A Critique on Recent Catholic Magisterium's Thinking on Animal Ethics

Una crítica al pensamiento reciente del Magisterio Católico sobre la ética animal

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Abstract: In recent times, the Catholic Church magisterium published two influential texts with some significance for animal ethics: the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*. These texts are scrutinised here, focusing on the human consumption of animals for food. Whilst the concept of 'intrinsic value' is applied to nonhuman animals, there is no rigorous analysis of what this concept might mean and of what its recognition might imply for our relationships with nonhuman animals. This is problematic. Here, I provide much needed clarity, which has been lacking in the (animal) ethics literature in general, in relation to the concept of 'intrinsic value'. I also reject the strong anthropocentric perspective that underpins these Catholic texts, wherein nonhuman animals are valued almost exclusively instrumentally. The alternative, weak anthropocentric perspective that I sketch recognises animals' intrinsic values and demands qualified moral veganism, which is defended against five potential criticisms.

Keywords: Animal ethics, bioethics, Catholic thought, intrinsic value, veganism

Resumen: Recientemente, el magisterio de la Iglesia Católica publicó dos textos influyentes con pertinencia para la ética animal: el Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica y la carta encíclica *Laudato Si'*. Estos textos se examinan aquí, centrándose en el consumo humano de animales para la alimentación. Si bien el concepto de 'valor intrínseco' se aplica a los animales no humanos, no existe un análisis riguroso de lo que podría significar este concepto y de lo que su reconocimiento podría implicar para nuestras relaciones con los animales no humanos. Esto es problemático. Aquí, proporciono la claridad necesaria, ausente en ética (animal) generalmente, en relación al concepto de 'valor intrínseco'. También rechazo la perspectiva antropocéntrica fuerte que sustenta estos textos, en la que los animales no humanos son valorados casi exclusivamente de manera instrumental. La perspectiva antropocéntrica alternativa y moderada que esbozo exige un veganismo moral calificado, que se defiende contra cinco críticas potenciales.

Palabras clave: Ética animal, bioética, pensamiento Católico, valor intrínseco, veganismo

1. Introduction

Whilst philosophers have debated animal ethics for a long time, this field of enquiry could be classed as a relatively young academic discipline as academic scholars have only relatively recently started to specialise in this area.[1] As a scholar in this field, I turn my attention in this article to recent Catholic thought (from the last 30 years) on animal ethics, using the notion 'Catholic thought' and similar notions as shorthand for 'thought of the Catholic magisterium'. Although I discuss the Catholic position in relation to animal ethics in general, I focus particularly on one area, namely the human use of nonhuman animals for food. This theme has had significant importance in the Catholic tradition, for example in the habit of some religious orders, such as the Trappists, to adopt partial vegetarianism. The topic of whether or not to use animals for food is also a prominent feature of animal ethics for many Catholics today as most people relate most frequently to nonhuman animals by turning them into objects for human consumption and by consuming them.

The human treatment of other animals and the human consumption of nonhuman animals have raised moral problems for a very long time. Many religions are inspired by texts that ponder what people ought (not) to do to nonhuman animals, and whether and when it might be acceptable for people to consume other animals. For Catholics, these texts are primarily those that have been collected in the Bible. In relation to the human

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consumption of nonhuman animals, the canonised text of Genesis (Gn) provides a good illustration of the editor wrestling with this question. The text suggests that the consumption of animals only received divine approval after the flood (Gn 9.3), with God merely approving of the consumption of plants beforehand (Gn 1.29 and 2.16). However, Catholics also adopt the view that these texts are not the only things that matter. Indeed, precisely because they think that other things matter too, Church leaders publish texts as well. It is these other, contemporary texts that concern me in this article, more specifically those that have been written by the magisterium of the Catholic Church over the last 30 years, where two texts in particular might be useful for Catholics who ponder animal ethics.[2] Whilst these texts have been published in multiple languages, I will use and translate the official Latin version as it is this version that the magisterium considers the official version or the '*editio typica*'.

The first is the Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae or Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992), promulgated by Pope John Paul II. It provides the most recent comprehensive summary of Catholic thinking, and has even been identified as 'the most significant post-Vatican II magisterial document on non-human animals' (Aseneta, 2017, 230). The second, the encyclical letter Laudato Si', was published by the current Pope, Franciscus (2015), and is regarded as one of the few contemporary writings from the Catholic magisterium that addresses how human beings ought to relate to the nonhuman world.[3] Its subtitle is 'On care for our common home' ('*De communi domo colenda*'), whilst its opening words, '*laudato si*'', refer to a text ('Canticle of the Sun') written by Francis of Assisi, also known as '*Laudes Creaturarum*' ('Praise of the Creatures'), which is cited fully (Franciscus, 2015; Moloney, 2013). By choosing these words, Francis might wish to pick up on a theme that Francis of Assisi is renowned for, his interest in the nonhuman world. My critique on these documents is that they fail to develop an adequate animal ethic in general, as well as more specifically in relation to my primary concern, the ethics of consuming animal products. I conclude this article by outlining an alternative, qualified vegan animal ethic, which is defended against five objections.

