

AN ETHIC OF ANIMAL CARE:  
CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

“Just as the housewife who has scrubbed the room is careful to see that the door is shut lest the dog should come in and ruin the finished job with its footprints,” Albert Schweitzer said, “so European thinkers are on their guard lest animals should intrude into ethics.”<sup>1</sup> For theology in particular, the topic of animal ethics seems half-heartedly shoved in the corner: ignored, forgotten, or never considered in the first place. While many things might be to blame, confusion may be the biggest culprit. With so many messages from secular sources, Christians seem to either take a defensive stance or check out of the conversation altogether.

By comparing secular opinions, then looking at the creation account and arguments from philosophy, it becomes clear that the Christian view is the *only* one that gives proper value to both humans *and* animals: Humans, having the *Imago Dei*, are above and yet trusted with the rest of creation; therefore, humans should model compassionate stewardship in their treatment of animal life.

### THE VIEWS COMPARED: PANTHEISM, ATHEISM, AND CHRISTIANITY

The following sections will highlight a particular viewpoint concerning creation in general and animal life in particular, evaluate them from a biblical stance, and compare the biblical stance to the attitudes and roles actually adopted by Christianity as a whole.

#### The Viewpoint of Pantheism: Animals are Divine

Pantheism is the belief that God and the material world are one and that the divine exists in everything; therefore, created things are worshipped. Before cutting down a tree or killing an animal, the Pantheist realizes the tragedy of his action. “There are societies in which the axeman or the slaughterer before taking up his axe or his knife, would first have begged the tree’s or the animal’s pardon, explaining the necessity which forced him to destroy it.”<sup>2</sup>

Pantheism does give respect to creation, but does so for the wrong reasons, and its worship is misplaced. “The secular world starves because it cannot worship. Christians

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<sup>1</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

live because we can worship.”<sup>3</sup> This starvation shows itself in Pantheism as people fulfill their need wrongly. This tends to devalue human and animal life since a rock is essentially as valuable as they. It robs humanity of its God-given role as caretaker over creation and places him in an uncertain place.

A Christian view does in fact see the Numinous, or presence of God, in everything he created, as the mark of an artist exists in his paintings. This is a beautiful concept and is much different than the Pantheistic view that the “paintings” are themselves to be worshipped rather than the “Painter.” While the Pantheist respects animals to the point of worshipping them, the Christian respects them because the hand of God is present in them.

While Pantheism (or New Age) may be easy to reject, we should be careful not to, at the same time, fall blindly into the opposite extreme. Unfortunately, Christianity as a whole has seemingly fallen in this very direction. Rather than merely disagreeing and emphasizing the biblical model, Christianity fell over backwards to separate herself from Pantheism and ended up adopting the opposite heresy: not only do animals not have *divine* value, they have little value *at all*. “The Christian community was overreacting to pagan animism, more concerned with rejecting pagan error than with adequately affirming Christian truth...Our own beliefs and attitudes are themselves shaped by the very falsehoods that we rightly seek to repudiate.”<sup>4</sup>

Where a Pantheistic view has erred on the side of mysticism, a rationalistic view of creation robs God of worship as well, for the credit goes not to God for creating it, but to man for explaining it. While one misplaces respect of creation, the other is completely void of it: where the Pantheist will worship an animal as divine, the Rationalist will treat him like a machine. In an extreme attempt to reject Pantheism, Christianity became anthropocentric and therefore failed to reject Pantheism correctly.

#### The Viewpoint of Evolutionary Theory: Might Makes Right

The theory of Evolution holds that everything exists as a result of time and chance. Everything exists by accident and then merely ceases to exist. Man is an animal, though the most evolved animal. Survival of the fittest reigns, and might makes right.

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<sup>3</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 21.

Obviously, Christianity holds that everything exists because God desired it to and everything has a purpose: to glorify him. Compassion is to be sought rather than domination or oppression. Might does not make right.

Evolution tends to devalue *all* life as a random happening. This makes ethical decisions very difficult, for how does one know if animals have any value, or if people have any value? When creation is devalued as a probability, all life seems pointless. (While there are those Evolutionists who claim that the mere fact that the universe “happened” to bang into existence at all is a reason for awe, this still does not give any foundation for ethical values aside from personal choice.)

The Evolutionary view can either devalue or over-value human life. If humans are merely more-developed animals, then there is nothing that sets us apart. However, on the opposite extreme, without the Bible to direct people into compassionate roles of stewardship, there is nothing to stop humans from becoming dictators and abusing whatever is weaker than he (survival of the fittest). Both attitudes toward life from Evolution fall short: either humans have no value or nothing else does.

Norman Levine, an evolutionist from the University of Illinois, captures a typical evolutionary viewpoint toward life. “It is not present life, or even human life, to which Levine assigns the highest value... It is the process of evolution itself... Evolution changes from a biological process to an irresistible force of destiny and is imbued with value regardless of the outcomes it produces.”<sup>5</sup> Evolution becomes God, and whatever evolution seems to revere—the intelligent, strong, beautiful, wealthy, male, Caucasian, human—we must revere also, for we are only cogs in the great wheel.

This ethical stance is similar to the Environmentalists’ because the processes of nature are valued as the supreme good. However, an Evolutionist stance differs in that humans may become the highest on the ladder simply by building deadly weapons. If survival of the fittest reigns, then domination becomes the right way of being human and an ethic of care for animal creation is simply rejected as evolutionary suicide.

Surprisingly, Christianity at large seems to echo the domination role of humanity espoused by evolution rather than the stewardship role of the Bible, only with a Christian twist: Man dominates animals not because of evolution, but because God put them there

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 75.

for that purpose. Christianity has done well rejecting the science of Evolutionary *theory* but not necessarily the implications of evolutionary lifestyle, for might still seems to make right when it comes to our dealings with animals. Christianity has rightly rejected evolution as opposed to creationism, but has not completely grasped the implications of the creation account. The seven-day creation “ex-nihilo,” and the age of the earth are stressed, but the notion of stewardship is largely ignored. It is stressed that animals were created, but no answer is given as to how they should be treated.

#### The Viewpoint of Environmentalism: Nature is Fundamentally Good

Secular Environmentalists echo a bit of evolutionary philosophy but take a different view toward animal life: rather than allow the process of evolution to “weed out” the weaker species, the weaker species should be preserved for the sake of the biotic community. Nature as a functioning whole is valued most when all parts are present and doing what is uniquely beneficial to the environment. Individual animals do not matter.

“Deep Ecology” Environmentalists hold that nature, including bloodshed, death, decay, disasters, etc. is fundamentally *good*. It does not matter if an animal or a human is killed by a flood because this is nature’s way. The ecosystem as a whole has so much value that “the constituent parts that compose the biosphere, including humans, take on their value *solely* from the contribution they make to the whole.”<sup>6</sup> If an organism benefits the ecosystem, it should remain untouched, but if it harms the ecosystem, it should be terminated.

Philosopher Thomas Berry “warns...that the Bible is the wrong place to look for a ‘theology of nature.’ ...The story Berry believes is that the cosmos itself is the teacher, that its destiny is our destiny and its values our values as the consciousness of the earth.”<sup>7</sup> Moral standards must be derived from nature.

However, Christianity teaches that nature is *not* good and pure *as is*. Nature, though created by God as “good,” is fallen. It is not as it was meant to be. However, “In spite of sin, [creation] does not sink back into chaos and void...And this preservation is

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<sup>6</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 81.

God's testimony that creation is still good in his sight."<sup>8</sup> It is still beautiful and reminds us of God's power and goodness, but it is in need of redemption.

Christianity teaches that creation was subjected to "frustration, not by its own choice" (Romans 8:20)<sup>9</sup>, that it has been "groaning" (vs. 22) to be "liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (vs. 21).

A Christian can hardly dismiss death as "nature's way," and must recognize the tragedy of a hurricane and of a lion preying on a gazelle. Nature, while not morally evil, is naturally evil because it is fallen from God's perfection due to sin. What occurs in nature cannot be the deciding factor for what is ultimately good.

The "ethical holism," as it is called, that Deep Ecologists revere, has significant ethical implications. If draining a swamp, cutting down a tree, or even culling a deer population is "good" based on the action's result to the ecosystem, then culling an overpopulation of humans will be judged as good if it benefits the ecosystem—and surely it would. Because the wildness of nature is valued above all else, there are basically no limits on what should be done to maintain that wildness.

Another major problem with environmental ethics is that it is inconsistent. "They demean human management of creation while at the same time [demand] such management."<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, people are seen as pests that get in the way of nature's infallible wildness; on the other, they are told to actively get involved to save it. Secular environmentalists get confused with the role of humanity in creation. The Bible, however, makes it clear that humans are set up as creation's humble caretakers, servants watching over our master's possessions. So the Christian's question is not whether we rule creation, but *how* we are to do so in a way that glorifies God.

Christianity has done well rejecting the "ecosystem as ultimate good" view. However, it has not done so well advocating a stewardship role for humanity. God's creation is being polluted and animals are being abused, and most Christians have nothing to say about it. In fact, most Christian talk of creation is negative.

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<sup>8</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.

<sup>10</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 97.

Fear of being labeled a “tree hugger” or a “liberal” have stopped many Christians from fulfilling their God-ordained roles in creation. “Some popular Christian writers who continue to deny any meaningful theology of creation have gone so far as to label Christians working to preserve creation as proponents of New Age heresies.”<sup>11</sup> In reality, it is the shrinking back of Christians from their God-given roles in creation that opens the door for such heresies to take over.

While a *secular* Environmentalism leads to the devaluing of life, a distinctly *Christian* “Creation Care” lays the foundation of value; unfortunately, Christians have remained in the background. As Cal DeWitt, director of the Au Sable Institute, so clearly put it, “As people continue to harmonize with nature without professing God, we’ll see an increase in Satanic approaches to revering the earth. The solution to the problem is not further isolation from God’s creation, but a powerful witness to the one true God.”<sup>12</sup>

#### The Viewpoint of Rationalism/Humanism: Man is the Measure

“Man is the measure of all things,” the center of the universe. The Enlightenment saw Rationalism become the New God. Man, who possessed Reason, was therefore above all and could determine, judge and use all things as he saw fit. Humans were kings of the universe and ruled with Reason and Science. Everything else, so it went, was his slave. Rene Descartes epitomized this view in his essay, “Animals Are Machines.”

