

From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology: Where Catholic Moral Theology Needs to Go

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THIS ESSAY—AND INDEED THIS ISSUE—of the *Journal of Moral Theology*—arise from a session at the January 2013 meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE) in Chicago. That year, the President of the SCE was Miguel De La Torre and the theme of the conference was to be marginalized groups and topics. This theme for the SCE inspired Charlie Camosy, Celia Deane-Drummond and I to propose a session entitled, “Ascending to the Margins: Speciesism as a Concern in Catholic Thought.” We picked that title because as far as we were concerned, the issue of moral concern for non-human animals was not yet even of marginal significance for Catholic moral theology.¹

Our goal for the 2013 SCE session was twofold: first, to show that the charge of speciesism (adequately qualified) is a legitimate critique of much of the Catholic moral tradition, and second, to argue that an appropriate response to this moral problem requires a development of Catholic doctrine and moral practice, particularly in the Western industrial context where structures of sin visit unprecedented cruelty upon untold millions of domesticated animals. The goal of this article is the same. I wish to show the extent to which the Catholic moral tradition remains speciesist, to discuss the ambivalent character of current official Catholic teaching on the moral treatment of non-human animals, and to suggest a direction towards a more adequate Catholic theology and ethics with regard to non-human animals.

This article proceeds in four parts. First, in very broad strokes I survey the scene of Catholic moral theology in the English speaking world over the last generation with regard what place it assigns to concern for non-human animals and to what extent it has been speciesist.

¹ Considering the fact that the pre-Vatican II manuals of moral theology did consider non-human animals to be a topic of moral concern, it would be more precise to say “no longer of concern for moral theology.” I discuss this point at greater length in the first section of the article.

I will argue that over the last generation Catholic moral theology as a discipline failed to recognize concern for non-human animals as a topic of concern, and thus didn't even bother to assert (though latently held) a speciesist viewpoint.

Second, I present a typology of three defenses of speciesism by Catholic moralists: *zero-sum defenses*, which presume or argue that any heightened or intrinsic concern attributed to any non-human animals will necessarily or inevitably lead to a failure of adequate intrinsic concern for human beings; *rationalist defenses*, which argue that rationality (at least according to a specific way of defining it) is uniquely human and that only rational animals are worthy of intrinsic concern; and finally *abstract concern defenses*, which while notionally acknowledging that animals have intrinsic worth and deserve care and concern, in real terms fail to engage in a moral and theological discussion of the implications of this view, and thus fail to practically address the issues.

Third, I examine in detail the most significant magisterial writing on concern for non-human animals in the last generation, the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church's* four paragraphs on the subject. I say "most significant" because it is a highly authoritative and highly influential teaching of the Catholic Church, undoubtedly the most authoritative and substantial writing on non-human animals coming from the magisterium in the post-Vatican II period. It thus deserves careful scrutiny with regard to what guidance it can provide the field of Catholic moral theology. I conclude that the *Catechism* reflects the ambiguous legacy of Catholic moral theology on non-human animals, but includes resources to guide a development in Catholic doctrine and practice with regard to appropriate concern for and treatment of non-human animals.

Having reflected on the meaning of speciesism and providing an account of theological speciesism, having examined the types of defenses of speciesism, and having looked at the *Catechism's* discussion of non-human animals, in the fourth and final section I discuss some of the deconstructive and constructive work that needs to be done if a post-speciesist understanding of other animal species is to fully emerge in the Catholic moral and theological tradition. I conclude the section by proposing the discipline of theological ethology and explaining the various reasons why St. Albert the Great should be its patron saint.

Since there are many moral questions related to the treatment of non-human animals, I will focus on the question of cruelty to non-human animals. I do so because the Catholic tradition has been most clear about the wrong of animal cruelty. I also focus on cruelty to animals because it is one of the great moral evils in contemporary America, an egregious wrong being done to a variety of domesticated non-human animals on a mind-boggling scale in industrial farming in

America (and America is busily exporting that model around the world). We as leaders for the Catholic moral tradition have been conspicuously silent about it.

WHAT IS SPECIESISM?

As noted above, it is necessary to adequately qualify what is meant by “speciesism” and “theological speciesism.” When Richard Ryder coined the term in 1971, “speciesism” meant the undue moral privileging of one species over another.² While Ryder certainly had in mind the undue privileging of the human species over all other animal species, speciesism can also refer to the undue privileging of any species over any other. For example, speciesism can be the undue privileging of dogs and cats and eagles over pigs and cows and wolves, or for that matter the undue privileging of elephants over human poachers. Acceptance of the legitimacy and usefulness of “speciesism” in itself only requires one to agree that at least some humans at some times inordinately privilege one species over another, which is obviously true.

The major objections to the very notion of speciesism as a moral term seems to have arisen by the term’s association with Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975), which popularized speciesism as a moral critique. Singer’s main goal in using speciesism as a moral critique was to increase human moral concern for non-human animals. Unfortunately, Singer’s use of speciesism became almost inextricably linked to his variety of preference utilitarian moral theory, which refuses to attribute intrinsic goodness to any species (including human beings). On Singer’s account, any creature’s value depends on its ability to hold and exercise preferences (“interests” was Singer’s preferred term). From this view Singer drew the logical but odious conclusion that since certain groups of human beings cannot exercise preferences (e.g., fetuses, infants, and the severely mentally disabled), they are less deserving of moral protection than (e.g., adult) members a variety of non-human species which can exercise preferences. The ironic result of the close association between speciesism and Singer’s moral theory and moral views more generally was that speciesism came to be associated with reducing or eliminating the moral protection of human beings *qua* human beings, rather than heightening moral concern for non-human animals.

² See Richard Ryder, “Experiments on Animals,” in Stanley Godlovitch, Roslind Godlovitch, and John Harris, ed., *Animals, Men and Morals: An Enquiry into the Maltreatment of Non-Humans* (London: Gollancz, 1971), 81. Ryder drew an analogy between racism and the undue treatment of animals. His hope was that in the same way that racial discrimination had gone from being largely condoned to almost universally reviled as “racism,” so too would the mistreatment of non-humans come to be reviled as “speciesism.”

In order to be adequately appropriated as a legitimate critique by moral theologians, it will be helpful to disentangle speciesism from Singer's moral theory and views and to begin by recovering its original meaning and best general definition—that by “speciesism” is meant the undue moral privileging of one species over another. Since, however, this essay focuses on the moral treatment of non-human animals by humans, the working definition of speciesism in this article is *the undue (and typically exclusive) intrinsic concern for human animals in comparison to all other animals*.