2. Recent Catholic Magisterium's Thinking on Animal Ethics

In the Catholic Catechism we read that 'God created everything for humanity' and that 'animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity'.[4] God would also have given people 'dominion over inanimate and other living beings'.[5] Whilst this dominion is subject to moral obligations, it concerns a 'dominion ... over the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe'.[6] These would be able to 'serve the just satisfaction of man's needs'.[7] The theme that 'man' should 'subject' ('*subicere*') or 'dominate' ('*dominare*') the earth appears several times (Catechism, 1992, 307, 373, 1607, 2402, 2427).

The text also mentions that God entrusted people to care for animals and that 'hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing'.[8] It continues that it is also allowed to 'domesticate' ('*mansuefacere*') animals to aid people in their labour and leisure, and that medical and scientific experiments are acceptable 'if ... they contribute to caring for or saving human lives'.[9]

Whilst the Catechism is clear that animals have instrumental value for humanity, it also questions a purely instrumental valuation. It states, for example, that 'people owe them (animals) kindness' and asks us to recall how Francis of Assisi and Philippus Neri treated animals.[10] Also, it would be 'against human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly',[11] and it would be good to 'love' ('*amare*') animals, even if it would be wrong to direct the affection ('*affectio*') that should be given to people towards them, as well as to spend money on them that should be spent on the alleviation of human misery.

Whilst the claim has been made that 'Laudato Si'' would be 'a striking new moment in church teaching ... in relation to animals' (Clough, 2017, 99), there is nothing in 'Laudato Si'' that suggests that Francis departs radically from the Catechism, either generally in relation to the question of what our moral responsibilities towards nonhuman animals ought to be, or more specifically in relation to the human use of nonhuman animals for nutritional purposes. The absence of any discussion of the use of nonhuman animals for food is notable, given that the farmed animals' sector poses the most significant threat to the preservation of our planetary ecosystem about which Francis is greatly concerned (Steinfeld; Gerber; Wassenaar; et al., 2006). Whilst Clough (2017) has remarked rightly that the encyclical's concern with human 'plunder' and 'violence', which cause 'all forms of life' to become sick and the earth to 'groan in travail (Rom 8:22)' (Franciscus, 2015, 2), might be interpreted to be incompatible with industrialised forms of animal farming, there is no discussion of this topic at all.

In the philosophical literature, scholars who have discussed human responsibilities vis-à-vis the nonhuman world and argued against the (industrialised) farming of animals have frequently done so by appealing to the view that we should recognise that some nonhuman entities, for example animals, have intrinsic value (O'Neill, 1992; Hursthouse, 2006). Whilst Francis does not discuss the human consumption of animals, he does use the notion of intrinsic value. The idea that things have value for God is supplemented in a few places with the idea that things would also have intrinsic value. Francis says, for example, that ecosystems would be intrinsically good or have 'intrinsic value'.[12] He fulminates against what he calls 'modern anthropocentrism', which would regard nature purely in terms of its utility and thus disparage the 'intrinsic value' of the earth.[13] An example is a plea to treat different creatures not only as potential sources of wealth 'while forgetting to value them in themselves'.[14] This intrinsic value is connected not only with nature, the planetary ecosystems, and the existence of many species, but also with 'the value proper to each creature'.[15] The Catechism (1992, 339) also refers to the intrinsic value of each creature, which it connects with the demands that people ought to respect all creatures and ought not to use them inappropriately. Francis refers to this text as if it is in line with the text of Laudato Si', but it is fair to say that Francis questions the human use of other creatures per se more. He also questions the human subjugation of nonhuman nature more, suggesting that this practice might impede our ability to recognise the intrinsic value of other things (Franciscus, 2015, 69). Even if only 'total submission',[16] rather than 'submission' per se is questioned, Francis cites in this context a document from a group of German bishops, which claims that 'being' ('*esse*') precedes 'being used' ('*esse utiles*') (Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, 1980). Whilst it is unclear what this text might mean, it is fair to conclude that it is in great tension with the text from the Catechism (1992, 2415) where it writes that nonhuman things are 'destined for the common good of ... humanity'.