As stated previously while discussing Pantheism, the view of Christianity does not rest with the mysticism of animal worship any more than it rests with the rationalistic arrogance of Humanism. It is impossible for a Christian to give proper worship to God while at the same time worshipping his own intellect.

Rather than disagree with Humanism and emphasize the biblical model, Christianity became friends with it and Christian Humanism was born. While rejecting the divinity of animal life came easy, rejecting the near-divine status of humanity was a little more difficult. Christianity is right to hold that man is more than an animal. In fact, the concept of the *Imago Dei* must be stressed or man does not know who he is. It is only this distinct Christian view that tells man his proper place in creation. However, the same Christian view puts man in a position of humility and stewardship, but this is not stressed.

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<sup>11</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137-138.

It is assumed that “animals are machines,” and if *that* is true, then it must *follow* that God put them here as machines for man to use at his disposal.

Rene Descartes’ approach to creation has had a detrimental effect on the way many believers view God’s creation, animals in particular:

Whereas Aristotle taught that everything in nature had a subjective side, Descartes taught that nature was without spirit or soul and that it was nothing more than a gigantic machine...The new science spawned by Descartes challenged those who believed that human beings were created in the image of God. And it gave no credence at all to claims that the rest of nature deserved reverence and loving care. The humanism that followed Descartes’ philosophy only made matters worse. According to this new humanism, human beings became the measure of all things and the center of all concerns...To the heirs of Descartes, human beings were all that mattered. This human-centered thinking ruined everything. For those who followed this new rationalism, nothing had a spiritual quality anymore, and nothing but human beings had anything that could be called ultimate value.<sup>13</sup>

It is an easy guess where an attitude like this leads. Followers of Descartes “kicked about their dogs and dissected their cats without mercy, laughing at any compassion for them and calling their screams the noise of broken machinery.”<sup>14</sup>

It is uncertain why Christianity chose to adopt this view. Whatever the reason, it is a fact that Christians hold a very dominionistic and man-centered view of creation. In a study done by Stephen Kellert and Joyce Berry of Yale University (1980) on the attitudes of Americans toward animals and the environment, a certain question dealt with the frequency of the attendance at religious services. They found that “those who attended church services most regularly had the most dominionistic and utilitarian attitudes toward the creation around them.”<sup>15</sup> Again, the test found that “Specifically, those rarely or never participating in formal religious activities scored far higher on the moralistic and lower on the utilitarian scales [concerning the ethical treatment of animals] than the respondents who attended services at least once a week or more.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the more frequent the churchgoer, the more likely he is to view himself as a dominator rather than a caregiver to animals.

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature*, p. 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 313.

<sup>15</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 18.

In his classic “Historical Roots” essay, Lynn White, Jr., criticized that “Christianity taught that all created things were made to serve humankind.”<sup>17</sup> It is hardly difficult to see why this criticism about the Christian community has surfaced. The problem is not that Christians seem *confused* about their biblical role as “dominators,” but that they seem absolutely *certain* about it.

#### The Viewpoint of Animal Rights Theory: Animals are Equal to Humans

Finally, and more specific to animal ethics, is the viewpoint of Animal Rights. As identified before, Environmentalists value animal species preservation for the sake of the biotic community, whereas Animal Rightists value individual animals for their own sake.

Peter Singer, a major voice for Animal Rightists and author of *Animal Liberation*, pronounced that animals are *equal* to humans. Both have rights of equal value. Anyone violating the rights of an animal is guilty of what is referred to as “species-ism.”

The problem with this theory is that there are situations where human life takes precedence over animal life. For instance, a person is dying of starvation and there is no other food source, or a person has to choose to either hit an animal while driving or swerve into another driver. While it is true that we justify much more than should be justified, there are those rare cases when animal and human life are at odds.

This view also denies that humans are made above the animals, which robs us of our distinctly human responsibility of stewardship. Rather than caring for animals out of compassion, Animal Rightists are forced to care for them out of legal duty.

Christianity has, obviously, rejected this viewpoint. It is even more obvious of a rejection than that of Environmentalism, for at least Environmentalism has some perceived human benefit (better air and water translate to better lifestyle). While there are some Animal Rightists who make major news coverage by pulling ridiculous stunts, these incidences are not the norm. Animal welfare groups such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) have in fact done more to care for God’s creatures than the majority of Christians, even if their efforts are not to worship God.

It has gotten to the point that a Christian associates animal ethics with secular groups rather than with the Bible’s teaching. Why? It seems that when Christians are neglecting their role in God’s world, non-believers step in. “Biologist Richard Wright

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<sup>17</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 48.

calls this the ‘Cyrus Principle’ ... As the Persian (and pagan) king Cyrus was used by God to accomplish his work, so the disobedience of the Christians in the care of creation has led to God’s use of unbelievers to carry out these commands.”<sup>18</sup>

Christians cannot sidestep or forfeit their role in God’s creation for fear of being labeled a liberal, tree hugger, etc. And we cannot condemn groups like PETA for their efforts just because their philosophy is not Christian. After all, we are not doing much.

There is a lot of defensiveness about animal ethics in the Christian arena. I have personally sat in on classes at Bible college as well as numerous Christian social gatherings (of both my peers and my elders) and heard plenty of bashing, name-calling, and sarcasm directed at groups like PETA. I know from personal memory that animal welfare groups *seem* to threaten our Christian worldview by placing animals in an elevated position. But I realized that the worldview that was being threatened was not necessarily Christian but Humanistic, but I had learned to link the two together.

On the other hand, I have been around animal welfare advocates who bash the Christian attitude as well. Christians are seen as selfish and greedy, domineering and prideful in their treatment of animals. I now understand that these people are not pointing out stains in Christianity, but in Humanism. But again, they have been so inseparably linked that neither Christians nor Animal Rightists can really tell the difference.

In my opinion, the bashing that goes on from both sides could stop if only both knew exactly what the actual Christian viewpoint is. The notion of biblical stewardship is totally unique and has no counterpart in the secular world. It is an incredibly wise, respectful, humble, thankful, compassionate, and otherworldly interaction with the creatures God has chosen to put beside us. Rather than bashing those who are attempting to care, Christians should be proud and excited to have such an incredible ethic revealed to them from God. They should be eager to exemplify it and share it with those who are actively searching for one that makes sense of both their own lives and the lives of our fellow creatures.

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<sup>18</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 133.

### The Viewpoint of Christianity: Hope for All Creation

As stated at the beginning of this paper, a major reason why Christians have not tackled the issue of animal ethics is due largely to confusion. There are, after all, many secular messages and it seems as if a Christian message is lost.

The errors within the previous views contain both what is valued and what is devalued. Life actually has different values within it, and it is the proper recognition of these values that has everyone confused. The foundation with which to base these values also seems to cause confusion: *Why* is life valuable? *Why* are values different? *Who* decides the value of an animal, of a man? These are questions that only Christianity can correctly answer; but, unfortunately, Christianity's answers have been misplaced.

In addition to needing a Christian answer to these value-of-life questions, people are searching for why they feel a need at all: a need to value, to care, to revere, to connect. The Evolutionist may think he has answered the need with science, the Environmentalist with nature, the Animal Rightist with animal care, and the Humanist with himself, but somehow the question still goes unanswered.

What does the search for value have to do with an ethic of animal care? *It is our need to properly value creation precisely because God instilled that need within us.* We were made to know the place of God, ourselves, animals, and nature so that proper worship may be given to God, the responsibility of unique human stewardship understood by us, proper compassion and care given to animals, and caring provision given to nature. "The question 'What is humanity's place in nature?' cannot be satisfactorily answered by Deep Ecology or New Age spirituality. The failure of the church to address this question has created a vacuum which such movements exploit, but it remains a question that only the church can answer."<sup>19</sup> Without knowing the value and place of things, we simply end up where we've been.

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<sup>19</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 138.

## THE GENESIS ACCOUNT OF CREATION

Christians have been blamed for the way humanity has mistreated God's creation, and while some of the blame may be warranted, some of it is not. While there have been Christian movements in the wrong direction (as mentioned earlier), there have also been movements in the right one. It is not the foundational belief of Christianity that is the problem, but the misrepresentation of the truth; Christianity is not fatally flawed but sometimes misapplied.

What does a distinctly Christian view look like? To see it again for the first time, one must return to the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings.

### Determining Value

As rationalistic Americans, we often assign value based on pragmatics—if something is not practical then it is largely unvalued. We have difficulty taking vacation time because it does not seem practical; we do not appreciate the arts as much as business because they seem frivolous. Many Christians get pulled into the value-based-on-pragmatics mentality. “The word *practical* has been lifted from run-of-the-mill discourse and set apart as a virtue... The hallmark of America is the practical... We lead the world in knowing how to get things done.”<sup>20</sup>

In the same way, we apply this ethic of values to God's creation. We look around and attempt to assign value to it based on practicality. While much of it, obviously, *is* practical (our bodies require air and water), much of it seems impractical (flowers just look pretty). When we look at creation, we tend to assess economical profit rather than appreciate beauty, splendor, and the artistic hand of God.

When it comes to animals, this attitude remains—their existence on earth beside us often leaves us stumped. We recognize that they have relational value because we adopt them into our homes, interact with and care for them. We also recognize that they have some practical value in that they (used to) aid in farm work and transportation. But we also struggle with the idea that God made them outside of any pragmatic usefulness to man. This is difficult for modern man to get his head around.

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Run with the Horses*, p. 170.

As mere men, part of creation, we cannot fully comprehend God's divine reasons—"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9), God says. As John Burnaby puts it, "The purpose of creation as a whole must be beyond our comprehension...And this should make it impossible for us to think that God has created all things with no other purpose than the satisfaction of men's natural desires and needs."<sup>21</sup>

Man was no more of a "practical" creation than anything around him; after all, man is the rebellious part of creation, the part that sins against God. Too often, man looks around and concludes that the world is his stage—merely props and lighting for his starring role. While God has made His desires for *us* known, that does not mean that He has *no* desires for anything else.

Archbishop Robert Runcie has said:

Too often our theology of creation, especially here in the so-called 'developed' world, has been distorted by being too man-centered. We need to maintain the value, the preciousness of the human by affirming the preciousness of the nonhuman also—of all that is. For our concept of God forbids the idea of a *cheap creation*, of a throwaway universe in which everything is expendable save human existence... The value, the worth of natural things is not found in Man's view of himself but in the goodness of God who made all things good and precious in his sight.<sup>22</sup>

God was not being thrifty in bringing about the universe. He was not considering cost and demand or worrying about expressing more of his splendor or creative love than was practically necessary. God created because he is a creative being; he is glorified in the mere existence of His creation. He created out of desire, not out of dire need. He created that which would rightly glorify Him.

