

significance of the Jubilee Year, noting that Scripture “argued fear of the Lord was the foundation of Wisdom” and thereby “did not aim at Promethean control but a harkening to the Law of God that directed the sage toward fulfilment” (206).

Scherz concludes that although “risk-based modes of practical reasoning are deeply embedded in contemporary subjectivity because of two hundred years of effort,” change, while difficult, is nonetheless possible and “requires regulation of technology and reshaping policymaking” as well as urging that “decision theory ceases to be the normative form of practical rationality” and that “individuals stop thinking and perceiving in these ways” (220). Ultimately, in Scherz’s view “trust in God can still provide a clear path toward ultimate certainty amid the confusion of life” (216).

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A Heaven for Animals: A Catholic Case and Why It Matters. By Christopher Steck, SJ. Washington, DC: Georgetown, 2025. x + 175. \$74.95 hardcover, \$24.95 paperback and ebook.

Christopher Steck’s book addresses an important question for those of us who care deeply for particular non-human animals: will we see them in heaven? Steck cogently argues that the answer to this question is “Yes.”

Steck begins by outlining the historical understanding of animals in Catholic theology before addressing reasons why our inherited views ought to change. For example, Aquinas, in *Summa Theologiae*, argued that “animals of the present age will not be in heaven” (13). For Aquinas, humans possess immortal souls while animals do not; following Aristotle, he believed humans’ natural capacity for reason was the crucial distinction. Their supposed lack of capacity for abstract reasoning entailed that animals, though composed of a sensitive soul and matter, could not be immortal (13–14).

After pointing out that the church or individual Christians are not necessarily beholden to Aquinas’s position, Steck highlights two theological arguments for it: first, animals, being created for the sake of humanity, will have no purpose in heaven; and second, animals, lacking capacity for spiritual contemplation, could not enjoy heaven. Using the same reasoning as Aquinas, Steck then suggests that creatures severely lacking in cognitive capacities may not be in heaven, but more developed ones, like the great apes, cetaceans, and others possessing demonstrable if limited cognitive capacities, could be in heaven (16–19). In sections two and three, Steck explores biblical and magisterial resources for affirming the presence of non-

human animals in heaven. He addresses possible critiques in chapter 6; he defends his position with reasonable caution, acknowledging that we are limited in our capacity to imagine the eschaton.

The book concludes with a sketch of the possible ethical ramifications of a Catholic understanding that animals can access heaven. Steck examines the philosophical approaches of utilitarianism and deontology, concluding that “neither of these theories is wholly adequate as a foundation for moral judgments about the treatment of animals, at least from a Catholic standpoint” (129). While sympathetic to these positions, Steck advocates for *natural law* and *aretaic ethics* (the latter derived from the Greek word for “virtue” or “excellence”). Combining these two foundations, he cites the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “‘It is *contrary to human dignity* to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly’ (no. 2418, emphasis added)” (132). He continues to apply Biblical principles, namely the notion of the “Already/Not Yet Kingdom,” pointing out that “attempts to live in accord with the kingdom will be frustrated” (135).

Chapter 8 provides the most concrete ethical applications of the eschatological understanding of animals. Steck begins with a brief “Catholic Theology of Animals” (144–145) before describing his proposed ethical response (145–148). In each case, he offers five principles to guide our theory and our actions. He then offers two examples of applied animal ethics: the consumption of their flesh (148–152) and experimentation (153–156). Here I would raise the critique that Steck did not go far enough in his conclusion about how we might fully embody paragraph 2418 of the *Catechism*, the prohibition against causing needless suffering of other animals. For example, he asks how our tacit complicity with factory farms can be reconciled with our devotion to other animals; at the same time, he does think that we can eat meat (150). I would argue that in most instances within the developed world, even raising animals for eventual consumption within so-called “humane” contexts is not ultimately concerned with animal well-being but a human interest to hide what seems to be, in most cases, formal complicity with evil.

A critical corollary to *A Heaven for Animals* is Steck’s 2019 book, *All God’s Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animal Ethics*, which will not be addressed here. (It is still recommended reading.) At the end of each chapter Steck provides resources for additional reading, and he includes his previous book as a resource for each chapter. Steck shared with this author that his purpose for writing *A Heaven for Animals* was to make more accessible the academic content of *All God’s Animals*. In this he has succeeded.

A Heaven for Animals is readily accessible to the lay person and an excellent resource for professional theological research. It is recommended as an excellent resource for courses on animal theology,

especially for lower-level university courses, though it could prove useful for upper-level students seeking supplemental resources.

A Heaven for Animals is an indispensable resource within the Catholic theological tradition regarding other animals. Steck has provided us with an excellent starting point to address this much neglected issue, giving hope for a path forward.

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