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A well-known theme in the Christian tradition is the idea that people should not be cruel to nonhuman animals as those who are cruel to them might be more disposed to being cruel in their dealings with other people.[17] This theme also features in Laudato Si', where Francis writes: 'Every act of cruelty towards any creature is "contrary to human dignity".'[18] Francis cites the Catechism (1992, 2418) here, and he cites the same phrase later on (Franciscus, 2015, 130). Whilst the second citation includes the Catechism's qualification that 'it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly', the first citation does not include this qualification. This points to a subtle difference between the text of Francis and that of the Catechism. Francis appears to question all forms of cruelty in paragraph 92. In this respect, there is no doubt that people are cruel by harming many animals needlessly in many activities, for example through hunting and fishing. Even if Francis mentions both (Franciscus, 2015, 129), he only questions a lack of control and the use of dynamite and cyanide in fishing, as well as the wastage of bycatch (Franciscus, 2015, 40-41).

3. A Critical Analysis

Both documents entertain the notion that animals would have 'intrinsic value', a concept that has played a crucial role in debates on animal ethics.[19] Many scholars have associated the claim that animals have intrinsic value with claims about what we ought (not) to do to animals, and in particular to react against theories that bestow only extrinsic value upon nonhuman animals. These Catholic texts also connect the notion of nonhuman animals having intrinsic value with claims about what we ought (not) to do to them. However, the nature of the connection is unclear, as there is no rigorous philosophical analysis of what it might mean for something to have 'intrinsic value', and what this might imply for morality. This concept is beset with the epistemological difficulty of how we can know whether something has intrinsic value. To say that an animal has four feet is clearly different from the statement that an animal has intrinsic value. The first statement can be verified by our senses, but it is not clear how we might verify whether an animal has intrinsic value.

Whilst much has been written about the concept of intrinsic value, the lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the concept is not unique to the Catholic magisterium (O'Neill). First of all, it is important to recognise that the claim that an animal has intrinsic value can either be an ontological claim or a moral claim. Ontologically, saying that 'X has intrinsic value' would mean that there is an entity X of which it can be said that it has a particular property, that of having intrinsic value. I think this claim must be understood in terms of the claim that X has value for itself, rather than for something else (extrinsic value). This, in turn, can be understood in two ways. Either X can value the existence of X, or X can value things that contribute to the existence of X. Epistemologically, it is not easy to know whether either might apply to a nonhuman animal. In the former sense, an animal X would possess intrinsic value if X values its own existence. This presupposes that the animal in question has both the concept of its own existence and the capacity to ponder the value of its existence. In the latter sense, we might claim that an animal X has intrinsic value merely because X is capable of appreciating things that contribute to its existence. Even if a dog, for example, would not know why she appreciates food (for example, to stay alive), on the latter understanding it would suffice for

us to know that the dog likes food to be able to say that the dog has intrinsic value. Following Rolston (2012), one might say that the dog is 'value-able', or able to value things.

The claim that X has intrinsic value, however, is most frequently understood in terms of a moral claim. Whilst some would argue that moral claims must be understood in terms of ontological claims about reality,[20] I believe that it is better to understand a moral claim not as referring to a state of affairs, but as an expectation that X ought to be valued or respected, that some things ought and some things ought not to be done to X. Morally, the claim that 'X has intrinsic value' could then be understood in either of two ways. Firstly, it could mean that X ought to value itself, as any value that would be given to X by another, say Y, would, by definition, be an extrinsic value. In this sense, it is not straightforward to say that a nonhuman entity would have intrinsic value as it presupposes that the entity in question ought to value itself in a manner that would be analogous to how moral agents value things. It would, for example, presuppose the validity of the ontological claim that nonhuman entities have the capacities to compare different entities, needs, or interests, and to decide which entity, interest, or need ought to be granted priority over another. Arguably, this moral capacity would require highly developed cognitive capacities that may not be possessed by most, if not all nonhuman entities.

The second interpretation is to understand the claim that 'X has intrinsic value' as 'a moral agent ought to value X because X has the ontological capacity either to value its own existence of (the possession or non-possession of) other things'. Thus, it would be an imprecise way to say that moral agents, for example Y, ought to value X not because Y would value X (extrinsically), but because X would value either its own existence or (the possession or non-possession of) other things for its existence. I think it is this sense that is usually being referred to when people talk, in a moral context, about intrinsic value, rather than about instrumental or extrinsic value. If we apply the first ontological understanding of intrinsic value here, a moral agent would ascribe moral value to the intrinsic value of a nonhuman entity if they would bestow value on the entity's presumed capacity to value its own existence. If we apply the second ontological understanding, moral value would be ascribed to the intrinsic value of an entity if the entity in question is deemed capable of valuing other things. The latter conception is the most popular account of intrinsic value in animal ethics, and the one that I adopt. In order to possess intrinsic value, an animal would not need to possess the capacity to value its own existence, but only the capacity to value particular things that are conducive to its own existence, for example the absence of pain or the presence of food. In this light, many theories in animal ethics value animals because they would possess particular interests, even if these might not include an interest in their own existence.[21]

Table 1 summarises this understanding of the concept of intrinsic value. I refer to accounts that only apply the notion of 'intrinsic value' to entities that value their own existence as the more selective account as it would apply the notion to very few beings on the assumption that mainstream approaches in animal ethics are correct to assume that few entities are capable of valuing their existence. The less selective account applies the notion to a much greater range of beings. I have emboldened the words in the bottom right cell of the table as this sums up what most scholars in animal ethics think when they talk about the intrinsic value of nonhuman animals.

