

Laudato Si' on Non-Human Animals

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FRANCIS'S *LAUDATO SI'* HAS TURNED our attention to the ecological crisis and gave rise to lively discussions about ecological issues and our responsibilities to our common home. In addition, the encyclical also shows a particular concern towards non-human animals and provides directions on how we should treat them who are our fellow inhabitants. This essay looks at what *Laudato Si'* teaches about the treatment of non-human animals, especially its strengths and weaknesses in light of the existing Catholic tradition. I hope to show that, despite the way Francis extends Catholic teaching on concern for non-human animals, there is still room for improvement, specifically by directly addressing ways in which humans use non-human animals.

To fully appreciate what Francis has written, the first part of this essay provides a brief overview of the Catholic tradition and teaching on the treatment of non-human animals prior to *Laudato Si'*. I limit myself to two important sources. The first one is Thomas Aquinas whose theses on non-human animals have significantly influenced how the Catholic moral tradition approached questions on the ethical status of non-human animals.¹ The second is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, being the most significant post-Vatican II magisterial document on non-human animals.² Several works have done significant analysis of these sources. Therefore, rather than a comprehensive and thorough review, these will be dealt with in broad strokes, identifying their central problems to situate and assess *Laudato Si'*.

The second part evaluates the contributions of *Laudato Si'* on the treatment of non-human animals in light of these central problems, pinpointing where it does well and falls short. The encyclical letter's

¹ James Gaffney, "The Relevance of Animal Experimentation to Roman Catholic Ethical Methodology," in *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science*, ed. Tom Regan (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1986), 153.

² John Berkman, "From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology: Where Catholic Moral Theology Needs to Go," *Journal of Moral Theology* 3, no. 2 (June 2014): 12.

treatment of this topic is quite progressive while at the same time remaining balanced and rooted in tradition and previous teaching. Nonetheless, it lacks a direct treatment of certain ways in which non-human animals are used. Treating such issues at the level of an encyclical letter concerned with our common home would have been opportune and could have substantially add to the Church's teaching on the treatment of non-human animals.

The third and final part identifies sources from which the Church can draw from in order to further extend its teaching on the treatment of non-human animals, specifically in addressing the ways humans use them. These sources suggest valuing encounters with non-human animals, recognizing their God-given *telos*, refusing to view concern for non-human animals as taking away concern for humans, and finally building upon the *Catechism of the Catholic Church's* language of justice in our treatment of non-human animals.

PART I: THE PLACE OF NON-HUMAN ANIMALS IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION

A. Thomas Aquinas

Influenced by Aristotle and other classical thinkers as well as by the rigid hierarchy of defined ecclesiastical and civil roles of his time, Aquinas developed a hierarchical view of creation both in terms of complexity and value. In this hierarchy, humans—being the most spiritual and rational and thus the most sublime—are at the top followed by non-human animals, and finally plants. Beings less sublime than humans are considered “less perfect” and serve the needs of the “more perfect” (*ST I q. 47, a. 2*). Humans are thus free to use less perfect beings for their benefit. Because of his understanding of creation in these terms, Aquinas is criticized as being anthropocentric.³

However, it would be unfair to simply dismiss Aquinas as anthropocentric without any qualifications. His hierarchical understanding of creation must be seen in the context of his sacramental view of creation and his perceived *telos* of non-human creation. Aquinas affirmed the godliness of all creation and the inherent goodness of all creatures as unique manifestations of the Triune God (*ST I q. 47, a. 1*). If this is the case then this hierarchy does not give humans a right to use less perfect creatures in an abusive manner.⁴ Furthermore, for Aquinas, the entire physical universe

³ Anne M. Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God,” in *“And God Saw That It Was Good:” Catholic Theology and the Environment*, eds. Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996), 40.

⁴ Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God,” 40.