As moral theologians, our first responsibility in writing about the moral treatment of non-human animals is to understand and communicate God's story about them. That story, as I understand it, is first and foremost a story of God's providential love and concern for each species of animal, including the individuals of each species. And an aspect of God's providential love are the ends of each animal, ends by which it flourishes as a member of its species. On this understanding, part of human stewardship of our fellow creatures consists in seeking to understand the flourishing of various species and the conditions under which various species flourish. And when possible, to facilitate or at least seek to avoid diminishing the capacity of God's creatures to flourish according to their kind.³

In contrast, speciesism in Christian perspective (i.e., theological speciesism) involves the *inordinate* favoring of any species over any other species. And what is the theological objection to theological speciesism? We might speak of two forms of theological speciesism and two concomitant theological failures. Inordinate over-concern for any species is, among other things, a form of idolatry. Inordinate under-concern (i.e., a lack of appropriate concern for any species) is a rejection of God's good creation and thus a different kind of failure in the Christian's worship and praise of God. Thus we arrive at a definition of theological speciesism, namely *a failure to see the variety of non-human animals the way God sees them; that is, failing to see them as creatures of God who manifest God's goodness and give praise to God in their flourishing as creatures of diverse natures*.

Having furnished working definitions of speciesism and theological speciesism, we can turn to typical responses to this critique in Catholic moral thought.

³ By referring to “kind” I do not mean to be taking any position on the controverted questions regarding the existence of “natural kinds” versus merely species (i.e., interbreeding populations), nor what might constitutes an appropriate definition of either. For a good introduction to the issues, see Stephen R. L. Clark, “Is humanity a natural kind?” in *The Political Animal: Biology, Ethics, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1999), 40-58.

SURVEYING THE SCENE: CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY ON SPECIESISM

The first thing to say about defenses of speciesism in Catholic moral theology is that they are hard to find. Looking at a range of “introduction to moral theology” textbooks (and I won’t mention all kinds of names, except for the otherwise excellent *Introducing Moral Theology*⁴ by my good friend Bill Mattison), there is no reference to concern for non-human animals as an ethical issue. Nor do animals constitute a topic of concern in a variety of collections of essays on the Catholic moral life (and again I won’t mention names, except for the other excellent collection *Gathered for the Journey*⁵ edited by my friends David McCarthy and Therese Lysaught). Intrinsic concern for animals as a moral topic also do not make it into the introductions to health care ethics and biomedicine in Catholic moral theology over thirty-plus years, not even making it into the recent introductory text by my good friend Nicanor Austriaco.⁶ Animals as a moral topic also do not make the cut in comprehensive magisterial documents of the Catholic Church on social ethics, such as *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (although it has a long section on the environment).⁷ Even my friend Tobias Winright’s wonderful recent edited volume *Green Discipleship* is silent on the status of non-human animals.⁸

The point of the previous paragraph is not to be “chummy” with, nor to offend and annoy a variety of my friends and colleagues in the guild of moral theology. I admire and respect all the books I have mentioned above. And I could have easily referenced a large variety of well-known or classic texts in the field by other colleagues and acquaintances in the field. For, to put it more bluntly, overviews of Catholic moral theology (either of the discipline as a whole or of its major sub-fields) in this last generation have ignored both the general issue of human responsibilities to non-human animals, and the specific issue of animal cruelty.⁹ This even seems true of Catholic texts giving a

⁴ William C. Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

⁵ David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught. *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁶Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco. *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

⁷ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

⁸ The exception is an essay in the inter-religious section of the book by a Jewish author. See Tobias Winright, ed., *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment* (Winona: Anselm Academic, 2011).

⁹That of course does not mean no Catholic moral theologians have ever addressed the topic. In the 1960s Justus George Lawler wrote a series of articles on non-human animals, including “Towards a Theology of Animals,” which appeared in *The Range*

comprehensive view of ecological or environmental ethics. As for the very few Catholic moral theologians who do write about animal ethics, it is its own little area, with hardly any integration into the larger field.¹⁰ I am very pleased to note that this very issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology*—both in terms of the *Journal's* willingness to devote this issue to this topic and the fact that a number of moral theologians are contributing to it—is a sign that things are changing.

In light of the fact that Catholic moral theology has not even seen the need to discuss or justify its ignoring the various moral issues to do with our relationships with other animals, whether it has to do with eating them and wearing their skins, or experimenting on them or keeping them in zoos or as pets, or even the egregious and cruel ways so many animals are treated in factory farming, one wonders if “speciesist” is the apt term for the current state of Catholic moral theology. When it comes to non-human animals and Catholic moral theology, moral nihilism and/or moral indifference seem to be the apt descriptors. Non-human animals are not even on the margins! Hence the title of the session we organized at the SCE in January of 2103.

If we moral theologians reflect on the fact of the moral vacuum in the field with regard to this topic, this is really astounding. For example, in 2011 in her remarks at the Catholic Mass at the SCE, Catholic moral theologian Christine Gudorf spoke of the number of her students who have become vegetarians for ethical reasons. Her experience is no doubt typical for those who teach undergraduates or seminarians. Despite our apparent silence, our students are discovering that the treatment of non-human animals is a serious moral issue. Popular books and films like *Fast Food Nation*, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and *Food Inc.*, just to name a few, parade the ethical issues before us. And yet we as a discipline have been almost entirely silent in this past generation. In fact, at a recent international gathering of Catholic moral theologians, the entrée of choice at the closing banquet was veal (of all meats!).¹¹ (Charles Camosy and I were awaiting a follow-up of *pâté de foie gras* served as an *amuse-bouche*.) How as a discipline have we managed to be blind to this? As such we fail our students. And this is particularly awful considering that this past generation has seen the

of Commitment: Essays of a Conservative Liberal (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1969). And over the last 20 years an occasional article or book has appeared that takes up aspects of the question—see the next footnote. My point is that the field has up until very recently not recognized the topic as part of its overall field of concern.

¹⁰ Besides the contributors to this volume, Catholic moral theologians who have occasionally presented or published in the area include William French, James Gaffney, Elizabeth Groppe, Beth Haile, Deborah Jones, Fergus Kerr, Jame Schaefer, Vincent Twomey, and Donna Yarri.

¹¹ This took place at the final banquet of the international meeting of *Catholic Moral Theologians in the World Church* in Trento, Italy in 2010.

explosion of factory farming in the West, with cruel treatment of animals on a scale and to a degree unlike ever before seen in our world.