#### Creation Gives Glory

Each part of creation has its own way of glorifying God. "A tree gives glory to God by being a tree," Thomas Merton so gracefully put it. "It is expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree."<sup>23</sup> This concept is foreign to many Americans and/or Christians. We say a tree is valuable because of what it gives to *us*: filtered air, shade,

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 29.

wood, paper, and food. And while this is not *untrue*, it is not the *only* truth. A tree is valuable ultimately because God *desired* it to exist *as it is*, and by existing as He willed it, it glorifies Him.

This concept is beautifully seen in all of creation. As each created thing or being exists in the way God desired it to, it glorifies Him. For a tree, it is remarkably simple to glorify its Creator. For animals, it is similarly so, for though animals are affected by man's sin in that they participate in natural evil (not moral evil), they are still fulfilling the divine desire by being what He willed. An animal is not valuable because man can confine him in a slaughterhouse and cut meat out of him.

Man, however, glorifies God in a much different way than a tree and even than an animal. He glorifies God when he has aligned his rebellious will with his Creator's. Because man is the only part of creation given a will, it is in the alignment of that will that makes him what God made him to be. "Unlike the animals and the trees, it is not enough for us to be what our nature intends. It is not enough for us to be individual men. For us, holiness is more than humanity."<sup>24</sup>

However, just because man's worship of God is more complex and rich, that does not mean that the tree or the animal's worship of God is any less valuable or that it should be dismissed as worthless. In the same way, we should not say that man is more worthy of worshipping God but that he worships God differently, according to his created purpose. A man who fails to worship God, who forfeits his divine purpose, does not keep the Lord from receiving His worship: Jesus said, "If they [the disciples] keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Everything worships God in its own appointed way. "The perfection of each created thing is not merely in its conformity to an abstract type but in its own individual identity with itself," Thomas Merton has said. "This particular tree will give glory to God by spreading out its roots in the earth and raising its branches into the air and the light in a way that no other tree before or after it ever did or will do."<sup>25</sup> Is this unique way of glorifying God not true of every part of creation?

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

As God created, he declared that each thing was “good” on its own, apart from man’s determination of practicality (for man had not yet been created). God approved of animals as “good” *before man was around* and before the needs of man existed, which are now used to justify God’s creation of animals in the first place.

“Human beings...[arrive] as the last act of a nearly finished work. They are not asked to applaud, evaluate or critique. Their own opinion about creation’s goodness is not considered and not solicited. The judgment has already been made, the valuation already declared, by the only Judge who really matters.”<sup>26</sup> Or as John Burnaby said it, “God is glorified on earth when the eyes of men are enlightened, when they see his goodness in his works and come to worship him. But it would be presumptuous to imagine that the glory of God *depends* on the existence of the human eye.”<sup>27</sup>

The unique way that humans worship God, by aligning their will with His, can be seen in their relationships with all entities with which they experienced separation in the fall: God, each other, the self, and creation. “The more I reflect on the Scriptures and the more I sense how God thrills to the adoration He receives from all that He has created, the more I realize that He has given us the awesome responsibility of caring for His creation so that it can go on praising Him until the end of time.”<sup>28</sup> Stewardship, then, is an element of proper worship.

#### Original Relationships: Domination or Care?

Interestingly, Christians throughout history have cited Genesis 1:28 as the biblical basis for their “domination” of creation. Animals are machines to be employed by man as he sees fit, because the text says that man should “subdue” the earth and “rule over” the animals. Roderick Nash describes the attitude this way: “The image is that of a conqueror placing his foot on the neck of a defeated enemy, exerting absolute domination.”<sup>29</sup> There are three main problems with this view: 1) This kind of domination would have been foreign in the context of Eden; 2) man names the animals as an act of intimacy and connectedness to them; and 3) the command to rule was given at the time that animals were forbidden as a food source.

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<sup>26</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature*, p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 19.

First of all, the assignment for man to subdue and rule was given at a time when the idea of dominating would have been foreign. In Eden there was no greed or ego to feed. Man would have understood this task as one of headship not of dictatorship. He would have understood stewardship, not enslavement. “In this context, the term *subdue* is apparently God’s instruction to Adam to continue to bring what God has created into conformity with his ways and purposes.”<sup>30</sup> As the only part of creation that possesses a will and an intellect somewhat closer to that of God’s, humans are the natural choice as the caretakers of everything else.

Secondly, man is told to give names to all the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). This, too, is often interpreted as a sign of domination—that the act of naming the animals corresponds with the later acts of masters naming slaves. This idea of enslavement through naming is as foreign to the harmony of Eden as the idea of dominating or exploiting. A second option is that the naming of the animals was for scientific classification. However, if this were the case, then Adam would have been instructed to name the vegetation as well.

It is much more likely that the act of naming the animals was an act of intimacy, an act of knowing and connecting. Animals were created, after all, to glorify God and to be companions to man. An important note, however, is that animals were not *complete* companionship for Adam (Genesis 2:18-25). Anyone who has befriended an animal knows the truth of this statement. Animals can be wonderful companions—they greet you happily, lounge around with you, play, cuddle, and follow you around just about anywhere—but they cannot take the place of human companionship.

The fact that people do enter into relationships with animals shows that there is a common bond. After all, no one ever does the same with a plant (unless he is mentally insane). It *makes sense* to us that we should be companions with animals and great joy comes from these relationships. It is the distance that modern man places between himself and animals (and between his dinner table and the slaughter house) that allows him to treat them like a mere commodity of human convenience.

Lastly, the command to rule was given within the understanding that animals were *forbidden as a food source*. Genesis 1:29-30, the very verses that follow the so-

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<sup>30</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 91.

called “domination verse,” clearly say that both man and animals are only to eat vegetation—“every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it.” As Karl Barth observed, “Whether or not we find it practicable and desirable, the diet assigned to men and beasts by God the Creator is vegetarian.”<sup>31</sup>

If given a little thought, it makes sense that there would be no killing in Eden. How could all of creation live harmoniously and peacefully if there were predators and prey, fear, oppression, and bloodshed? Eden is a snapshot for us of God’s ideal before sin, “a world not yet marred by human rebellion, a world in which humans are at peace with God, with animals, and with the world of nature... Here were realized God’s perfect intentions for humans and animals.”<sup>32</sup>

This command in Genesis 1:29-30 was given to all creation that possessed the breath of life—man and animals. “‘And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—*everything that has the breath of life in it*—I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so” (vs. 30, italics added).

In Hebrew, the word for “breath of life,” which is present in both man and animals, is *nephesh*. This word appears in the creation accounts to describe animals as “living creatures” who have the “breath of life,” which is the same word used when God breathed “life” into Adam.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, plants do not possess this life breath. “The diet prescribed for all creatures having a *nephesh* (or breath of life) did not include killing and eating other creatures with a *nephesh*. This implies that there is something special or sacred about the life principle *nephesh*.”<sup>34</sup>

So we must keep in mind that the honor given to man to rule over creation *could not* have meant that he killed animals for food or that he “used them” in any inappropriate way. “Man’s natural role, therefore, is one of sovereignty over other creatures—not the absolute sovereignty that belongs to God alone, but at least a relative authority and superiority. The ‘dominion,’ therefore, which man is promised in Genesis 1 is poles

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 292.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Alan Young, *Is God A Vegetarian?*, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

apart from the kind of right to egotistical exploitation which it suggests to our ears. It is in essence a perfect obedience to the will of God...”<sup>35</sup>

To ‘subdue the earth’ refers to human beings finding nourishment from it for themselves, which “according to [Genesis] verses 29 and 30, is evidently supposed to be exclusively vegetarian...This means that the right to kill animals is excluded from the lordship of humans over them.”<sup>36</sup>

With all of this said, it is clear that the proper place of man in creation was that of a steward. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). There is no hint of domination or exploitation in this verse. “In the eyes of God, the one who rules is the one who serves. So humans are called to rule and subdue the creation by serving it. In fact, the Hebrew phrase of Genesis 2:15, normally translated ‘till and keep,’ could be as accurately rendered ‘serve and preserve.’”<sup>37</sup> If man was commanded to serve and care for Eden, it is hardly imaginable that God would also command him to harshly dominate over animals.

Man was given value above all of creation as being made in God’s image (1:27), and with this privilege also came responsibility. Because of his superior abilities, man is the obvious choice to care over those weaker than he. “So we are exalted to act as God’s servants and representatives to other creatures in this present age. But we are also, in the same acts of stewardship, humbled, for we also are creatures, and we stand accountable before God for the outcomes of any action we take.”<sup>38</sup>

Jewish tradition shares this viewpoint: “Moral and legal rules concerning the treatment of animals are based on the principle that animals are part of God’s creation toward which humans bear responsibility. Laws and other indications in the Bible make it clear not only that cruelty to animals is forbidden but also that mercy, kindness, and compassion to them are demanded of humans by God.”<sup>39</sup>

The privilege of stewardship is not superior or exalted enough for the egos and/or comfort of some, and for those who desire to dominate and exploit what belongs to God,

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 12, 15-16, quoting John Austin Baker.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Alan Young, *Is God A Vegetarian?*, p. 20, quoting Jurgen Moltmann.

<sup>37</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>39</sup> Ronald H. Isaacs, *Animals in Jewish Thought and Tradition*, p. 77.

the message of stewardship is that much more important. “Human dignity arises within creation, not against it.”<sup>40</sup>

A steward is defined as a “manager or trustee; a chief servant,” and the act of stewarding is defined as “guarding, conserving.”<sup>41</sup> It is clear from Scripture that God has assigned man the privilege and humble honor of being chief servant of His creation. God has trusted us to *guard* and *conserve* what is His, which cannot mean that we, in serving our own desires, destroy and pillage creation, leaving it vulnerable and unprotected. A steward may have special privilege, but he also has special responsibility, answering to one who is higher than he.

#### The Fall, the Flood and their Implications

It seems a problem that we are called to be stewards of the animals and not cause them any harm, and then we are given permission to eat them. How is this?