(which includes plants, non-human animals, and humans) is ordered towards “ultimate perfection” which, in turn, is destined to God. The perfection of the physical universe gives glory to God’s goodness (*ST I* q. 47, a. 2). Thus, while hierarchical, creation is by no means anthropocentric.⁵

For Aquinas, non-human animals, or in his own terms, “irrational creatures,” are not to be “loved out of charity.” Influenced by Aristotle, Aquinas interprets love philosophically as friendship. He is thus stating that one cannot extend friendship to non-human animals. Precisely because of their irrationality, they cannot be direct objects of human friendship or of Christian charity (except metaphorically) which contains the whole of Christian morality. Only God and humans are the proper objects of such kind of love. They can, however, be indirect objects of love. One may love them out of charity if we see them as the good things that we desire for others to give honor to God and to provide for human use. Thus, it is not really for their own sake that they are loved or moral concern is shown to them, but for the sake of God and humans (*ST II-II* q. 25, a. 3).⁶

The situation becomes more problematic when we read the core argument of Aquinas against animal cruelty. For Aquinas, cruelty against animals is wrong because it corrupts the virtue and character of the abuser. This in turn makes animal abusers more likely to display the same behavior towards humans. Furthermore, he also writes that injuring an animal is wrong because it might lead to a material loss for someone (*SCG III-II* 112, 13). Thus, it is not the harm caused to animals *per se* which makes animal cruelty wrong. In this sense, non-human animals are not accorded any value for their own sake.⁷ Despite the beautiful things Aquinas has to say about the inherent goodness of each creature, his explicit ethical treatment of non-human animals is wanting.

B. The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Aquinas’s perspective has influenced the Catholic tradition on the treatment of animals. This becomes more apparent in how the *Catechism* treats the same subject. The *Catechism* spends four paragraphs concerning non-human animals. These sections read as follows:

⁵ John Berkman, “Towards a Thomistic Theology of Animality,” in *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*, eds. Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (London: SCM Press, 2009), 24.

⁶ See also Gaffney, “The Relevance of Animal Experimentation,” 152–53.

⁷ Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge our Moral Universe* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 120–2.

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. 1:28–31). 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. (Cf. Mt. 6:2; 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.

In "From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology," John Berkman carefully reads through the *Catechism's* treatment of non-human animals and concludes that it is ambiguous yet still offers resources for the development of Catholic teaching on concern for non-human animals. The first thing he notes is that the *Catechism's* discussion on the morality of treating non-human animals follows the method of old moral manuals which treats such issues under the seventh commandment ("You shall not steal") which protects human property.⁸ This presupposes that the environment in general and non-human animals in particular are the "properties" of humans.

Furthermore, Berkman points out, the *Catechism* does not have a single view about the morality of treating non-human animals. Instead, it contains a multiplicity of views which are at best in tension and at worst incompatible with one another. On the one hand, section 2416

⁸ Berkman, "From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology," 24–25.

of the *Catechism* states that non-human animals are God's creatures and He surrounds them with His providential care. They give glory to God by their mere existence. Here, we can see that the *Catechism* accords non-human animals value in themselves, something which Aquinas also acknowledges by affirming the inherent goodness of all creatures as divine manifestations of the Trinity. Because of this, humans *owe* them kindness and gentleness. In *For Love of Animals*, Charles Camosy strengthens this point noting that, by using the word "owe," the *Catechism* employs a very strong language: the language of justice. Moreover, we are even exhorted to follow the examples of saints who treated non-human animals with kindness.⁹

On the other hand, section 2418 treats non-human animals in a different way by providing instrumental reasons against animal cruelty, namely, that it is "contrary to human dignity." This is clearly reflective of the treatment of non-human animals by Aquinas which does not accord them intrinsic value. Furthermore, the same section also gives an unclear moral guidance by asserting that they should not be made to suffer or die "needlessly." This moral guidance maybe read in two ways, according to Berkman. First, if this is read in light of section 2415—non-human animals are destined for the common good of humanity—then almost any reason can be acceptable to make them suffer and die as long as it is considered a need for the good of humanity. If this same passage is read in light of section 2416—God surrounds non-human animals with His providential care and we owe them kindness—then one needs to have very strong reasons for causing them to suffer and die.¹⁰

In section 2417, the *Catechism* tells us that God entrusted non-human animals to the stewardship of humans which makes it legitimate for humans to use them to provide for their needs. The same section specifies ways humans may use them: for food, clothing, and domestication to help humans in work or for leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation are also considered morally acceptable so long as it "remains within reasonable limits" and "contributes to caring for or saving human lives."

What, however, does constitute "reasonable limits" and who should identify these limits? Furthermore, while the "caring for or saving human lives" criteria would certainly make cosmetic testing on animals unacceptable (unless it really contributes to caring for or saving human lives), what of other biomedical research? Almost any experiment would appear to be permissible, if it is justified as an effort to care for or save human lives. Lastly, if we really need to use animals for human necessity, does this mean that we can make them suffer and

⁹ Charles Camosy, *For Love of Animals: Christian Ethics, Consistent Action* (Ohio: Franciscan Media, 2013), 73.