And the great irony in all this is that for all their faults (and for all the ways in which some contemporary Catholic moral theologians denigrate them), the pre-Vatican II moral manuals typically included a section on human responsibilities to non-human animals. Although the manuals indicated that cruelty to non-human animals could be wrong for instrumental reasons (i.e., we damage our character or are more likely to be cruel to other humans if we are cruel to animals), they also typically indicate that non-human animals are God's creatures with their own dignity, and cruelty to them is an offence against God's providential concern for all of God's creatures. For example, in his *Introduction to Moral Theology*, Karl Hörmann's discussion of non-human animals begins with an extended meditation on the intrinsic goodness of non-human animals. He begins by noting that "[a]ll creation is destined by a loving God for transformation.... The more powerfully the sonship of God is realized, so much the more certain is the guarantee that all creation will find its meaning in God's glory and in the transfiguration which comes from this."¹² Furthermore, when Hörmann discusses the moral treatment of animals, he notes that cruelty to animals can constitute grave sin, because it "offends against the grave obligation of love for God's creatures," and also "ruins the character of the person who indulges in it."¹³ So this is one question where post-Vatican II Catholic moralists need to catch up to their pre-Vatican II predecessors.¹⁴

A TYPOLOGY OF DEFENSES OF SPECIESISM

While moral theologians have typically not taken up a defense of speciesism, Catholic philosophers have,¹⁵ and their defenses of speciesism fall into three main categories: a) there are *zero-sum defenders*, that begin with the assumption that greater concern for animals

¹² Karl Hörmann, *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961), 273.

¹³ Hörmann, *Introduction*, 275.

¹⁴ It is also worth noting that in Hörmann's preface, he explains that as a "handbook" in moral theology "the presentation had to be concise... and some of the less important problems had to be omitted altogether" (v). It is thus all the more notable that Hörmann includes a four page section on non-humans in his 276 page introductory text.

¹⁵ I do not mean to infer that *many* Catholic philosophers took up a response. For example, although ethical questions about animals were widely in the news by the mid-1970s, both because of the chimpanzee language experiments of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and also because of Singer and other philosophical animal advocates, in 1985 Catholic philosopher R.J. McLaughlin could write, "Accelerated research into animal behavior has brought us to see many 'brute' animals, as much less brutish than we previous thought, and much more like us. Our fondness for animals has grown proportionately, as has the suspicion that the radically different way in which we treat man and beast may not be justified.... I invite you to join me in pressing with St.

means less concern for human beings; b) there are the *rationalist defenders*, which focus on (typically a Thomist) account of rationality (or since the 1960s, often of linguistic ability in relation to rationality) to draw a relatively sharp line between human and non-human animals; c) there are *abstract concern defenders*, that acknowledge the recent ethological advances in understanding a variety of species, and for that or other reasons acknowledge we should have significant concern for the welfare of non-human animals. However, these “abstract concern defenders” fail to engage in the kind of casuistry necessary to provide and implement the practical guidance necessary to actually impact our lives with regard to the treatment of non-human animals.

Zero-sum defenses

Zero-sum defenses are typically reactionary, preoccupied with countering viewpoints of philosophers who argue for a version of animal rights. As one would expect, many Catholic philosophers over the years have been eager to respond to Peter Singer’s views on the moral treatment of non-human animals, especially in relation to his view on the moral treatment of some human animals! Furthermore, as is widely known, since some of the more extreme animal rights viewpoints give equal or greater moral value to some other mammals than to some human beings (e.g., human infants, very young children, or human beings who have severe mental impairments), it is not surprising that these arguments elicited strong reactions. Thus it is entirely predictable that a typical response to Singer’s arguments would be to argue for inherent and universal human dignity, and to make arguments as to why all human beings (and typically only human beings) have this dignity. If Singer was going to provoke, and in some instances give more value to a non-human animal life than to a human life, the zero-sum defenders could be expected to respond in kind, arguing not only that all human beings are not only worth more than any non-human animals, but that they are worth incomparably more. This is the heart of the zero-sum defense. Any concern for animals seems to lessen or relativize concern for humans.

The fundamental problem with the zero-sum response is that it missed the overarching point of philosophers like Singer, Regan, et al., who are ultimately and primarily arguing for concern for non-human animals. We can certainly commend those zero-sum defenders for advocating universal human dignity. But in responding as they did the zero-sum defenders typically bypass the question of appropriate

Thomas whether there is anything about man, in contrast to other animals especially, that justifies the favored treatment that we accord him.... *People sympathetic to Thomas’s way of doing philosophy have been curiously silent on this question* (italics added),” R.J. McLaughlin, “Men, Animals and Personhood,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* Vol. 59 (1985), 166-7.

concern for non-human animals in order to get right to the conclusion that advocating for human dignity requires them to disparage all non-human animals. Ironically, I suspect many of the zero-sum defenders do not actually believe this in practice. Likely many of them have pets whom they love, and whom they think deserve appropriate treatment. And most likely think that zoo animals ought to be treated well, and cruelty to non-human animals should be avoided when possible, and wild animals should receive some habitat protection and so on.

The irony is that these otherwise sensible Catholic philosophers allowed Singer to set the terms of the question, and were thus lured into the *reductio ad absurdum* of the radicalized zero-sum viewpoint. Latent (if not baldly stated) by the zero-sum speciesists is a doctrine of “human exceptionalism.” And so it turns out that the zero-sum defenders simply have no interest in giving serious thought to understanding (nor morally evaluating) the significance of the natures or rational capabilities of any particular species of non-human animal.¹⁶

What’s problematic about this human exceptionalism? Isn’t this typical of the Catholic tradition to think of only human beings as persons and thus worthy of moral concern and protection? Well, no, it isn’t “the” Catholic tradition, although dominant strands of it, especially under the influence of the Cartesian view of animals, have come very close to that.

But beyond that, it is also the case that for decades Catholic philosophers have been willing to consider attributing “personhood” and moral concern to non-human beings. But this openness to attributing personhood to non-humans has centered on discussions of the possibility of extending personhood and attendant rights and protections to Martians or other intelligent extra-terrestrials (or even androids) if one should arrive on earth or otherwise make contact with us earthlings.¹⁷

¹⁶ Many, many examples could be given. John Finnis dismisses “animal rights” in one paragraph in *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 194-5. He says nothing about what would be appropriate concern for non-human animals, his only apparent interest being to refute Singer. A more recent and telling example is Christopher Kaczor’s “Notes on Philosophy and Theology,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, Vol. 10, no. 4 (Winter 2010), 799-805. Kaczor’s article begins by noting it is about animal rights, which involves questions like “Is eating meat morally permissible? Can hunting be justified? Do sentient animals deserve greater consideration than non-sentient human beings?”(799). But then Kaczor goes on to indicate he will in fact only discuss whether “species membership is relevant to ethical judgment” (799). Like many other Catholic philosophers, Kaczor is lured into Peter Singer’s intellectual framework, spending the beginning of his article attempting to refute Singer, and then allowing his whole article to become an extended polemic against Singer and his intellectual allies in defending human dignity. In this article ostensibly about non-human animals, Kaczor manages to say not a single word about how it is appropriate or inappropriate to treat non-human animals, much less even begin to address his own opening questions about meat eating or hunting.