Many Christians recall the passage where God gives humans permission to eat meat (Genesis 9:2-3). They usually also recall, incorrectly, that God granted this to humans right after the Fall, as if it were part of the curse of sin. While this would seem to make sense because meat eating was forbidden *before* sin, it is not the case. After all, man eating an animal is not punishment for man but suffering for the animal. No, the curse given to man was that he would no longer be able to enjoy the effortless bounty from the earth.

Because of this new fallen state, the following became realities: 1) man and the animals would, for the first time, experience enmity between one another, 2) the experience of childbearing would become painful, 3) man and woman would experience, for the first time, conflict between them, 4) man must toil and sweat in order to “eat the plants of the field,” and 5) man would experience death (Genesis 3:15-19). From this point on, the created order is fallen and man experiences what we now identify as the four separations. Man is separated from God, himself, other people, and the rest of creation. From this point on, natural and moral evil are everywhere.

It is interesting, then, that God does *not* give permission for man to eat animals just because sin has entered the world and man can now think of killing. God does not

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<sup>40</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 140.

<sup>41</sup> The New American Webster College Dictionary, 1981, p. 512.

consent immediately, though the human heart has already begun its decay. Why does God hold back this permission until after the Flood? If animals are in fact valuable to Him, why does He give this permission at all? Is God “taking back” the value assigned to them when He created them?

Some people speculate that God gave Noah and his family permission to eat meat because there was no other food source (since everything had been under water for forty days). However, the tone seems more permanent than that; it seems to apply to all of man and not just to Noah’s situation. But is this God’s jubilant declaration of His will for His creation, as some would claim? Is it a *command* that we eat animals?

Keeping the ideal harmony of Eden in mind, these claims hardly seem likely. God is simply acknowledging a tragedy. “The Flood and subsequent new start for the world are used as an opportunity to switch from the theoretic ‘golden age’ to the conditions actually obtaining, and one of the saddest features of this is the degradation of relations between man and the animals from their first created beauty.”<sup>42</sup>

The history of Jewish tradition on this text agrees. “The permission to eat meat in Judaism has often been described as a compromise, a divine concession, so-to-speak, to human weakness and human need.”<sup>43</sup> Again, “Judaism has often viewed vegetarianism as the ‘ideal’ diet commanded by God before humanity’s descent into sin symbolized by the Fall and the flood.”<sup>44</sup>

Obviously, God has destroyed the earth immediately prior to this because of “man’s great wickedness,” because the “thoughts of his heart” were “evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5) and “The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain” (vs. 6).

It was obvious that the harmony and purity of Eden were over, and God was dealing with fallen man now. “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence” (vs. 11). After the initial grief and pain, God dealt with Noah and his family (and succeeding generations) as a patient father, setting boundaries without exasperating people with the ideal expectations of Eden.

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 16, quoting John Austin Baker.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald H. Isaacs, *Animals in Jewish Thought and Tradition*, p. 194.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, p. 52.

Stephen Webb compares God's allowance of animal consumption to certain allowances that parents may give their children. He says, "Parents often let their children do things that are less than what is best for them. Parents let children watch too much television and eat more junk food than is good for them. All parents know that they have to pick their battles with their kids by ordering priorities and setting realistic goals."<sup>45</sup> Exasperation is not the road to obedience.

There are other examples of divine concession being given due to human need and weakness. Aside from the concession to eat meat, God has granted his children an earthly king (1 Samuel 8:22), quail in the desert when manna was not good enough (Numbers 11:18-22), and divorce because their hearts were hard (Matthew 19:7-8). "Although [the passage] recognizes man's preying on nature as a fact, it characterizes that fact as a mark of man's decline from the first perfect intentions of God for him."<sup>46</sup>

One more important thing to note about the Flood story is the emphasis given to the *value* of animals. God gave specific instructions for the size of the ark in Genesis 6:14-16: It is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Noah was not a young man when he was told to build this monstrous boat. It is a testimony to how God valued animal life along with human life that he commanded Noah to build a boat big enough that a pair of each kind would be able to fit on it. Surely, it would have been much easier for Noah to have just constructed a boat large enough for his family, but instead he was told to take the extra time and effort to include the animals too.

It is also worthy of noting that after the waters had gone down, God made His covenant with the people *and* the animals. God establishes His covenant with "you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you...every living creature on earth" (Genesis 9:9-10). This covenant is repeated again in vs. 12, 15, and 17. "The idea of covenanting with God is an exalted concept—a sacred phenomenon. In biblical terms it constitutes a unique relationship—a special bonding. And the constant repetition that God made this special bond between Himself and the

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<sup>45</sup> Stephen Webb, *Good Eating*, p. 26-27.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 17, quoting John Austin Baker.

animals came at a crucial point in the history of the earth. Just as life after the Flood was a much lower order of existence than it had been before.”<sup>47</sup>

### The Peaceable Kingdom: Christ’s Restoration

Not only does Eden remind us of how we were meant to be, the promise of restoration when Christ redeems all of creation tells us who we will be again for eternity.

In a passage speaking prophetically about the coming of Christ, Isaiah describes the “peaceable kingdom” that the Messiah will bring. “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them” (11:6). Not only will animals no longer experience this enmity between them, they will no longer experience enmity with humans either. Additionally, the practice of predation in nature, which is a result of sin, will cease, as “the lion will eat straw like the ox” (vs. 7).

I have heard this passage explained away as a “symbolic” or “figurative” image of peace, not something that will really happen. I assume that “the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12) is a figurative expression that nonetheless refers to actual creation praising God. I suppose it is assumed that, in Isaiah 11, either such a biological change just cannot happen, would be silly, or that animals do not matter enough to be referred to in the Messianic restoration.

Just such a biological change *already occurred* with the entrance of sin, so why would it not occur again with the exit of sin? If there really will be a restoration, what is it that will be restored? Eden, this time void of anything *but* man? That is not restoration but annihilation of a good part of God’s original creation. As Archbishop Robert Runcie was quoted as saying earlier, this concept of God making a “cheap creation” or a “throwaway universe” is not biblical. “Just as the sin of Adam affected all creation, so the sacrifice of Christ begins the redemption of it.”<sup>48</sup>

Again we turn to Jewish tradition on Isaiah 11. “Just as at the beginning of time in the perfect society symbolized by the Garden of Eden, there was no eating of meat, so

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<sup>47</sup> J.R. Hyland, *God’s Covenant with Animals*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 86.

at the end of time, in the messianic era as described by the prophet Isaiah, there will be a return to the original state.”<sup>49</sup>

Some people have a problem with the idea that Christ’s redemption applies to all of creation rather than *only* to man. However, the redemption of man is not robbed of its significance just because it encompasses more than him. Besides, Christ’s redemptive work is not a resource that will run out if applied to too liberally. It includes all men who have turned their wills toward Him as well as the rest of fallen creation. The redemption of man is different and more significant, but man is not the only recipient of Christ’s eternal renewal, of Christ’s “making all things new.”

#### The Afterlife of Animals

This discussion of creation restoration obviously translates to what some call “animal afterlife.” For some, animals are to be excluded because they do not possess the human “reason” or “soul,” and for others, they are to be included because, summing up Irenaeus, “salvation does not involve the rejection of flesh but its transformation.”<sup>50</sup>

I am guessing that most modern Christians struggle with “dogs going to heaven” because they view heaven as a white, cloudy place above us where souls float when the body dies. While I do think that there is a “rest for the soul” after a person dies where they are already “with the Lord,” I also think that this “place” exists in our minds within the confines of time and space. We have to have a “place” where people go to wait for Jesus to come back to earth for everyone else.

In reality, God and all otherworldly realities transcend our limits in ways that we cannot understand. God’s redemptive power is not limited by time and space. If He created it, then He is not bound by it. However, some people struggle with this idea because they fear that an animal redemption is just too impractical. According to them,

The redeeming work of Christ can cope only with the human species. After all, they say, only half-joking, heaven would have to be a big place to hold all these animals as well. But the real issue is not whether our picture of heaven is big enough but whether our vision of God is. The truth is that a new heaven and earth that cannot encompass redemption for each and every suffering creature is not big enough for the God of justice in whom Christians believe.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald H. Isaacs, *Animals in Jewish Thought and Tradition*, p. 193.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, p. 16.

I have been asked, “Do you really think God will restore *every* animal that *ever* lived?” This is apparently too difficult a task for God, and some suggest He just make all *new* animals. However, “starting over” is not a simpler task than restoration. It also implies that the animals God has already made have no value as beings, but are only stage props. In addition, if it is too much work for God to “reach back in time and preserve for eternity” each animal life, surely it would also be too much work for God to really preserve every human that ever lived.<sup>52</sup> In all of this we are assuming that God has tasks that require Him tedious amounts of work in the first place.

Others suggest that God should only redeem certain *species* or *representatives* of animals. The suggestion is that God has in mind mighty, majestic representations of the now less-than-adequate animal world that He will redeem (or create anew)—because the rest of the animal world is just not glorious enough.

Do you imagine that the individual created things in the world are imperfect attempts at reproducing an ideal type which the Creator never quite succeeded in actualizing on earth? If that is so they do not give Him glory but proclaim that He is not a perfect Creator. Therefore each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art.<sup>53</sup>

Appreciating each individual animal for what it is *now* glorifies God, though we still may realize that each individual animal will be restored to his first created glory. The suggestion that God will only redeem (or recreate) the “representatives” denies that all animals praise God. It is as if individual animals have no value and redemption is only for the sake of “having animals around” rather than compensating them for their lives of suffering or because God delights in their individual presence.

If we do not believe that animals will be restored, then we “face the difficult task of making peace with a God who brings into existence creatures ‘whose sole destiny was to suffer pain’; but that...is incompatible with the doctrine that God is love.”<sup>54</sup> That animals should be subject to sin because of man, live lives of suffering (often because of

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<sup>52</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Christianity*, p. 322.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 29-30.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

man), and then be dropped into non-existence while man is redeemed does not line up with the value placed on them in Eden or God's character.

God created animals as part of His divine desire and He cares for them. It does not follow that He should then subject them to senseless suffering and then forget about them in the end. "If God has brought into existence animals and has allowed them to suffer considerably but then drops them out of existence, that seems more problematic than God resurrecting them to a new life filled with satisfactions."<sup>55</sup> God does not possess a "divine indifference" to any of His creation.