¹⁰ Berkman, "From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology," 25–26.

die in any way to satisfy necessity? It is one thing to say that we need a non-human animal for this human necessity and quite another on how non-human animals are to be treated to fulfill this necessity. In not sufficiently providing concrete limitations, the *Catechism* thus seems to give a broad margin for humans to decide when and how to use non-human animals.

Finally, section 2418 directs that, while it is acceptable to love non-human animals, they should not be given affection that should be given to humans alone. A correlated injunction is giving priority to human misery. While not citing the *Summa*, it echoes Aquinas's thought that non-human animals are not to be loved out of charity or with the kind of love that should be directed to God and humans. Berkman reads this as a rebuke for "poor souls" who prefer the company of non-human animals or who devote their lives to their companion animals.¹¹

For all its difficulties, the *Catechism*, like Aquinas's writings, should not be easily dismissed. Despite its ambiguous and even conflicting views, this magisterial document still affirms the legitimacy of love for non-human animals by highlighting God's providential concern for them and the lives of saints who have shown them love and compassion.¹² Furthermore, by delineating the ways in which humans may use non-human animals, the *Catechism* implicitly rejects practices such as the use of non-human animals for blood sports and their torturing and killing for entertainment purposes. Finally, as Camosy notes, the *Catechism* even uses the language of justice to describe our relationship with non-human animals and demands of us not to cause them needless suffering and death.¹³

C. A Reappraisal of the Place of Non-Human Animals in the Catholic Tradition

The most common charge against the Catholic tradition's treatment of non-human animals is that it is anthropocentric. It prioritizes human interests over the interests of non-human animals, consistently placing humans at the center of creation and making judgments according to what will benefit humans.¹⁴ This tendency can be seen in the "give priority to human misery" injunction of the *Catechism* and in

¹¹ Berkman, "From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology," 25–26.

¹² Berkman, "From Theological Speciesism to a Theological Ethology," 26.

¹³ Camosy, *For Love of Animals*, 73.

¹⁴ Reynaldo D. Raluto, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads: Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 40 and 107; Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2013), 429–32.

Aquinas's justification for using less perfect beings by more perfect beings as well as prohibiting harm of non-human animals because it might lead to temporal loss for humans.

Part of the cause of this anthropocentrism is that the Catholic tradition emphasizes human dignity more than the integrity of non-human animals. This overemphasis obscures the connection which should exist between them.¹⁵ For Frear, the likely cause is neither because of biblical texts about humanity being God's image and likeness nor about human dominion over creation. Rather, it is the traditional dualistic understanding of human nature with its sharp distinction and division between material body and rational soul wherein only in the bodily realm do humans have similarity with creation and non-human animals.¹⁶

While it is evident that the Church prioritizes humans over non-human creatures, the dominion that humans have over creation and, thus, non-human creation is not limitless. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II teaches that this dominion is not "an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse,' or to dispose of things as one pleases" (no. 34). Likewise, in *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI points out that nature contains a "grammar" put by God "which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation" (no. 48). Thus, the Church's anthropocentric outlook is nuanced and qualified. It markedly differs from the commonly understood anthropocentrism which sees that there is no limit to the human exploitation of creation. On the contrary, the Church's anthropocentric outlook is balanced and strictly limited by the teaching that creation has its own God-given integrity and order which humans must respect.¹⁷ In this perspective, humans *do* have priority, but this does not deny the value of non-human animals and the attendant responsibilities towards them. In fact, the emphasis on human dignity can be a powerful source of commitment if it implies a unique moral responsibility of humans for other creatures and the rest of creation.¹⁸ Human dignity should be interpreted in light of this relationship with the rest of creation.¹⁹

PART II: *LAUDATO SI'* ON NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

While the Church rejects an anthropocentrism which removes concern for non-human creation, *Laudato Si'* does so in much stronger

¹⁵ Raluto, *Poverty and Ecology at the Crossroads*, 107–8.

¹⁶ George L. Frear, Jr., "Animals, Rights of," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, eds. Judith A. Dwyer and Elizabeth L. Montgomery (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 43.