¹⁷ See, for example, Philip Devine, *The Ethics of Homicide* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1978), 53ff. Discussions about Martians/aliens as “persons” have been a stock

That being the case, it seems that the zero-sum defenders should in principle be open to the fact that there may be other intelligent and moral “alien” species, species that could possibly be living unrecognized in our homes, or in our zoos, or in our laboratories, or in our abattoirs, or in the wild. And yet, as noted above, the zero-sum defenders have not been interested in exploring whether there might be one or more other earthly species of being more intelligent and/or more moral than we have heretofore realized.

Rationalist defenses

The second type of speciesist among Catholic intellectuals provides rationalist defenses, and they vary tremendously. The clumsiest ones simply assert a sharp rational/irrational distinction, uncritically taking over terminology derived from centuries past. Their crude generalizations and stereotypes about non-human animals are so foreign to the reality of the diversity of God’s creatures, it leads one to wonder if some of them have ever actually met a live animal!

However, the typical rationalist defense of speciesism among Catholic moralists follows an authentic strand of Thomistic thought. Aquinas clearly believed that humans were the only rational animals, and combined with his view of the hierarchical order of nature, claimed that non-human animals were for the use of human beings.¹⁸

example for philosophers discussing the nature and meaning of personhood, particularly in relation to the philosophical debates over abortion since the early 1970s. For a rather different book on theology and “E.T.’s,” see Thomas O’Meara, O.P., *Vast Universe: Extraterrestrials and Christian Revelation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012).

¹⁸ The first of these two viewpoints, that humans are the only rational animals, is almost universally held by Thomists, and many offer sophisticated versions of it. A classic Thomist argument for this is Mortimer Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967). An accessible yet sophisticated exponent of this viewpoint is Herbert McCabe, who expounds versions of it in “Sense and Sensibility” in *God Still Matters* (New York: Continuum, 2002), in “Organism, Language, and Grace” and “Animals and Us” in *The Good Life: Ethics and the Pursuit of Happiness* (London: Continuum, 2005) and in “Sensations, Language, and Individuals” in *On Aquinas* (London: Burns & Oates, 2008).

The second of these viewpoints, that because non-human animals are irrational they are thus “lesser” beings and thus for the use of human beings, is often stated but rarely argued. For example Peter Drum, after discussing at length the distinction between rational humans and all other irrational animals, quotes Aquinas that “‘less perfect things are ordered to the more perfect’ (Aquinas, ST, II-II, 64.2), so there is nothing wrong with persons using animals to satisfy personal needs and to achieve personal benefits.” See Peter Drum, “Aquinas and the Moral Status of Animals,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, no. 4 (1992), 487. Having quoted Aquinas, Drum seems satisfied merely to say “this seems right as the well-being of fully-fledged moral patients is clearly more important than the well-being of those that are not” (487). That may all be true, but from that does not follow that humans can use animals for almost whatever purposes they desire. The point being highlighted

This is not the whole story of Aquinas's views on non-human animals and their capacities,¹⁹ but it is widespread in the tradition and suffices for many rationalist defenders of speciesism in the Catholic tradition.

It should also be noted that being a defender of the Thomistic view that "rationality" in the Thomistic sense is unique to human beings does not in itself make one a speciesist. Countless religious and secular advocates of concern for non-human animals hold this view or a close variant of it.²⁰ What typically makes a rationalist defender of speciesism a speciesist is their holding a related Thomistic viewpoint, namely that sub-rational creatures have no (or inconsequential) intrinsic goodness and may be used willy-nilly by human beings for almost any purpose.²¹ Having said that, current research in ethology on the social skills, and on the emotional, intellectual, and/or even moral capacities of a variety of animals (e.g., primates, canids, cetaceans, corvids, and cephalopods) makes the continued use of traditional generalizations about the "rationality" or lack thereof in all "non-human animals" increasingly intellectually irresponsible.

However, recent developments in Thomistic scholarship are opening new possibilities for a better understanding of non-human animals. First, the recent attention to the emotions and sense appetites in Thomas Aquinas is very important, since that is a focus on those central characteristics of human beings that, as Aquinas notes, humans share with higher non-human animals. Although Thomas says that human beings transform their passions in relation to their rational will, Thomas also acknowledges that the "estimative sense" in non-human animals constitutes a kind of quasi-rationality. However, Thomists

here is that Drum (like most other rational defense speciesists) apparently sees no need to argue or justify this view.

¹⁹ I have elaborated on Aquinas's views on animals and human animality in "Toward a Thomistic Theology of Animality" in *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (London: SCM Press, 2009), 21-40. A balanced overview treatment of Aquinas's views on animals can be found in chapter 1 of Ryan Patrick McLoughlin, *Christian Theology and the Status of Animals: The Dominant Tradition and Its Alternatives* (London: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2014).

²⁰ Including, it would seem, Frans De Waal. When discussing his three-level account of morality, De Waal gets to the third level and says, "Perhaps this reflects just our current state of knowledge, but I know of no parallels in animals for moral reasoning.... The desire for an internally consistent moral framework is uniquely human. We are the only ones to worry about why we think what we think.... I consider this level of morality, with its desire for consistency and 'disinterestedness', and its careful weighing of what one did against what one could or should have done, uniquely human. Even though it never fully transcends primate social motives, our internal dialogue nevertheless lifts moral behavior to a level of abstraction and self-reflections unheard of before our species entered the evolutionary scene." Frans De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 174-5.

²¹ See the second viewpoint discussed in footnote 18 above.

have not done the work to go beyond Thomas and investigate with empirical evidence how the estimative sense coordinates the senses in particular higher non-human animals.

Thus, the most promising work is being done by those who seek to bring together contemporary work in ethology with philosophical reflection on the sense appetites to potentially better understand the varieties of intelligence in a variety of non-human animal species. We see a brief example of this in Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals*. However, although MacIntyre discusses dolphins for a number of chapters in that book, MacIntyre in fact appears uninterested in dolphins for their own sake (at least in that book), merely using his reflections on dolphins to instruct his readers about the significance of a particular aspect (that is, the bodily aspect) of human life.²² What we need, and what the final section of this article calls for, are *theological ethologists*, that is, moral theologians who develop a deep understanding of a particular (e.g., dolphin or chimpanzee) species and integrate that with their theological understanding of God's intrinsic concern for that particular (e.g., dolphin or chimpanzee) species. This could and would take moral theologians beyond the facile generalized arguments about sentience and rationality and actually begin to understand the particular good of real dolphins and real chimpanzees, and make concrete proposals about promoting the good (or at least avoiding continued egregious harm) towards these species in relation to their specific good. At the very least moral theologians and philosophers would then be able to speak intelligently about the intellectual and practical capacities of the particular species, and perhaps develop an analogous natural law understanding of the flourishing that should properly be ascribed to these dolphins and/or chimpanzees. What we need are modern day St. Alberts, who like Albert in his thirteenth century *On Animals*, attempt to bring together the best of currently existing ethology and theology to understand the natures and destinies of particular non-human species.