"As a recompense for what they once suffered," John Wesley has said, "while under the 'bondage of corruption,' when God has 'renewed the face of the earth,' and their corruptible body has put on incorruption, they shall enjoy happiness suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption, and without end."<sup>56</sup> If animals share "in the curse of Adam's sin, with its pain and death, one might not be too bold to suggest that it would be fitting that they also share in the cancellation of that curse in Christ, participating in the resurrection and sharing, in their own way, in the glory that is to come."<sup>57</sup>

We do not know what the perfect relationship between God and man was like before sin, but we often imagine what it would be like to hear "the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). We long for that kind of a relationship and look forward to experiencing it someday. On the same note, we do not know what the perfect relationship was like between man and man, exactly, nor between man and animals.

"Immediately upon the fall, the mind of man shrank from its primitive greatness and expandedness, to an exceeding smallness and contractedness...Before, his soul was under the government of the noble principle of divine love, whereby it was enlarged to the comprehensiveness of all his fellow creatures and their welfare...[But] sin, like some powerful astringent, contracted his soul to the very small dimensions of selfishness..."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 327.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 103.

<sup>57</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 333-334.

<sup>58</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 164, quoting Jonathan Edwards.

We do not know exactly how much was lost with sin or how much we will regain when things are made new. We do not know what our relationship with animals was meant to be, in all its perfection, or what it will be again. We are not on God's side of eternity, and we dare not make careless, one-sided decisions as if we were. As the poet Alice Meynell has said it, "O daisy mine, what will it be to look / From God's side even of such a simple thing?"

#### ARGUMENTS FROM PHILOSOPHY: DO ANIMALS MATTER?

Having explored the creation account as well as various worldviews concerning animals, a discussion of a Christian ethic of animal care will be more complete with a look at philosophy. It is important to know what philosophical reasoning is used to deny value and care toward animals, especially in a Christian context.

The main arguments given *against* an animal ethic are as follows: 1) Only beings that possess reason deserve moral treatment; 2) humans, being more perfect, are free to use animals, who are less perfect (dominion idea); 3) humans should not harm animals *only* because it might lead to harming other humans; and 4) animals are not to be loved out of charity or cared for instead of humans.

While there are others who espouse these views, I will discuss the basic views as put forth by Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, and Kant, for they have not changed much since them. I will briefly explain each argument and then reply to each, often referring to information from the past two sections.

##### Argument #1: Only Rational Beings Deserve Moral Consideration

This view says that animals do not deserve moral consideration because they do not possess human reason. Augustine said, "For we see and appreciate from their cries that animals die with pain. But man disregards this in a beast, with which, as having no rational soul, he is linked by no community of law."<sup>59</sup>

Thomas Aquinas continued Augustine's philosophy toward animal life. In "The Lawful Treatment of Animals," from *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas uses a quote from

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<sup>59</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Christianity*, p. 304.

Augustine that “thou shalt not kill” does not apply to “trees, for they have no sense, nor to irrational animals.”<sup>60</sup>

Immanuel Kant also espouses this view. Part of being rational, he says, is having the ability to act morally. Animals are not ends in themselves, but only irrational means to a rational human end. According to Kant, “whereas human beings are not to use other human beings as means, they *can* use both inanimate objects and animals as means because neither are rational moral agents.”<sup>61</sup>

Rene Descartes, a champion of the Enlightenment, shares this view. In his essay, “Animals are Machines,” he gives his reasons why animals are to be excluded from moral consideration: 1) they “could never use speech or other signs as we do,” 2) they have no thoughts, feelings, or desires, 3) the “soul of the brute” cannot be “of the same nature as our own,” and 4) this “absolves [men] from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals.”<sup>62</sup>

A Christian must be able to look at his viewpoints squarely and then separate as best he can which ones come from Scripture and which ones come from the influence of culture. The entire argument claiming that animals are outside of moral consideration because they are not rational *is not found in Scripture*. This is a purely philosophical argument, and while it is beneficial to challenge ourselves with philosophy, we cannot confuse it with the authority of Scripture.

Augustine’s view regarding animals was largely influenced by the Stoic philosophy of his day, Descartes was a subject of rationalistic and humanistic Enlightenment thinking, and he along with Aquinas and Kant were largely influenced by what they deemed were the authoritative words of Augustine.

The Stoic philosophy that influenced Augustine stressed the irrationality of animals. They argued that the possession of reason was a necessary requirement for being a legitimate object of moral concern.<sup>63</sup> Rereading Augustine’s previous statement, it is clear that such words could have been penned by one of his contemporary Stoic influences.

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 124.

<sup>61</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 130.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 46-52.

<sup>63</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 304.

Augustine was also influenced to comment as he did in order to refute a heresy of his time, the teachings of Mani (father of the Manichean movement). An even more pressing reason for Augustine to refute him was because, for nine years, Augustine had been a Manichean.<sup>64</sup> The teachings of this heretical group were basically that, “because meat derives from the prince of darkness and consuming it strengthens the body’s sensual lusts, it is not to be eaten.”<sup>65</sup> *Because of this view*, Manicheans were not allowed to harm animal life. Downplaying the significance of animals (they have no dark power over men, men have power over *them*) served to keep this heresy from influencing Christians and to separate Augustine from the heresy that had taken nine years of his life.

The farmers of Augustine’s day also served to influence his position on animal life, though his conclusions here contradict his previous conclusion. These farmers were attracted to paganism because they believed only pagan gods could look after their animals.<sup>66</sup> Augustine, in trying to bring them to Christianity, quoted Matthew 10:29 (God’s eye on the sparrow) to prove that God cares about each *individual* animal. “So, curiously, although God’s providential care extends to each animal [for the benefit of the farmers], nevertheless we humans have no moral obligation to individual animals [to refute the Manicheans]. Divine concern is not to translate into human moral concern.”<sup>67</sup>

The tragedy is while Augustine’s views were influenced by his culture (to the point of contradicting himself), his views have largely influenced Christian thinkers ever since. Theologians had been discussing the issue of animal ethics *before* Augustine, but *after* him the discussion ceased, for theologians relied on his quotations for their own beliefs as if they were Scripture. Richard Sorabji, author of *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*, says, “The Stoic view of animals, with its stress on their irrationality, became embedded in Western, Latin-speaking Christianity above all through Augustine. Western Christianity concentrated on one half, the anti-animal half, of the much more evenly balanced ancient debate.”<sup>68</sup> The pervasiveness of Augustine’s Stoic philosophy throughout Christendom helps explain why, in section one,

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<sup>64</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 304.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 303.

it was shown that the *more* one attends church, the *less* he knows or cares about animal life.

Thomas Aquinas perpetuated Augustine's views. In fact, he taught that some animals were "satellites of Satan", instigated by powers of hell.<sup>69</sup> He grouped animals with "trees" and Descartes considered them mere "machines." Kant degrades them because they cannot make moral choices, and Descartes because they cannot use language.

While common sense can often lead us astray due to bias or ignorance, in many cases it can be helpful. Common sense tells most people that an animal and a carrot are not the same, that a dog and the clock on your mantel are different. How can we tell that animals are not plants and not machines?

As much as man *is* above the animals, it is ridiculous to take this to the extremes it has been taken to. One cannot play fetch with a clock, be protected by a carrot, or interact in any way with an inanimate object or plant the way one can with an animal.

We adopt animals into our homes, name them, care for them, talk to them, play with them, and mourn the day they die. We play games with our pets and laugh at their curiosity, we cuddle with them, exercise together and enjoy their company. Animals protect their human families (from intruders, from drowning, etc.); they help the blind physically and emotionally; they get embarrassed and hide under tables when we shave their fur; they get scared at lightning and they tiptoe at night when everyone else is sleeping (like my dog). They mourn death, display courage, bestow love and protection, and look back into human eyes with something recognizable.

All animals display emotion and have the ability to form bonds and can feel pleasure and pain. Animals also display varying personalities. Upon a visit to Farm Sanctuary, a refuge for farm animals that have been abandoned, writer Erik Marcus discovered this truth. Most of us recognize the different personalities in dogs and cats because we live with them; however, most of us do not think twice about the personalities of the animals we associate with dinner. "Indeed, it seems that we are not able to take animals seriously precisely because we eat them."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Webb, *On God and Dogs*, p. 87.

Marcus encountered the chicken named Ruby who protected Paula, another chicken who had been harshly rejected by the main flock due to her weak and malnourished appearance. Ruby would sleep on top of Paula in order to protect her from the damaging pecks from other chickens. After Paula's feathers grew back and the flock accepted her, she and Ruby remained constant companions. While Ruby no longer needed to sleep *on* Paula to protect her, they did continue sleeping side-by-side and remained lifelong friends.<sup>71</sup> He also encountered the ornery pig named Dawn who sauntered up to him and casually untied his shoelaces. She would then walk away, looking over her back to see his reaction. This, according to the caretakers, was a regular trick that Dawn pulled on visitors.<sup>72</sup> Similar stories continued.

Some would charge this argument with “sentimentality” and dismiss it altogether. It is assumed that one should go about his decision-making with no emotion, employing only cool rationalism in his moral life. When told of animal personality or of unjust animal suffering, such people disengage their emotions, as if only cold hard facts were relevant to making ethical choices. Imagine the state of the world if moral decisions were made consistently without empathy or compassion.

“Not to feel in the moral realm is tantamount to not seeing; it constitutes a form of moral blindness. It is simply not true that we can conduct our moral lives with the same cold detachment that we associate, say, with doing geometry.”<sup>73</sup> When we allow ourselves to recognize emotion and “other-ness” in animals, it is obvious that they cannot be dismissed as either plants or machinery.

God created animals *with the breath of life*, as I discussed earlier in section two, they were *given names* as an act of intimacy and they were *not allowed as a food source* (while plants were *given* as food). They were created for God's glory and by His estimation they are “good” on their own, apart from man.

We also observe that most religions recognize the value of life in an animal and require them to be treated compassionately. Children seem to form even tighter bonds with animals than adults, referring to them as their friends and spending hours with them

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<sup>71</sup> Erik Marcus, *Vegan: The New Ethics of Eating*, p. 105-106.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 227.

as playmates. Perhaps part of the reason why children become friends with animals and adults deny them moral value is because of the pervasive influence of rationalism.