¹⁷ Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*, 430.

¹⁸ Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 200.

¹⁹ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 16, 20, and 22.

terms. While affirming that humans possess a “particular dignity above other creatures” (no. 119) and that there can be no ecology without an “adequate anthropology,” thereby rejecting “biocentrism” (no. 118), Francis condemns a “tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (no. 68). He stresses that “we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (no. 67). The ultimate purpose of creation is not to be found in us but in God (no. 83). The Pope thus finds total technical dominion over creation to be unacceptable (nos. 115–16).

With regards to the relationship between humans and non-human animals in general, *Laudato Si'* still upholds the uniqueness of humans which distinguishes us from the rest of creation. This includes the capacity for reason, to have abstract thoughts, to invent, and create art among others (nos. 81 and 90). At first glance, this might be interpreted in a way which furthers the distinction between humans and non-human animals to the extent of blurring the kinship between them. However, a closer reading of the encyclical tells us otherwise. *Laudato Si'* calls our attention to a universal communion which excludes nothing and no one. In fact, throughout the encyclical, Francis stresses the interconnection of all things (nos. 85, 120, and 137–8). As Francis writes:

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth. (no. 92)

Despite this call for a universal communion, Francis still prioritizes the relationship between and concern for humans. A universal communion cannot be authentic if one is concerned with non-human animals while being indifferent to the problems faced by humans. Disapproval is also shown when more zeal is present in protecting species rather than defending the dignity of human beings (nos. 81–92). While we should be concerned when other beings are treated irresponsibly, we are called to be “particularly indignant” at the gaping inequalities present in society (no. 90). Given that Francis upholds the uniqueness and special place of humans in creation, this should hardly be surprising. Though not citing the *Catechism*, the encyclical appears to affirm the former’s injunction of giving priority to human misery.

Keeping these general perspectives in mind, we turn to the encyclical’s specific treatment of non-human animals. In several instances of *Laudato Si'*, Francis discusses the status and treatment of non-human animals. The lengthiest of these is the third section of chapter one which dedicates ten paragraphs (nos. 32–42) to the issue

of the loss of biodiversity. Francis writes that climate change and other environmental problems result in the extinction of different species which are “extremely important resources” as food and medicine. While he clearly refers to the “instrumental value” of non-human animals, the pope adds that they also possess “value in themselves” regardless of their usefulness to humans or to the ecosystem (nos. 25 and 32–33). That being so, he condemns the loss of species in especially strong terms.

Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right. (no. 33)

The loss of diverse animal species is often caused by short term economic, commercial, and production plans. More often than not, projects are assessed only in light of their impact on air, land, and water but not on the loss of species. Even endeavors considered necessary for development, such as the building of highways, new plantations, and the damming of water sources, did not escape criticism. Whatever benefits come from these projects can be outweighed by the adverse effects. As Francis writes, “Where certain species are destroyed or seriously harmed, the values involved are incalculable” (no. 36).

Whereas John Paul II (e.g., *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nos. 26 and 29) and Benedict XVI (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 48) have pushed for the inclusion of environmental factors in planning development projects,²⁰ Francis goes further by explicitly including the protection and preservation of animal species in planning these projects. This is clearly a demanding view which places concern for non-human animals at a high level. We are called to find alternatives to lessen the impacts of developmental projects not only to the environment in general but also to animal species in particular and so exercise far-sightedness in planning (*Laudato Si'*, nos. 35–36).

Given that Francis and Catholic tradition recognize the unique value and place of humans in creation, it is not surprising that the loss of human culture is more serious than the loss of plant or animal species.

The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The

²⁰ For a greater discussion of these, see Celia Deane-Drummond, “Joining in the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology,” *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1004 (March 2012): 198–204.

imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 145)

Even so, Francis shows concern for the loss of animal species. By saying that the disappearance of the latter “can be just as serious” as the disappearance of the former, Francis actually raises concern for the loss of animal species while recognizing the unique value and place of humans.

Apart from showing concern for the loss of biodiversity, *Laudato Si'* also reiterates the teaching of the *Catechism*. While human intervention on plants and non-human animals is permitted when it concerns the necessities of human life, it is only morally acceptable “if it remains within reasonable limits [and] contributes to caring for or saving human lives” (no. 130). He stresses that the *Catechism* firmly teaches that human powers have limitations and “it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly” (no. 130).