Abstract concern defenses

Finally, there are the *abstract concern* defenders of speciesism.²³

²² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (London: Open Court Press, 1999). MacIntyre discusses dolphins (and other higher animals including primates) in chapters 2-6, but then at the beginning of chapter 7 suddenly makes a transition to discussing the development of human children. With the exception of occasionally recapitulating his overall argument, MacIntyre does not return to discussing non-human animals for the rest of the book.

²³ A most interesting analysis of arguments around the treatment of non-human animals is the philosopher Philip Devine's 1978 article "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism," *Philosophy* Vol. 53 (1978), 481-505. This highly clever article takes up and dispatches an extraordinarily large number of relevant arguments in a highly compressed manner. However, while Devine finally concludes that the treatment of non-

The philosophers and theologians in this category typically acknowledge the intrinsic goodness of non-human animals, that we have moral responsibilities in our treatment of them, and that we should be concerned for their welfare. As such these thinkers are not explicit but implicit speciesists. Why are they implicit speciesists? Because while they acknowledge the grave evils that humans can and do perpetuate with regard to non-human animals, they fail (either completely or adequately) to engage in the casuistry necessary to show that their concern is real and not merely notional. For the evils done by humans to non-human animals—most egregiously (but not exclusively) in factory farming—require moral philosophers and theologians to engage in the type of casuistry that can suggest the kinds of changes necessary to overcome or at least relieve aspects of these evils.

Interestingly, of the few Catholic moralists over the last generation who acknowledge the intrinsic goodness of non-human animals as creatures of God, and thus acknowledge that we have some responsibilities to them, some seem to do so in continuity with and almost out of deference to the older tradition of the manuals and their inclusion of the treatment of non-human animals as a moral question. So for example, Germain Grisez acknowledges that we should not be cruel to animals without good reason, but does not spell out what constitutes “good reason.” Furthermore, the limited amount of casuistry he does never requires him to take a particular ethical stand regarding a minimum of respectful treatment of any non-human animal. Since he never takes up paradigmatic cases of animal cruelty like factory farming as is overwhelming practiced in the West and now also in the second and third world, he is never required to establish any norm resolutely advocating for basic concern for the welfare of non-human animals. Having said that, the fact that Grisez even includes the treatment of non-human animals as a moral question in his work and engages in some casuistry what is involved is a credit to him and serves as at least as a starting point for more developed and adequate treatments of the subject.

From this very brief typology, we can conclude that as of right now, the Catholic moral tradition has almost nothing to contribute constructively to reflecting on the moral status of particular species of non-human animals, especially in light of modern ethology. This is a very unfortunate state of affairs that we can hope will change in the

human animals is a morally serious question, he proposes no solutions or guidance regarding the societal issues.

Germain Grisez takes up the intrinsic significance of non-human animals and their moral treatment in a few places, albeit briefly and without enthusiasm. See Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus Vol. 2: Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 782-9. Grisez also takes up questions related to the moral treatment of animals in Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus Vol. 3: Difficult Moral Questions* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), 419-25.

coming years. For I believe it is essential that as our contemporary society evolves in light of new knowledge about the emotional, moral, and intellectual capacities of cetaceans, great apes, elephants, pigs and various other species, that Catholic moral theology be able to contextualize this new knowledge for contemporary society in a way consonant with an authentic Catholic vision of the world.

**NON-HUMAN ANIMALS
IN THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

In the midst of the deafening silence of post-Vatican II Catholic moral theology on animals, there is one very significant, albeit puzzling Catholic teaching on non-human animals. Sections 2415-2418 of the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* read as follows:

Respect for the integrity of creation

- 2415 The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. (Cf. Gen 128-31) Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation. (Cf. CA 37-38)
- 2416 Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. (Mt 6:26; Dan 3:79-81) Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.
- 2417 God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. (Cf. Gen 2:19-20; 9:1-4) Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice, if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.
- 2418 It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.

The first thing to note is that the *Catechism* treats moral questions involving non-human animals under the heading "Respect for the integrity of creation," which is part of a larger section on respecting the property of others (which is in turn part of a discussion of the seventh command against stealing). This is the first sign that we can expect the

Catechism's moral analysis of the treatment of non-human animals to follow that of the moral manuals, which also tended to locate discussions of non-human animals under the seventh commandment against stealing.

My summary evaluation of the *Catechism* is that it does not have one clearly consistent view on the moral treatment of non-human animals. Rather, it seems to have a variety of views that are at best in tension with one another, and perhaps even incompatible with each other. While some aspects of the teaching are speciesist, other aspects provide a wonderful starting point for Catholic moral and theological reflection on non-human animals. And still other aspects of it are mystifying, leaving the reader with little guidance on applying the teaching. Let us take each in turn.

Since the *Catechism's* discussion of animals appears in the section on the commandment not to steal and to respect the property of other human beings, it would seem to have speciesist assumptions, namely that non-human animals are the property of humans. And this reading is reinforced by lines like "Animals... are by nature destined for the common good of... humanity" (no. 2415).

On the other hand, paragraph 2416 emphasizes a seemingly different message, emphasizing God's love and concern for his creatures (i.e., they belong fundamentally to God, not to humans). It notes that non-human animals bless God by the intrinsic goodness of their existence and flourishing. As noted above, here the *Catechism* provides a solid basis for a truly theocentric perspective on non-human animals. And if one focuses on paragraph 2416, one can easily interpret the context of this section rather differently. In other words, the context for the discussion of non-human animals is not what belongs to humans, but rather what belongs to God. Furthermore, paragraph 2416 assigns moral duties to humans with regard to the care of other animals and also reminds us of the saints whose love of non-human animals is to be imitated.

Finally, section 2418 seems to take a still different approach, apparently giving only instrumental reasons for not being cruel to animals ("contrary to human dignity"). But what of the God-given intrinsic goodness of these creatures? Or of humans as stewards who should reflect God's providential care of other animals? The different paragraphs seem so different in substance and tone that one can't help but speculate if, like the book of Genesis, this small section of the catechism had multiple authors (or editors), whose differing views have been left standing side by side.

Paragraph 2418 also gives mystifying moral guidance. With regard to its "no needless suffering" injunction, what constitutes "needlessly" causing an animal to suffer or die? If one reads only no. 2415 before reading that, almost any reason would seem to do, since they are destined for the good of humans. But if one only reads no. 2416 before

reading it, it would seem one would need a very strong reason for causing an animal to suffer or die. One fears that as stated these paragraphs seem more likely to reinforce a person's existing views about harming animals (almost whatever they are) than lead to a new one.

With regard to the "give priority to human misery" injunction, which is presumably referring to pets (though one could interpret it as applying to zoos? or wildlife refuges? or efforts to reintroduce species to where they are endangered or extinct?), its language is puzzlingly strong. Is it a rhetorical way of saying "don't treat your pets luxuriously"? For those more ascetically inclined—or for those who do not like other animals—it could plausibly be interpreted as discouraging almost any spending of money on non-human animals. But that interpretation would seem to easily lead to the utilitarian *reductio ad absurdum* that one should not spend money on anything less urgent than the relief of human misery. So it remains at least somewhat obscure as a piece of moral guidance.