In addition, beating a clock to pieces or a carrot to pulp with a baseball bat does not pose any moral dilemma for us. Clocks and carrots are inanimate, senseless things that cannot feel pain or die in any sense (as only beings with life, or *nephesh*, can be robbed of that life). However, if one were told to beat an animal with a baseball bat, he would cringe both physically and emotionally. “We have an innate tendency to ascribe consciousness to entities which act in ways which we recognize as signs of sensation.”<sup>74</sup> We recognize a likeness of ourselves in animals that we cannot force ourselves to see in either clocks or carrot sticks.

Biological evidence also leads us to believe that animals experience pain. We can intelligently conclude that a chicken feels pain when it is debeaked because the beak “consists of an outer layer of horny material covering soft tissue which extends along the length of the beak and is well supplied with blood and nerve fibers,” which we recognize as pain sensors.<sup>75</sup> When the bird’s beak is cut off with a hot blade (as is routinely done in factory farms), one can put two and two together, especially when the beak bleeds and the chicken squawks and tries to get away. Indeed, “Why beat a dog if it doesn’t hurt him?”<sup>76</sup>

At this point, there are even those who would argue, “So what? It doesn’t *matter* that animals feel pain.” While some atheists may choose to argue this, it does not seem at all cohesive with either the account in Genesis or the character of God. “The fact remains that [animals] suffer and in given instances suffer considerably. That itself is sufficient to pose a serious problem for the construction of a satisfactory vision of a loving and powerful Creator providentially in control of all life that he has called into existence” if we say their pain is of no consequence.<sup>77</sup>

Some may say that although animals endure suffering, so do people, as a result of sin—and God is still a good God. However, God allows people to go through suffering because it produces a stronger dependence on Him, a stronger Church, and most

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<sup>74</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 93, quoting Rosemary Rodd.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97, quoting Rosemary Rodd.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98, quoting Bernard Rollin.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

significantly, believers know that they will receive their reward for suffering—in the afterlife. In other words, it's *worth* it. In these terms, of course a loving God allows suffering, because it is compensated. With animals, this view of God-is-good-through-suffering only works if one allows animals to share in the afterlife as well, which many believers are not prepared to do.

Looking back to the original argument(s) put forth, a few more points must be considered. So far we have established that 1) animals are creatively different than either plants or machines (*nephesh*), 2) animals experience pleasure and pain and, like us, prefer pleasure to pain, 3) the pain of animals is a natural evil, as all sin is evil, and is not part of God's original creative ideal, and 4) animals endure suffering like humans do, and as for humans, sense will be made of their suffering with the compensation of an afterlife by a loving Creator.

In addition to the argument that reason is required for moral consideration, Kant brings the ability to make moral decisions into the picture and Descartes, the ability to use language. However, if one has *already established* in his mind that man is above all else, then he will use the attributes of *man* such as reason and language, to determine the moral value of other created beings. These versions of the same argument all stem from philosophical propositions that are largely influenced by culture rather than Scripture.

Another major problem arises with these rules for moral consideration. While the philosophers may be attempting to exclude only *animals* from ethics by playing the “reason” card, they are also unwittingly excluding irrational humans. If we determine value *only* as this theory would have us do, then rational humans have *no moral duties* to “infants (and fetuses), the massively retarded, the severely senile, and the insane,”<sup>78</sup> all who are irrational.

Clearly, the major problem with this philosophy is that it is an attempt to exclude part of God's creation from having value, based solely on man's reason and not on God's revelation. As truth slowly came to be viewed, not as something revealed to man by God, but as something man *discovers* using his own reasoning ability, faulty philosophies arose along with their problematic implications. To make matters even more tragic, such philosophies became ingrained as part of Christian doctrine.

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<sup>78</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 130.

To briefly mention the two other objections to animal value as raised by Descartes, I will say this: they are not reasons at all but complaints. They are the complaints of a spoiled worldview. As mentioned previously, Descartes' other two "reasons" were 1) the "soul of the brute" cannot be "of the same nature as our own," and 2) this "absolves [men] from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals."

The humanistic philosophical stance says that for man to be like the animals in any way is to rob man of his supreme position above all things. While Scripture says that man and the animals were given "the breath of life," humanism says that only men deserve it. What Descartes is forgetting (or never saw in the first place) is that value is not an "all or nothing" thing—it is not "you have it or you don't" when it comes to God's creation. Saying an animal has *value* is not saying the value is *equal* to that of humans.

Raising a complaint about this is like a young child hating his new baby sister out of fear that mother will expend more energy on loving the baby than on loving him. The fear is that God's love and compassion are capable of running out if given too liberally. Descartes, and others like him, seem to be afraid that animals compete with man as if God's love and compassion were rare commodities that will run out.

Descartes' last reason for denying animals moral consideration is so that men will not "feel bad" when they "eat or kill animals." Doesn't the very fact that this practice *poses an ethical problem* say something about it? For who needs to be reassured that he is not in an unethical place by eating carrots? Or who needs comforted that by smashing his old, broken clock that he is not to feel morally guilty? This reason is not a reason at all, but rather a poor excuse for puffed up men to continue doing what they want despite what their conscience may tell them to the contrary.

In this discussion it is important to note the caution with which one must use human reason and philosophy to make his moral decisions. While man without God may solely rely on his own reasoning, man with God must accept the humble position of a servant, receive truth from God, and use his human reasoning in compliance to God's truth. One must not bend God's truth to fit his philosophy, but bend his man-made philosophy to fit God's revealed truth.

A Christian ethic of care toward animals is based upon the fact that they belong to God and we are the humble stewards of what belongs to Him. Animals have value

because God values them. If God said that an asparagus was to be treated with care and compassion, then we would be obliged to obey. It is crucial to establish by what *authority* value is granted. Humans do not make this decision, God does. Fortunately for the sake of our reasoning minds, God’s statement of value and His command of compassion correlate with what makes sense to us. If an asparagus feels no pain, then why is it wrong to cut it? We can submit to this ethic toward animals because it does, after all, make sense to us.

Reason is not the enemy, but *can* lead to our moral decline if we rely on it solely to determine our actions. As we all know, man can reason his way out of doing just about anything that is inconvenient or unpleasurable. When we start building our ethics on our own (or each other’s) rationality, which is flawed and fallen, we are setting ourselves up for faulty ethics.

For example, if our reasoning minds convince us that we are only to assign value to beings that can talk (because we can talk), we have just said that babies and the deaf have no value. And if by “talk” we mean “use language coherently,” then we are saying that the senile and mentally handicapped are value-less as well. It is for this very reason—that man will try to reason himself out of moral responsibility as long as his own kind is still deemed worthy of moral treatment—that our ethic must come from something higher than our own minds.

#### Argument #2: Animals Are for the Use of Humans

Aquinas says, “There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. Now the order of things is such that the imperfect [animals] are for the perfect [humans].”<sup>79</sup> He is telling us that God has ordered His creation so that the more perfect and valuable are to use the less perfect and valuable at their disposal.

Aquinas is assuming that “the purpose for which it is,” referring to animals, can be nothing other than to serve man. He presupposes that God created a cheap creation for the sole purpose of man’s desires and that man may use and dispose of as he wills. This is the common dominion theory as discussed previously, so it is not necessary to repeat all that was stated about it in section two. However, some additional comments about Aquinas’ theology should be made.

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<sup>79</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 124.

“If Aquinas is arguing that the more perfect have *no* duties to the less perfect, then his argument is seriously problematic. For if a significant aspect of being ‘more perfect’ is being ‘more intelligent,’ then it would certainly follow that normal human beings have no duties to...massively retarded human beings, who are even less intelligent and consequently less perfect than chimpanzees.”<sup>80</sup> A human with *no* moral duties to the weak quickly becomes an exploiter of the weak. With no restraints come many ethical dilemmas.

If by “more perfect” Aquinas means “more like God,” or “in God’s image,” then this would have to mean that being “more perfect” means having characteristics like God’s. But it cannot mean that humans are like God physically or by default, but rather by aligning their rebellious wills with His divine will. Surely all humans have value as bestowed by the One who created them, but not all humans reflect God’s glory because many of them are, indeed, his enemies (as we have all been at one time). Jesus was not the image of God because He had opposable thumbs and God has opposable thumbs, or because Jesus could talk and God can talk, but rather because Jesus gave up His own human will and submitted Himself to God’s will.

We could say that being “more perfect,” then, is being like God in the display of these characteristics. We, like God, lead by serving, for His “idea of ruling proves very different from the world’s... In the eyes of God, the one who rules is the one who serves.”<sup>81</sup>

As stated previously, animals are not given merely for human use but are created by God’s will to glorify Him (as are we). “Use” and “care” *can* coincide; the farmer can “use” his oxen to plow fields and then “care” for them by attending to their needs. It is more probable that a human with the mentality of “using” will take advantage of the weaker being. Use and abuse are more related than care and abuse.

“It is the very fact that we humans are more perfect that makes possible our caring for those who are less perfect.”<sup>82</sup> What makes us more perfect is that we have the ability to reflect God’s character. When we cease to serve, instead desiring to become dictators,

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<sup>80</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 128.

<sup>81</sup> Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation*, p. 93.

<sup>82</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 128.

we stop reflecting God. We forfeit our privilege of being “more perfect” and, in fact, cease being what Aquinas insists gives us value in the first place.

Argument #3: Duties to Animals are Only Duties to Humans

Aquinas and Kant, specifically, hold that cruelty to animals is *only wrong* because it may lead to cruelty to other humans; likewise, kindness to animals is *only right* because it may encourage kindness to other humans. “The trick for them is to morally condemn cruelty to animals without admitting direct moral obligations to animals,”<sup>83</sup> so this is their conclusion. Because they do not grant value to animals, they must ground the wrongness of cruelty to them in an indirect ethic to humans.

“What Aquinas and Kant ask us to believe...is hard to believe...because we are asked to believe that the torture of an animal is wrong only because it might prompt us to mistreat or neglect humans; the animal’s pain and suffering counts for nothing and by itself provides no reason whatsoever why we should refrain from our torture.”<sup>84</sup> According to this them, “beating a dog with a baseball bat is no more objectionable, taken by itself, than beating a rug.”<sup>85</sup>

According to this philosophy, if we lived in a world where the beating of rugs led to the beating of spouses and children, then the beating of rugs would be ethically wrong; but, because the beating of animals leads to the beating of spouses and children, then for that reason *alone* the beating of a dog is wrong. To most, however, the beating of a rug would not be *ethically wrong* even if it led to the beating of people; it would just be a discouraged activity, like violent video games or allowing oneself to foster “road rage.”