In his call to a universal communion and fraternity which excludes nothing and no one, Francis warns that our indifference and cruelty towards any creature would sooner or later also show itself in our treatment of human beings.

We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is ‘contrary to human dignity.’ (no. 92)

This resonates with Aquinas’s view that animal cruelty is wrong not really because it causes non-human animals suffering but because it might lead to the mistreatment of humans. The concern that animal cruelty can lead to human violence is not in itself wrong. We only need to reflect on how workers, particularly undocumented ones, are treated inside “factory farms”²¹ and the numerous studies which confirm the link between animal cruelty and human violence.²² The problem would be if this is the *only way* Francis thinks about animal cruelty. It is not. The pope affirms the *intrinsic* value of *each* creature, which “must be cherished with love and respect” (nos. 33 and 42).

²¹ Camosy, *For Love of Animals*, 95.

²² See, for instance, the studies cited in “Animal Cruelty and Human Violence,” *The Humane Society of the United States*, www.humanesociety.org/issues/abuse_neglect/qa/cruelty_violence_connection_faq.html; “Animal Abuse and Human Abuse: Partners in Crime,” *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, www.peta.org/issues/companion-animal-issues/companion-animals-factsheets/animal-abuse-human-abuse-partners-crime/.

Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection. (no. 76)

Moreover, his claim that the Blessed Mother *grieves* for creatures destroyed by humans is striking. As *Laudato Si'* poignantly states:

Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power. (no. 241)

These statements are strong indicators that *each* non-human animal has intrinsic value. Cruelty to non-human animals is therefore wrong not only because of the risk of mistreating humans but also because it harms creatures who have a value of their own and are cared for by God. It is not only a perversion of the caring relationship between humans and non-human creation but also an offense against God as it goes against the proper use of God's gifts.²³

While Francis clearly and forcefully confirms the intrinsic value of each non-human creature and condemns cruel acts done to them, *Laudato Si'* remains within Catholic tradition. The encyclical openly affirms the intrinsic value of non-human animals and, at the same time, recognizes the unique value and special place of humans in creation. What would help advance this "chastened anthropocentrism"²⁴ is a direct treatment of the uses of non-human animals in order to limit the rather broad margin given by the *Catechism*. The encyclical touches directly on actions people can take that address many of the specific issues affecting our common home, keenly grasping the extent and complexity of the ecological crisis.²⁵ For non-human animals, the pope could have tackled whether their use for clothing, their processing in "factory farming" (which not only harms non-human animals but also the ecosystem)²⁶ and their roles in biomedical research are within the bounds of the "necessities of

²³ Thomas Ryan, "Ecology" in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, eds. Judith A. Dwyer and Elizabeth L. Montgomery (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 309.

²⁴ Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, vol. 3, *Light to the World, Salt of the Earth* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 180–81.

²⁵ Anthony Annett, "The Next Step: How *Laudato Si'* Extends Catholic Social Teaching," *Commonweal*, August 14, 2015, <https://www.commonweal-magazine.org/next-step>.

²⁶ Camosy gives a detailed description of this practice. For more details see Camosy, *For Love of Animals*, 83–96.

human life” and “caring for or saving human lives.” Does genetic manipulation where scientists are able to produce animals that will be born with or develop diseases such as diabetes and breast cancer fall within these bounds?²⁷ Even if we grant that need to use non-human animals, are such practices consequently permissible?

PART III: EXTENDING THE CHURCH’S TEACHINGS ON THE TREATMENT OF NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

For all the wonderful things Francis teaches about non-human animals, one thing that is wanting is directly questioning or touching on the ways humans use (or rather, *misuse*) non-human animals. This could, in turn, fail to limit the rather broad permissiveness given by the *Catechism* for the use of non-human animals. However, the Church has a rich tradition from which it can draw to attend to this issue. First, treating such issues would be in continuity with papal concern for non-human animals. Francis’s predecessors have addressed the treatment of non-human animals, albeit outside an encyclical letter or official Church teaching. For instance, in *Love and Responsibility*, John Paul II wrote,

Intelligent human beings are not only required not to squander or destroy ...natural resources, but to use them with restraint In his treatment of animals in particular, since they are *beings endowed with feeling and sensitive to pain*, man is required to ensure that the use of these creatures is *never attended by suffering or physical torture*.²⁸