The final unclear directive is that while it is fine to love animals, do not give them affection due only to (human) persons. For this begs the question as to what affection is due only to human persons. Again, one puzzles to conjure up the kind of scenario envisioned by the authors of the *Catechism*. Is this a reproach to those poor souls who prefer the exclusive company of their companion animals to any interaction with other human beings? Or exclusively devote their lives to their companion animals? Again, while the exhortation initially sounds compelling, one searches for an appropriate application.

So what do we conclude about this section of the *Catechism*? Part of me wants to be cheeky and say that this is what we should expect when Catholic moral theology has had practically nothing to say on a moral topic in the thirty years prior to the *Catechism*! And in fact, when read along aside a variety of the pre-Vatican II moral manuals, much of what the *Catechism* says is simply repeating that teaching. But the *Catechism*, while maintaining much of that older teaching (particularly its concern about those who lavish too much attention on non-human animals), also adds a rather different emphasis, in terms of the legitimacy of love for animals, in emphasizing God's providential concern for other species, and in highlighting the lives of the saints who have shown love and compassion for non-human animals.

I have argued elsewhere²⁴ that at the time of Vatican II Catholic moral theology more generally was in what MacIntyre calls an epistemological crisis.²⁵ I believe this small section of the *Catechism* gives

²⁴ See John Berkman, "How Important is the Doctrine of Double Effect? Contextualizing the Controversy," *Christian Bioethics* Vol. 3, no. 2 (1997), especially 92-5.

²⁵ According to MacIntyre, the signs that a mode of enquiry (such as the Catholic moral tradition's thought on non-human animals) is in epistemological crisis are when "by its own standard of progress it ceases to make progress. Its hitherto trusted methods of enquiry have become sterile. Conflicts over rival answers to key questions can

us good reason to believe that there is an epistemological crisis in the tradition's reflection on this topic. The older manualist approach to thinking about non-human animals is no longer sufficient, and in itself does not have the resources for a renewed theological and moral approach to the subject. And yet, the new elements of Catholic teaching as embodied in the *Catechism* have not yet been sufficiently developed to signal a clear way forward for the Catholic moral tradition's thought on non-human animals. Thus, the framework for the moral treatment of non-human animals in the *Catechism* shows cracks and fissures. The question for us at present is thus: What is needed from moral theology so that in a future generation and with a future *Catechism*, something more intellectually coherent and morally compelling could be offered?

FROM THEOLOGICAL SPECIESISM TO THEOLOGICAL ETHOLOGY

What is the kind of work that needs to be done to avoid theological speciesism, that is, to learn to see all the other animals God has placed with humans on earth as God sees them, and to learn how to live as harmoniously as possible with them? The following would seem to be at least some of the tasks that require further work and reflection by Catholic moral theologians.

Humans as animals

First, there is much work to be done by moral theologians to overcome the problematic aspects of the crude binary between humans and all other animals. Of course, there are perfectly legitimate biological reasons (e.g., mammalian species tend to be primarily interested in their own), legal reasons (e.g., we wish to maintain distinct levels of legal protection to all human beings) and theological reasons (e.g., God assigns to humans a variety of unique tasks) to maintain interest in and language about that which is distinctively human. That is not under question. What is problematic is what seems to be a distinctively modern binary between humans and "animals" as the great divide in terms of moral concern, as if humans are not in fact animals and "animals" refers to all other sentient creatures which are not human beings. In a public lecture David Clough noted that in the King James Bible there is no term for "animal" as it is now commonly used, that is, a term referring to all other sentient creatures. The ancients and

no longer be settled rationally. Moreover, it may indeed happen that the use of the methods of enquiry and of the forms of argument, by means of which rational progress had been achieved so far, begins to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognized incoherences, and new problems for the solution of which there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 361-2.

medievals all recognized that we humans are also animals. For example, St. Albert and St. Thomas refer to human beings as animals on dozens of occasions. Whereas in former ages “acting like a beast” was to act according to one’s lower nature, in modern parlance it more often than not means that is one is not acting like a human being at all. Since the view that humans are not animals is now so well-entrenched in our thought patterns and our language, a major first step is a deconstructive project of unmasking the modern facade that humans are not also animals.

Rejecting cognitive parsimony

Jane Goodall and Frans De Waal have taught us that chimpanzees live in close knit societies, and yet there are bouts of discord among them. De Waal recounts an anecdote about the time he finally noticed a striking long-term pattern among chimpanzees in which former opponents in a squabble were “attracted to each other like magnets.”²⁶ De Waal goes on to discuss the patterns of embracing, kissing, and grooming that so often occurred with former opponents in a fight, sometimes immediately after the fight, but at other times hours later. Furthermore, conflicts between two individual chimpanzees impacted the whole group, with tension and hesitancy in the group until the former combatants made affectionate overtures to one another. De Waal says:

The obvious word to describe this phenomenon is reconciliation, but I have heard people object to it on the grounds that by choosing such terms chimpanzees are unnecessarily humanized. Why not call it something neutral like “first post-conflict contact,” because after all that is what it is? Out of the same desire for objectivity, kissing could be called “mouth-mouth contact,” embrace “arms-around-shoulder,” face “snout,” and hand “front paw.” I am inclined to take the motives put forward in favor of dehumanized terminology with a pinch of salt. Is it not an attempt to veil in words the mirror that chimpanzees hold up to us? Might we not be sticking out heads in the sand to preserve our need for dignity?²⁷

This brings us to the point that all observers of chimpanzees bring their pre-conceptions to their observations. Those more willing to see continuity and analogies between human and chimpanzee behavior tend to appeal to the principle of evolutionary parsimony. De Waal explains that evolutionary parsimony is the principle that if closely related species act similarly, then we should presume that the underlying sensory, emotional, and cognitive processes that lead to those actions are also

²⁶ Frans De Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex Among Apes, 25th Anniversary Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 27.

²⁷ De Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics*, 28.

similar.²⁸ On the other hand, those who tend to resist seeing continuity between chimpanzee and human behavior also appeal to a principle of parsimony, sometimes called cognitive parsimony, namely that one should not attribute cognitive processes to another creature without overwhelming evidence, presumably because for so long the reigning scientific doctrine has been that other animals do not think.