Taken to its philosophical ends, if the beating of animals is only wrong if it leads to the beating of humans, then hypothetically speaking, Adam could have rightly beaten animals in the Garden before there were any other humans to beat. Adam and Eve both could have abused animals freely before sin since only the beating of humans is said to be wrong. We might even say that God himself could torture an animal in His purity of character since He would never be led to torture a human as a result.

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<sup>83</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 121.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

With this philosophy we are asked to believe that “when we beat the dog we cause it excruciating suffering, but, by itself, we are told, that provides no more reason for refraining from our act of beating than the fact that beating a rug causes the emission of dust. Neither the dust nor the pain are viewed by themselves as morally relevant considerations.”<sup>86</sup> All of this reasoning is absurd.

Why *do* we see the beating of dogs as a pathway to the beating of humans, and not the beating of rugs as that pathway? Is the beating of dogs not wrong “because we perceive that beating dogs, unlike the beating of rugs, is itself cruel and wicked, and we fear that cruelty and wickedness in one area of life is likely to extend into other areas?”<sup>87</sup> Because we recognize that beating a dog is cruel, we recognize that a person who would do such an evil thing might not restrain himself from the same cruelty to human beings. “Our very fear that beating dogs will give rise to mistreating humans is a recognition that beating dogs is itself an evil.”<sup>88</sup>

#### Argument #4: Animals Should Not Be Loved as Humans Are

With this argument we again hear from Aquinas. In his opinion, it is not proper for animals to receive the love that only other humans should receive. This argument is not as philosophical as the others, but still merits a reply.

Aquinas’ opinion is that true fellowship can only occur between humans. With this statement I would not disagree, for we gather from the creation account, as explored earlier, that animals could not fully meet Adam’s companionship needs. However, we also gather that animals *did* provide and were created to provide a certain *level* of companionship to Adam (as the plants and sky and water could not). Aquinas’ error is in assuming that fellowship must always be experienced in a human-human relationship.

While the relationships between humans are indeed much more complex and fulfilling (as a human’s relationship with God is more complex and fulfilling than with another human), this does not therefore completely *negate any possibility or value* of a relationship with an animal friend.

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<sup>86</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

This mentality is captured in the words of Mary Midgley: “One sort of love does not need to block another, because love, like compassion, is not a rare fluid to be economized, but a capacity which grows by use.”<sup>89</sup> In fact, it is common that a person who gives of his time and energy to show compassion to animals will also be involved in human welfare. For example, William Wilberforce, who led the fight to outlaw bull baiting and founding member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), was also an evangelical Christian who may have been the single most influential force against slavery.

Other examples include Thomas Fowell Buxton (anti-slavery leader and member of RSPCA), Anthony Ashley Cooper (worked on behalf of the insane and factory children, and president of RSPCA), Frances Power Cobbe (anti-vivisectionist and worked among slum children), Samuel Gridley Howe (worked on behalf of the blind, prisoners, mentally retarded, against slavery, and director of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), Harriet Beecher Stowe (desensitized people to the suffering of slaves as well as animals), and more.<sup>90</sup>

In relation to Aquinas’ reservation, I have heard people express disgust or at least disagreement with the high status to which many have elevated their pets. By this I do not mean the common bonds expressed through the pet-owner relationship, but rather the extravagant luxuries that are often lavished upon pets in wealthy countries. To some, and rightfully so, it is a problem for people to spend thousands of dollars on cashmere doggie sweaters and trips to a doggie spa when so many people around the world are starving. However, the fact that this *does* occur in rare situations does not demand that the entire world should stop caring about pets, or animals in general, at all.

The same objection could very well be raised against other people. Do people not spend thousands of dollars lavishing luxury on their loved ones in the midst of world hunger? Do people not spend even a *bit* more than they *should* on themselves? Perhaps instead of necessarily singling out the pet relationships, humans should be convicted in *all* areas where they are irresponsibly spending money. Surely we waste more money on extravagance for *ourselves* than we waste on our pets.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 8-9.

Another, perhaps more common objection to caring for animals along this line of thinking is that giving time and energy to animals takes away from giving time and energy to humans. The minutes we spend caring for animals should be spent caring for humans, so it goes. Many who volunteer for animal care are criticized for not putting in time caring for humans instead. Rosemary Rodd says, “Presumably those making this criticism would not make similar remarks to people who were merely engaged in private entertainment: that is, going to the cinema.”<sup>91</sup>

Robert Wennberg refers to this as the logic of the line: “The picture that comes to mind here is that of an enormously long line of needy individuals, with humans at the front of the line where they belong and animals at the rear of the line where they belong. And our task...is to start at the front of the line and work systematically back toward the end of the line.”<sup>92</sup>

The common assumption is that, since there are so many human needs to be met, we will (or should) spend all of our time meeting them and we will never end up getting to the back of the line. Those who devote time caring for animals are charged with cutting backwards in line and tending to needs before their rightful time. In this way animal care is translated into human neglect and it is looked down upon.

“A similar logic has prompted some Christians to argue that *all* our efforts as a Christian community ought to be devoted to saving souls, for at the very front of this enormously long line that we are imagining are not only humans but unsaved humans.”<sup>93</sup> According to the logic of the line, even in dealing with other humans we *must* only meet needs in their order of perceived importance. We must *only* lead people to Christ and cannot waste our time tending to physical or even psychological needs. If the greatest need is salvation, then unfortunately those who are starving or depressed will simply have to wait so long at *their place in line* that they die waiting.

When we look at the life of Jesus, we do not see such a notion. He did not save His compassion for those with a “front of the line” pass. Jesus gave compassion freely to those who needed it *as He encountered them*. He did not say, “Sorry, your blindness will

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<sup>91</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 9.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

have to wait until every person is saved.” Indeed, in ministering to physical and psychological needs, many are then brought to salvation.

In the same way, in caring for the needs of animals, Christians are showing compassion from God, which often says more to unsaved people than words. In our obedience and care, we show to a lost world that our ethic and purpose come from a loving God. Unfortunately it is the very callousness of Christians toward the needs of animals that poses a major problem for unbelieving people. They wonder, “How can Christians treat animals with such neglect and carelessness if God is love?”

A holistic view of faith does not compartmentalize life into what is “spiritual” and what is “earthly.” To the Christian who sees the big picture, who lives in hopeful preparation of the coming kingdom *now*, there is no part of life that does not belong to God and there is no part that cannot be given to Him in worship. The compassionate care of animals is an act of worship to a God who cares for them; it is obedient anticipation of the renewal of all creation that is to come.

“As a steward, one is to be a caretaker of the natural order, a caretakership that includes the world of animals, who are to be treated in a way that respects the purpose for which they were created.”<sup>94</sup> Our proper stewardship is an act of worship to our Creator. In aligning our will with His will, in really wanting what He wants, we pursue that which glorifies Him and reflects His character. In this way we praise God by expressing what it really means to be made in His image.

#### ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF AN ANIMAL ETHIC

We cannot speak of the value of animals and our responsibility to care for them without mentioning the implications of such an ethic on our lifestyles. Unfortunately, the predominant Christian attitude toward animals has been dominionistic and careless; therefore, their treatment of animals in their everyday lives follows the attitude. The implications that follow will most likely present quite a change for most Christians. This,

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<sup>94</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 177.

however, is not because the value of animals is something new, but because their devaluing has become tradition.

Only an entirely separate paper could satisfactorily present the implications for a Christian ethic of animal stewardship. Just because they are briefly mentioned here does not mean that they are insignificant. The topics covered here will include three main areas of concern: eating (killing for food), hunting (killing for fun), and research (killing for science). I suggest reading some of the books cited in this section for a more comprehensive look at this topic.

### Killing for Food

In his book on Christian ethics entitled *Making Choices*, Peter Kreeft says in his second chapter, “Not all choices are moral choices. Most choices, in fact, are not moral choices. Shall I buy a Sony or a Zenith TV? Shall we eat chicken or hamburger tonight? ...I choose chicken, you choose hamburger, and neither of us is wrong.”<sup>95</sup>

Aside from denying that what we *buy* may have ethical implications—where it is made, who makes it, how the workers are treated, aside from the moral compromises often involved in even watching TV—Kreeft is denying that there is *any ethical problem whatsoever* with eating an animal for dinner. It is as void of ethical implications as setting the alarm for 6 or 6:15.<sup>96</sup>

Obviously, an ethic of animal care has been established in the preceding pages. God cares about them and sustains them as they glorify Him by being what He willed. Our value is not too far separated from this definition. Animals were forbidden as food in the beginning and, when all things are made new there will be no eating of flesh. As we have seen in Jewish tradition, meat eating is seen as a concession to human weakness and need rather than a command or desire of God for His creatures.

To kill an animal for food is not always wrong, based on the circumstances. For example, if one was starving to death on a deserted island or was dying/sick from severe malnutrition, these situations would be justifiable, but they would still be tragic. That we live in a fallen world where one being must die for the sake of another is a tragedy. In our wealthy culture especially, many more killings are justified than ethically *should be*

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<sup>95</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Making Choices*, p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

justified. In fact, most of the time no one sees the point of justifying it—that is how devalued animals are, that to kill them does not even warrant a passing justification.

Killing animals for food is ethically suspect aside from the fact that God values them. Wealthy nations exploit the poor for the grain to fatten animals—in fact, half of the grain grown in the world goes to feed animals raised for slaughter in wealthy nations. The world’s cattle consume enough food to feed 8.7 billion people, which is more than presently exist on earth.<sup>97</sup>

The fact that rich, over-fed Americans are hoarding grain from starving people *just* to fatten their over-bred cattle for slaughter should be enough to convince a Christian that eating meat is bad stewardship. “Meat is always an extravagance, a sign of surplus, the triumph of strenuous human effort rather than the product of the careful stewardship of resources.”<sup>98</sup>

Another reason not already explored in this paper that killing animals for food is poor stewardship is the issue of intensive farming. If an animal were killed in a humane way—as in the Jewish requirement of *kosher* meat which implies the animal was killed without needless suffering—it would be *less* of a tragedy. Most animals, however, are not killed humanely<sup>99</sup>; in fact, a glance at the modern slaughterhouse proves that “humane” is a word of the past.

