblical and extrabiblical texts. It begins by discussing kings as nonhuman figures, demonstrating the various ideological ways they present themselves as existing above the human category. This chapter also demonstrates that many biblical texts do not explicitly grant kings this type of status, which is so readily ascribed in extrabiblical parallels. Instead, many biblical texts highlight the explicit humanness of kings while simultaneously comparing them to the divine features of priests and prophets. This chapter serves as an extension to the research in the previous chapters by demonstrating how the title of king fits in with the representation of human and nonhuman entities discussed in the previous chapter.

Chapter 4, “Curses as Expressions of Humanness,” will further analyze concepts introduced in the previous chapters by focusing on treaties and curses in order to argue that curses can be used as a means to construct humanness in the ancient world. Here curses will be shown to demonstrate human values in that they threaten various things that are important to humans. In establishing the significance of curses in treaty language, the chapter will show that the concept of humanness is often contingent on upholding a treaty; to break a treaty is to forfeit one’s status, generally as a human entity. To further prove that these curses are not idle threats, the chapter also looks at various conquest narratives in which these curses were implemented and discusses how this action complicates the human status of victims. Within this chapter I will also demonstrate the utility of my research by analyzing a confusing text, the Jezebel narrative in 2 Kgs 9, and shedding new light on it, arguing that the text assumes much of the information presented about space in this project and utilizes that information to curse and threaten Jezebel in a specific way. In doing so, I hope to bring complexity to the discussion of both human and nonhuman animals while also further demonstrating the intricate system of categorization and human production in ancient West Asian texts.

While chapter 4 focuses on macro-level characteristics, chapter 5, “Torture and Transformation: The Polemics of Defining Humanness,” will focus on a few key individuals in order to demonstrate how humanness is defined, and subsequently manipulated, in their respective narratives. One purpose of this chapter is to show that the concept of what is and is not human is malleable in many ancient West Asian contexts since many texts assert that humans can be changed into nonhuman entities. Sometimes, as is the case with Assyrian kings, who often describe themselves with leonine qualities, these changes raise an individual above the status of a typical human. Often, however, such changes are not only rhetorical but physical and involve mutilating, torturing, and robbing individuals of their human qualities. The section will show that hybridization, discussed previously, is a tool used by the powerful to subjugate the less powerful. By showing various examples of how humanness is manipulated, I am able to demonstrate which qualities, according to the texts, are viewed as human and thus provide a better framework for future scholarship in this field.

From the data gathered in the previous chapters, chapter 6, “Is Samson Human? Conceptualizing What Is and Is Not Human in Judges 13–16,” will argue that Samson, the “hero” of Judg 13–16, is presented as a nonhuman entity as a theoretical way of challenging the notions of previous scholars. The chapter will demonstrate that Samson is explicitly set apart from every human in the text and that he shares far more qualities with divine beings. This analysis will aid in proving the utility of the theoretical framework I have established

in the previous chapters: while most scholars assume that Samson is a human character, I argue that the text can be read as presenting him differently. In this way I hope to both challenge and expand the preconceived notions in scholarship.

In my conclusion, I will summarize the main arguments of my work while also providing a list of future projects to which the framework I have established could be applied. Here I hope to demonstrate once more the utility of my research and its potential for larger projects.