In responding to journalist Peter Seewald’s question “are we allowed to make use of animals, and even to eat them?” Benedict XVI replied,

That is a *very serious question*. At any rate, we can see that they are given into our care, that we cannot just do whatever we want with them. Animals, too, are God’s creatures.... Certainly, a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, or hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds, *this degrading of living*

²⁷ Susan Kopp and Charles C. Camosy, “Animals 2.0: A Veterinarian and a Theologian Survey a Brave New World of Biotechnology,” *America*, May 13, 2015, www.americamagazine.org/issue/animals-20; Charles Camosy and Susan Kopp, “The Use of Non-Human Animals in Biomedical Research: Can Moral Theology Fill the Gap?” *Journal of Moral Theology* 3, no. 2 (June 2014): 60–62. The latter article especially provides details regarding these kinds of biomedical research.

²⁸ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (California: Ignatius Press, 1993), 25. Emphases added.

*creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible.*²⁹

Second is human experience, an indispensable source of moral theology which has led to the development of moral doctrine.³⁰ While difficult to quantify or qualify, human experience is still necessary for, without it, a moral system will become a mere abstraction separated from reality.³¹ In his 1990 World Day of Peace Message, John Paul II spoke of our contact with nature which has a “deep restorative power” which in turn leads us to care for it.³² In the same manner, our experience of meaningful encounter with animals can also have a “restorative power” in the sense of restoring the proper relationship which should exist between humans and non-human animals. We should be reminded that humans and non-human animals were created on the same day, which implies a special kind of kinship between them and that, originally, God intended non-human animals to be human companions.³³

Third, this encounter with non-human animals should not be selfish but with the gaze of Jesus who sees the Father’s love in each and every creature and their importance in God’s eyes (*Laudato Si’*, no. 96). Our eyes should be open to recognize each creature’s God-given *telos*. In the sixth day of the first creation story (Genesis 1: 24–31), particularly on the creation of non-human animals, God created and pronounced them to be good without referring to humans (*Laudato Si’*, no. 46). This serves as a theological basis for a metaphysical teleology of non-human animals. In the words of Camosy and Kopp, “Animals were created ‘good’ by God independent of any instrumental value they may have for us God created animals ‘good,’ *period*, to flourish in their own right as the good kinds of things they are.”³⁴

Each individual creature, therefore, has its own nature and *telos* which God wills for them to achieve in its fullness.³⁵ Humans cannot

²⁹ “Pope Benedict XVI Continues Tradition of Papal Concern for Animals,” *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, www.peta.org/features/pope-benedict-xvi/. Emphases added.

³⁰ James T. Bretzke, *Handbook of Roman Catholic Moral Terms* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 111; See John T. Noonan, Jr., “Experience and the Development of Moral Doctrine,” *CTSA Proceedings* 54 (1999): 43–56.

³¹ Bretzke, *Handbook of Roman Catholic Moral Terms*, 111.

³² John Paul II, “XXIII World Day for Peace 1990 Message: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,” 8 December 1989, w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html.

³³ Camosy, *For Love of Animals*, 46–47.

³⁴ Camosy and Kopp, “The Use of Non-Human Animals in Biomedical Research,” 65. Emphasis on the original.

³⁵ Camosy and Kopp, “The Use of Non-Human Animals in Biomedical Research,” 65.

just dispose of them arbitrarily. It is noteworthy that Jean Porter argues in *Nature as Reason* that the recognition of the *telos* of non-human animals does not require theism or empirical data. Rather one can discern from intuition what it means for a creature to be healthy and flourishing.³⁶ Again, this points to human experience as a valuable font of moral norms. The recognition of the *telos* of non-human animals means people have to consider and respect the overall flourishing of each animal as the kind of creature it is³⁷ and the fact that they are each loved by the Father as the creatures they are.

Fourth, we should not think that giving attention to non-human animals would mean taking attention away from humans. We should not fall into what Wennberg calls the “logic of the line approach.” This approach sees a long line of concerns starting with human needs and with animal welfare towards the end of the line. Human needs should be met first before turning to non-human animals. However, if one were to follow this reasoning, non-human animals will never be given attention due to the sheer magnitude of human needs. Instead of having this flawed perspective, one must have a “moral and spiritual wholeness” which embraces concern for humans, non-human animals, and the environment.³⁸ People who follow the logic of the line mistakenly take love as a “rare fluid to be economized” rather than a “capacity which grows by use.”³⁹ Caring for non-human animals does not necessarily (and should never) mean lessening attention to humans nor placing animals above or at equal footing with humans. The challenge is overcoming moral narrowness, expanding sympathies, and learning priorities.⁴⁰ We should be reminded of St. Francis of Assisi, who “is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 11). His love for the poor did not prevent him from caring for God’s creatures nor did his care for creation take away attention to the poor.