But what, one may ask, is problematic about holding to the principle of cognitive parsimony? Is it not the right approach to doubt that animals can think unless we can clearly infer it from their behavior? MacIntyre argues that this is exactly the wrong approach to take if one wants to understand the nature and capacities of chimpanzees or other higher animals. (MacIntyre focuses on dolphins and other cetaceans.) Contrary to those philosophers deeply troubled by the problem of “other minds” (i.e., how can one *know* if any other human beings actually have minds) and those who apply the “principle of parsimony” to what otherwise appears to be signs of theoretical or practical intelligence in chimpanzees and/or other higher animals, MacIntyre argues that human beings come to essential understandings of themselves and other human and non-human animals *only* through pre-reflective engagement with and experience of them. According to MacIntyre, *pre-reflective* interpretive experience is absolutely crucial in coming to understand the practical reasoning of both human children and other intelligent animals.²⁹ Without such interpretative experience, MacIntyre says, “We would be unable to ascribe thoughts and feelings to others, whether human infants or dogs or whatever.”³⁰

In other words, we can only come to understand the capacities of chimpanzees by extensive interaction with them and wise interpretation of what we experience with them, that is, the kind of interaction to which ethologists like Jane Goodall and Frans De Waal and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh have devoted much of their lives. I say “ethologists like Jane Goodall and Frans De Waal and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh” because we should be careful not to give equal weight to the experience of some who extensively interact with chimpanzees—that is, those who for one reason or another are captured by a pre-existing account of what chimpanzees “should” or “should not” be able to do.³¹

²⁸ De Waal, *Primates and Philosophers*, 61-2.

²⁹ MacIntyre also refers to this “pre-reflective experience” as “non-inferential knowledge,” by which he means knowledge that arises from entering into a relationship of responsive activity with the other human or chimpanzee (or, for example, elephant or dolphin).

³⁰ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 24. For an excellent effort by a philosopher to bring pre-reflective experience to bear on his understanding of his dog, see Raimond Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog* (New York: Random House, 2005)

³¹ It is not just philosophers who are likely to be captured by modern epistemological skepticism about chimpanzees (or a huge range of other species) having feelings

Evolution and continuity in ethics

A number of moral theologians (e.g., Celia Deane-Drummond, John Mahoney, and Stephen Pope) have already done important work on the significance of evolutionary theory for understanding proto-moral and moral behavior in theological perspective. To do that they engage the work of anthropologists, paleontologists and ethologists to understand the origins of morality not only in our hominid and hominoid precursors, but also for signs of proto-morality and/or morality in various other primates.

In so doing, these moral theologians take one side in an age-old division in thinking about ethics. While an oversimplification, one can divide philosophical and theological thinking about the origins of morality into two camps. There is the continuity camp, which understands that at least some elements of human morality are on a continuum with and/or develop out of characteristics that humans share with our hominid precursors and/or the precursors of other primates. In this camp one will find ancients and medievals like Aristotle and Aquinas, enlightenment empiricists like David Hume, and Darwinians like Edward Westermarck. On the other hand, there are those who believe that morality is something in humans that reflects a fundamental disjunction from all other creatures. In this camp one will find ancients like the Gnostics, medieval and reformation divine command theorists, rationalists like Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, and Darwinians like Thomas Huxley.

It is important to emphasize that the continuity viewpoint by no means arises with evolutionary theory. For example, St. Albert has an extended discussion of the bodily form of the human animal and its perfection and clearly relates the human's rational ability to its bodily form. In Albert's discussion of various other animals, he proceeds with the view that the degree of bodily likeness to humans is associated with the degree of mental likeness to humans. Thus, in his discussion of pygmies and monkeys, he classifies them in such a way that the descending scale of physical likeness to humans corresponds with their mental likeness.³²

and/or thoughts. As I noted in my discussion of zero-sum speciesists, some see moral concern as a zero-sum game, that if it is to be extended to chimpanzees it must detract from what is accorded human beings. (Celia Deane-Drummond also takes up this problematic in her essay in this issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology*.) As I note below in discussing anthropocentric ethologists, those who instrumentalize other species by experimenting on them or otherwise exploiting them can be expected to be tempted to skepticism about the degree of their thoughts and feelings. A recent narrative of this problem in the early chimpanzee language experiments can be found in Benjamin Hale, "The Last Distinction? Talking to the Animals," *Harper's Magazine* (August 2012), 65-70.

³² As William Wallace notes, books 21 and 22 of *On Animals* are the heart of Albert's integrative project, where Albert is discussing the hierarchy of perfections among the bodies (and thus minds) of various animals (including humans). See Albertus Magnus,

Now, while those in the “continuity” camp such as Aristotle, Albert, and Aquinas may not have been willing to attribute morality to simians, it would be because while they thought simians shared a variety of emotional and intellectual capacities with human beings, they came to the (empirical) conclusion that simians do not share all the capacities necessary for “reason” or morality.

Moral Blindness

Since the publication of J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello* almost 20 years ago, there has been a veritable cottage industry of analysis of the significance of his work among philosophers.³³ A central theme that these various philosophers take from Coetzee is the problem of “moral blindness,” the question of why and how the vast majority of a society can see a situation (in this case, the institutionalized cruelty of factory farming) as morally insignificant, whereas for a small minority, this situation represents a moral catastrophe, an ongoing situation of moral evil that disconsols, enrages, and/or paralyzes this minority. While these philosophers vary in their evaluation of the nature and significance of this problem, they all in some way seek to understand the struggle of such persons to maintain their moral identity—in some cases their identity more generally—in a culture they see as so morally foreign, engaged as they see it in morally oppressive and catastrophic practices.

This has long been a concern for moral theology, especially its natural law tradition. It has taken a variety of forms, with some philosophers and theologians (e.g., David Burrell, Herbert Fingerette, Stanley Hauerwas, and Gregg Ten Elshof) working on it as the problem of self-deception in ethics. Others, most notably John Noonan in his work on the development of moral doctrine,³⁴ have pointed to the complexities and dangers in too blithely passing moral judgments on the moral practices of past societies.

A theological ethology

Those who spend their lives studying the behavior (and thus the

On Animals: A Medieval Summa Zoologica, trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell, and Irven Michael Resnick, forward by William Wallace (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), xviii-xix.

³³ The list of philosophical luminaries responding to Coetzee’s work includes Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, Ian Hacking, John McDowell, Peter Singer, and especially Stephen Mulhall. Stanley Hauerwas in “Bearing Reality,” his Presidential Address to the Society of Christian Ethics in 2012, also offers a response to themes raised by Coetzee (and Cora Diamond).

³⁴ See especially John Noonan, *A Church that Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), especially the final section where Noonan speculates about contemporary moral practices that he believes future generations will be tempted to look back on at us with moral horror and indignation.

nature) of individual animal species diverge in their motives for doing so. Let me give just a few examples. For instance, anthropologists and paleontologists may be interested in primates to gain a better understanding of human prehistory. Agriculturalists may be interested in understanding cows and pigs so they can be raised and slaughtered not only more “humanely,” but also more efficiently and effectively (e.g., Temple Grandin). Biological scientists may study rats and dogs to understand the limits of applicability to humans of their experimental results. Zoologists may be interested in understanding the natures of polar bears, pandas, tigers and elephants to design better enclosures at zoos (or circus acts) so the animals are happier and put on a better show for their human visitors. These motives can certainly be all well and good, but they are not in the end, so to speak, about the apes, bears, cows, tigers, and rats themselves. It is still ultimately all about humans. This is what I would call “anthropocentric ethology.”