Every day in the United States alone, 130,000 cattle, 7,000 calves, 360,000 pigs, and 24 million chickens are slaughtered.<sup>100</sup> These animals are subject to ridiculously small and dirty quarters, surgical manipulation, malnourishment, disease, separation from young, infections, cruel treatment from handlers, and the list goes on. Perhaps the most despicable aspect of factory farming is the way an animal dies. Though I could write ten more pages on this issue alone, I will limit my description to these two examples. The first in reference to the treatment of chickens:

[Chickens] are shackled by their legs to conveyor belts and hung with their heads down so the blood can be concentrated in their heads and easily drained from their bodies when

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<sup>97</sup> Stephen Webb, *Good Eating*, p. 23-24.

<sup>98</sup> Stephen Webb, *On God and Dogs*, p. 89.

<sup>99</sup> I believe that killing an animal humanely does not, in and of itself, justify the killing, for a life is still being taken, and usually without real need; painless death is still a tragedy of sin.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen Web, *Good Eating*, p. 24.

their throats are cut. Still not dead, they are carried through a ‘bleeding tunnel’ and then lowered into a scalding tank. Two out of three of them go into the tank alive. Those who argue that (as unfortunate as this painful treatment of chickens might be) it is necessary to provide the food that we need, are ignoring the facts. We over-produce chickens. We have to advertise in order to stimulate the overconsumption that keeps the chicken economy going.”<sup>101</sup>

The second is in reference to the treatment of cows:

It takes 25 minutes to turn a live steer into a steak at the modern slaughterhouse where Ramon Moreno works. For 20 years, his post was ‘second-legger,’ a job that entails cutting hocks off carcasses as they whirl past at a rate of 309 an hour. The cattle were supposed to be dead before they got to Moreno. But too often they weren’t. ‘They blink. They make noises,’ he said softly. ‘The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around.’ Still Moreno would cut. On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. ‘They die,’ said Moreno, ‘piece by piece.’<sup>102</sup>

There is absolutely nothing about the modern slaughterhouse that even *echoes* of godly stewardship. Most people, however, never think about where their food comes from. If most people had to slaughter the animals themselves or even *see* the process of slaughter, they would be horrified. Instead, we go to air-conditioned grocery stores in our cars, stroll the aisles, and pick up neatly and cleanly wrapped sections of meat (no blood, no fur, no eyeballs or brain tissue). Modern people are kept perpetually ignorant of slaughter by way of miles and cellophane wrap.

### Killing for Fun

While there are circumstances where, unfortunately, the killing of an animal for food is justified, the vast majority of those situations are purely hypothetical. For anyone, and for a Christian especially, the act of taking a life must be justified before God. While ethical justification pardons one from killing for food, there is no ethical justification for one who kills purely for fun.

We simply do not realize that “all God creates gives Him pleasure and that the destruction of what He loves brings Him pain, especially when that destruction is made into a sport. Why is it that when we destroy something humans have made we call it

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<sup>101</sup> Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshipping Nature*, p. 67.

<sup>102</sup> Joby Warrick, “Modern Meat: A Brutal Harvest,” *The Washington Post*, 4/10/01.

vandalism, but when we destroy something God has made we call it a sport?”<sup>103</sup> It may be a necessary pain to realize that we value the things *we* create—buildings, roads, art—more than we value what *God* created.

It is true that in some situations, where there is nothing else to eat, one may have to hunt. I am talking about the sheer entertainment of hunting, not the rare necessity of it. In fact, hunting as a sport is shunned in Judaism as a sin. “The Jewish tradition forbids cruelty to animals, a view summarized in the Hebrew phrase *tsa’ ar ba’ alei chayim*, the biblically based injunction not to cause ‘pain to any living creature.’ In accordance with this principle, Jews have consistently refused to participate in bloodsports, especially sport hunting.”<sup>104</sup> Of hunting, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, a seventeenth-century sage, writes:

In the Torah the sport of hunting is ascribed only to fierce characters like Nimrod and Esau, never to any of the patriarchs or their descendants... I cannot comprehend how a Jew could ever dream of killing animals merely for the pleasure of hunting... It is rather a lustful occupation... When the act of killing is prompted by sport, it is downright cruelty.<sup>105</sup>

While some could not think of a better pastime to promote male bonding, it is entirely an act of selfishness to hunt for pleasure. If one says he just “enjoys the outdoors,” there are ways to do that, better ways, than at the same time destroying God’s creatures. “[Hunting] is to fall back into that bondage, that predatory system of nature, from which the Christian hope has always been that not only man but the natural order itself is to be released and redeemed.”<sup>106</sup>

Indeed, though nature may currently be fallen, it is still God’s handiwork. It displays His power, beauty, and love. To make a sport of destroying that is worse than poor stewardship—it is to deny that it matters, and that it will one day be made new. To engage in destruction is to worsen the fallenness rather than live in hope. “Hunting represents...both man’s lack of sensitivity to his real condition and his unwillingness

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<sup>103</sup> Tony Campolo, *Twenty Hot Potatoes Christians are Afraid to Touch*, p. 136.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, p. 52.

<sup>105</sup> Ronald H. Isaacs, *Animals in Jewish Thought and Tradition*, p. 80.

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 178, quoting Edward Carpenter.

seriously to try to lift the whole order of creation into a higher estate...an estate more noble, more divine.”<sup>107</sup>

We have given up our role as servant-leaders in creation. All of creation, that includes animals, is groaning for redemption from this fallen state (Rom. 8:19-20), but instead we kill them for fun. We give it no more thought than we give to playing golf. All of this shows how fallen man is in his understanding. “We only have an infinitesimal understanding of the role that God has ordained for [animals] to have in our lives. To kill such precious gifts from God as a sport must be sin” (p. 139).<sup>108</sup>

#### Killing/Harming for Science

The number of animals, by species, used in laboratory research in 1988 was as follows: dogs (140,471), cats (42,271), primates (51,641), guinea pigs (431,457), hamsters (331,945), rabbits (459,254), and wild animals (178,249).<sup>109</sup> While some of these animals were used in experiments that one might argue are necessary for human benefit, many of them are for superficial reasons, such as testing new make-up formulas. Animals have been shot, gassed, irradiated, and subjected to all the horrors of modern warfare,<sup>110</sup> sometimes out of plain curiosity.

The practice of vivisection, which means “live cutting,” has been widely protested since its inception. Antivivisectionist societies work hard to stop such cruelties that are done in the name of science. Scientists, with the support of clergy, have “nailed poor animals up on boards by their forepaws to vivisect them and see the circulation of the blood which was a great subject of conversation.”<sup>111</sup> C.S. Lewis took a strong stance against vivisection. He says, “If we cut up beasts simply because they cannot prevent us and because we are backing our own side in the struggle for existence, it is only logical to cut up imbeciles, criminals, enemies or capitalists for the same reasons.”<sup>112</sup>

While some scientific research *may* be justified, it is rare. According to scientist Robert Sharp, “since animal research is unable to combat our major health problems and,

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<sup>107</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 178, quoting Edward Carpenter.

<sup>108</sup> Tony Campolo, *Twenty Hot Potatoes Christians are Afraid to Touch*, p. 139.

<sup>109</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 255.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>111</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 310, quoting Nicholas Fontaine in 1738.

<sup>112</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 163.

more dangerously, often diverts attention from the study of humans, the real choice is not between animals and people; rather it is between good science and bad science.”<sup>113</sup> Cases are rare when the overwhelming pain of an animal is justified for its overwhelming benefit to humans.

Is it even justifiable to subject an animal to suffering in order to make life better for people? Again, C.S. Lewis’ view:

It may be very natural to have this loyalty to our own species, but let us hear no more from the naturalists about the “sentimentality” of anti-vivisectionists. If loyalty to our own species, preference for man simply because we are men, is not a sentiment, then what is? ...But the most sinister thing about vivisection is this. If a mere sentiment justifies cruelty, why stop at a sentiment for the whole human race? There is also a sentiment for the white man against the black, for a *Herrenvolk* against the non-Aryans, for “civilized” or “progressive” peoples against “savages” or “backward” peoples. Finally, for our own country, party or class against others. Once the old Christian idea of a total difference in kind between man and beast has been abandoned, then no argument for experiments on animals can be found which is not also an argument for experiments on inferior men.<sup>114</sup>

It is clear that the wanton abuse of animals, especially by Christians, is not only unethical, not only bad stewardship, but may be—can we say it?—sin. And while it may be arguable that some of these acts constitute “sin,” it can be said that all of them betray the depravity in humankind. And there is far more to being a Christian than merely “not sinning”; we can live our lives not crossing the line, but inching our big toe up to it, and this is hardly what is meant by holiness. It seems to me that a foundational step toward holiness is found in the way we treat animals. Leo Tolstoy has said, “If man aspires towards a righteous life, his first act of abstinence is injury to animals.”<sup>115</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In comparison to all other worldviews which man has defined for himself, only the Christian worldview gives proper respect and value to all of creation. Rather than shy away from our unique God-given ethic, Christians should find purpose and value in it

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<sup>113</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 273.

<sup>114</sup> Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eds.), *Animals and Christianity*, p. 163.

<sup>115</sup> Erik Marcus, *Vegan: The New Ethics of Eating*, p. 87.

through obedience and worship. Stewardship is a distinctly Christian mandate and the only view that is holistic, compassionate, honoring, and hopeful.

In reading the Genesis account we find the place and value of all creation. It is our guide in a world so confused that humans are either gods, tyrants, or pests, where animals are either worshipped as divine or treated like mere machinery and ground up in factory farms. In living in harmony with God's will for His creation, we can demonstrate our distinct human purpose to a wandering world. In a culture that denies itself nothing and gorges itself on its impulses, an ethic of restraint and moral consideration gives freedom. There *is* freedom in boundaries and in faithfully abiding by them.

Stewardship "is a metaphor for the whole Christian life: as Christians we are to live our lives as stewards, taking the gifts and talents God has given us and using them faithfully and to their fullest in God's service."<sup>116</sup> The notion of stewardship provides God with the glory, man with the privilege of responsibility, and animals with compassionate care. It provides Christians with the opportunity to live out what the Image of God in us means. It provides hope and obedience as we anticipate the fulfillment of all things made new.

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<sup>116</sup> Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, p. 173.

*“But ask the animals, and they will teach you,  
or the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,  
or let the fish of the sea inform you.*

*Which of all these does not know  
that the hand of the LORD has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every creature  
and the breath of all mankind.”*

**Job 12:7-10**

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