Finally, we could build more upon the *Catechism*’s teaching that humans “owe animals kindness” since they are God’s creatures and He surrounds them with His providential care. In light of this, Camosy extends the virtue of *justice* into non-human animals. According to him:

³⁶ Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 100–2.

³⁷ Camosy and Kopp, “The Use of Non-Human Animals in Biomedical Research,” 69.

³⁸ Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 13.

³⁹ Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 119.

⁴⁰ Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 13–14 and 201–3.

A serious kind of injustice takes place when we refuse to recognize certain individuals or groups as the kinds of beings to which we owe moral behavior Christian justice means consistently and actively working to see that individuals and groups—especially vulnerable population on the margins—are given what they are owed.⁴¹

If God loves each creature, if they have their intrinsic value, and if we owe them kindness, does not injustice take place whenever they are treated the way they are in factory farms?

If one were to utilize these aspects of the Church's tradition—papal writings, human experiences with non-human animals, seeing animals as creatures God loves, not pitting human needs against animal needs, and expanding a sense of justice toward animals—the church could clarify what really constitutes legitimate human use of non-human animals and limit how humans use them. For instance, the *Catechism's* allowance of the use of non-human animals for clothing and food could be further qualified. With the advances in clothing technology and the availability of alternative materials such as synthetic or faux leather and fur, can one still consider the use of non-human animals for clothing to be within the bounds of human necessity?

Regarding the use of non-human animals as food, needed nutrients found therein can also be found in non-human animal sources. Yet, it must also be recognized that not everyone is capable of totally giving up meat, so, perhaps the best thing that can be done is to avoid meat as much as possible. If there is a *real* need to eat meat, reasonable efforts should be made to source meat from ethical sources rather than from “factory farms.”⁴²

Finally, while the use of non-human animals for blood sports and violent entertainment would be clearly ruled out, we should also turn our attention to the use of non-human animals for circuses and other entertainment purposes. Not only would such activities appear not to recognize their God-given *telos*, but it is also doubtful whether using non-human animals for such purposes constitutes legitimate human necessity.

Of course, it can be argued that it can fall within legitimate human need if it provides employment. However, we cannot simply dismiss

⁴¹ Camosy, *For Love of Animals*, 3 and 7.

⁴² Julie Hanlon Rubio provides an excellent discussion of this topic in her article “Animals, Evil, and Family Meals” in *Journal of Moral Theology* 3, no. 2 (2014): 35–53. A related article is John Berkman’s “Are We Addicted to the Suffering of Animals? Animal Cruelty and the Catholic Moral Tradition,” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Animals*, ed. Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012), which discusses how eating meat, especially that coming from “factory farms,” is a form of material cooperation in evil.

the kindness that we owe to non-human animals as creatures that God loves in meeting such valid human necessities. Both needs would have to be taken into account rather than be pitted against each other. This principle also applies, I believe, to the *Catechism's* approval of the use of non-human animals for helping humans in their work such as in the case of animals used in ploughing and work unrelated to entertainment. As much as possible, sufficient efforts should be made to find alternatives to the use of non-human animals for work, but, if a real need exists for them to help humans, their welfare should be looked after and their use should never be degrading and attended by torture and suffering. In so doing, we live an integral ecology which unites concern for non-human animals and humans.

These are just some of the ways in which the Church's teachings on the treatment of non-human animals can be extended or clarified. These topics are quite intricate in themselves already and can, hopefully, give rise to further discussions on how to limit the use of non-human animals. One thing is for certain though: these aspects of the Catholic tradition and *Laudato Si'* should make us more discerning on the ways we use and treat non-human animals and how our activities affect them. We should make *reasonable efforts* to avoid using them and to find ways to treat them with the respect that is their due whenever they are used out of *real* necessities and not just out of convenience and pleasure under the guise of necessity. Doing so will help us give the kindness that we owe to non-human animals who are also our brothers and sisters. **M**