And to the extent it is ultimately about us humans, such studiers of animals have at least a potential conflict of interest. In the same way we do not presume that the advertiser’s or the automobile salesperson’s quest to “understand us” is so they can better serve our good, we should at least be suspicious about the understanding of a species gained by persons whose end in obtaining that understanding is ultimately not the good of that species. To put it in the extreme: Should we rely on the factory farmer to educate us about cognitive abilities (or ability to suffer) of pigs?

There are, no doubt, anthropocentric ethologists as well as other individuals in the disciplines mentioned above who do in fact study individual species out of the love of understanding a species as an end in itself, or at least have mixed motives. For example, they may be in those disciplines because it allows them to make a living while their true love and interest is an understanding of the nature and good of a particular species. Fair enough.

Furthermore, this is eminently possible, as we constantly rely on persons whose profession (in the traditional sense) is to understand and promote the good of those they serve. We expect our physicians to understand us in order to act in our best interests in healing our bodies (as opposed to selling us a “medical procedure” that we don’t need). Similarly, we expect our priests to be seeking to understand us to act on the best interests of our soul (as opposed to seeking an endowment for the parish organ). So too it is eminently reasonable that some people may seek to understand and promote the good of the particular species they study.

And this brings us to theological ethology, which, as I propose above, is the discipline that seeks to understand each species in light

of its own authentic natural and supernatural good,³⁵ understood as flourishing according to its nature.³⁶ And moral theology, with its interdisciplinary focus and emphasis on the good, and its particular resources to avoid the lure of anthropocentric ethology, is in a particularly good place to serve as a home basis for this field. In fact, a theological ethology may be thought of as analogous to traditional natural law thought on what we can understand about human nature and flourishing *qua* human nature (Jean Porter's work, both in this issue and more generally is exemplary in this regard).

CONCLUSION

As noted previously, for far too long theological discussions about non-human animals have treated them all as one, with no recognition of their particular natures or what we might owe them to allow them to flourish. We can expect a theological ethology to help us understand far more authentically than we have been able to do so far, the true extent of emotional, rational, and moral capacities of a large number of species about which hitherto we have known so little.

As St. Alphonsus is the patron saint of moral theology, it is obvious to propose St. Albert the Great as the patron saint for theological ethology. For while a man of his time and place, a time and place that had infinitely fewer resources to come to an understanding of the great diversity of species with which we share the earth, St. Albert produced his extraordinary *On Animals*, which while certainly outdated in profound ways, nevertheless provides a paradigm for how moral theologians might do theological ethology. Among other virtues, his work exemplifies all the characteristics I have been calling for. Albert clearly recognized humans as one among all the other animals (though a very special one). Albert believed in continuity in the natures of animals, believing that creatures of like bodily natures could be expected to have like mental (and perhaps spiritual) natures. As such Albert (like Aristotle before him and Thomas after him) paved the way for an (at least in theory) unproblematic reception of the insights of (a truly scientific) evolutionary theory. Albert also clearly rejected cognitive parsimony. While an elaboration of this is beyond the scope of this article, Albert's view that humans were the only "rational" and hence "moral" species was, I would argue, a conclusion reached primarily on the basis of empirical understanding of the natures of other animals. In light of the growing consensus in contemporary ethology, I believe that Albert would have had no objections to affirming that—based on

³⁵ A discussion of the supernatural good of animal species besides humans is beyond the scope of this article, but a starting place for any theological discussion of the matter would be scriptural sources such as Romans 8.

³⁶ This I take to be the thrust of Charles Camosy and Susan Kopp's paper in this volume.

adequate empirical evidence—other species might well be rational and/or moral.³⁷

While it is still probably a little early to be making categorical pronouncements that this or that species can be deemed to be “moral,” in say, a Thomistic understanding of ethics, this is quite definitely now a very open question for ethology and philosophy and it most certainly should be for moral theology. And while I may be shown wrong, I fully expect that it is only a matter of time before official Catholic theology comes to recognize at least a form of morality (and for that matter personhood) in at least a few of our fellow species.

While this may open up new avenues of fellowship between humans and other species, I fully expect that for the most part the lives of most animals will remain largely if not utterly a mystery to us. We may hope that this lack of clarity will inspire in us increased humility (rather than presumption). It also perhaps gives us another reason to eagerly anticipate the eschaton.³⁸ **M**

³⁷ For more on this topic, see my “Just Chimpanzees? A Thomistic Perspective on Ethics in a Non-Human Species,” forthcoming in Jonathan K. Crane, ed., *Beastly Morality: Animals as Moral Agents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

³⁸ I wish to thank Charles Camosy and Celia Deane-Drummond for their helpful comments and criticisms of an earlier draft of this essay.

Catholic moral theology is a major category of doctrine in the Catholic Church, equivalent to a religious ethics. Moral theology encompasses Roman Catholic social teaching, Catholic medical ethics, sexual ethics, and various doctrines on individual moral virtue and moral theory. It can be distinguished as dealing with "how one is to act", in contrast to dogmatic theology which proposes "what one is to believe". YouTube Encyclopedic. 1/5.Â âœª Part 1 - Msgr. William Smith - Fundamental Moral Theology. âœª Catholic Morality: An Introduction. âœª Part 2 - Msgr. William Smith - Fundamental Moral Theology. âœª Introduction to Moral Theology. âœª 2014 Murnion Lecture: Finding Common Ground in Catholic Moral Theology. The moral theology before Vatican II was dazzlingly clear. But since the Council, much of this tradition has been condemned as "manualist," therefore bad.Â Subsequent Catholic moral theologians have been accused of merely echoing or translating him. While a few may have done this, it can hardly be said of all. Some other important Catholic moralists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (prior to the Council) are Archbishop Kenrick; Fr.Â BÄ¶ckle was going to oppose Pope John Paul II (quite what he intended to do, I do not know) if that pope ever stated that any act was intrinsically evil. BÄ¶ckle never did so because he died before Veritatis Splendor was published. Not everyone on Bretzke's list is bad. Moral theology, to be complete in every respect, must accomplish in moral questions what dogmatic theology does in questions pertaining to dogma. The latter has to explain clearly the truths of faith and prove them to be such; it must also, as far as possible, show their accordance with reason, defend them against objections, trace their connection with other truths, and, by means of theological argumentation, deduce further truths. Moral theology must follow the same processive questions of morals. âœª" It is evident that this cannot be done in all branches of moral theology in such a way as to