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Table 1: Different conceptions of intrinsic value in animal ethics.		
Intrinsic value	Ontological meanings	Moral meanings
More selective account	X values its existence.	Y values X because X values its existence.
Less selective account	X values things that support its existence.	**Y values X because X values things that support its existence.**

It is important to highlight that merely recognising that animals have intrinsic value does not solve all problems. The important questions that remain to be answered are why it should matter that animals have particular interests, and how much weight we should give to one animal's value relative to the intrinsic value of another thing. However, this does not imply that a good moral theory should avoid settling the issue of how to conceive of intrinsic value. Indeed, the reason discussions of intrinsic value have been so important in the literature on animal ethics stems from the view that, without attributing the notion to nonhuman entities, the only value that such entities would have is the value that they have for moral agents. Whereas there is no doubt that nonhuman entities have great extrinsic value for moral agents, a moral theory that only values nonhuman entities for their extrinsic value is likely to lead to the kind of anthropocentrism that Francis fulminates against. It is true that we might bestow great value on nonhuman animals on extrinsic grounds, think for example of the great value that some people bestow upon companion animals, and that this might, de facto, imply that these animals' own interests are protected. However, without a theory of intrinsic value, it would be hard to make a moral difference between discarding a plant and discarding a companion animal. It might be argued that we should feel differently about one than about the other, and that this might be sufficient to do the moral work. Whilst I have some sympathy for this (relational) view, I do not think that it is sufficient. Rather, our moral feelings should track, at least to some extent, some objective aspects of external reality, which in this case might be a companion animal having more significant interests than a plant.

The emergence of animal ethics as an academic discipline must be seen at least in part as a reaction against strong anthropocentric accounts that ignore these ontological features of reality. This is why the lack of theorisation about intrinsic value in these texts is so problematic. It is unclear which ontological and moral understandings of intrinsic value the authors of these Catholic texts had in mind. Whereas the notion of intrinsic value is invoked in the Catechism to question the inappropriate use of nature, it is unclear which practices would be inappropriate. Whilst Francis questions human use more, it remains unclear in which circumstances he would (not) approve of the human subjugation of particular entities that have intrinsic value. This lack of clarity is compounded by the fact that God is the primary evaluator in Catholic thought. This raises the question whether the value that some entity assigns either to itself or to other things might be compatible with the value that God would attribute to it, and what its moral implications might be. This is also unclear.

In spite of God being the main decision-maker, the power of human beings over other things is also emphasised, raising the question when the intrinsic value of an entity ought and when it ought not to be prioritised over its extrinsic value for humanity. Only human beings are said to have been created 'in the image of God'.[22] In the Catechism, this conception of the human

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being is connected with that of personhood, as well as with the idea that the human person 'is not only something, but also someone'.[23] Whilst the claim that people have been granted dominion over everything that exists, apart from God, does not imply that everything else is conceived as a collection of objects, the fact that the concept of being 'someone' is not applied to nonhuman entities opens the door to ignoring their intrinsic values (Catechism, 1992, 2415). Interestingly, the title that the Christian tradition bestowed upon Jesus ('*Dominus*', 'Lord') is closely related to the notion of dominion ('*dominatus*'). The rest of creation would be subservient, expressed in the words '*subsidiorum*' and '*inservire*', the latter being closely related etymologically to the Latin word for slave ('*servus*') (Catechism, 1992, 2456-2457). It is possible that there is a divine being with such power, and that this being has given us the job of looking after the rest of the universe, but accepting this possibility as a true state of affairs fails to convince me. The idea that nonhuman things are destined for humanity sounds rather arrogant to me. If this were the case, it would imply that the billions of years of evolution of life on this planet when human beings were not there would merely be a preparation for the advent of humanity. It also raises the question why other things would exist elsewhere in the universe and when human beings will be extinct. The fact that people use particular things and that this might be morally good need not necessarily go hand in hand with the idea that nonhuman entities should be seen primarily as a collection of human resources. Whilst people must use other things to look after themselves, it is also possible to recognise this fact without thinking that a divine being has justified this or that other things, like good slaves, would aspire to serve human beings. An account that appeals more to me is to think that other living things care predominantly about their own survival and the survival of some of their species members, rather than about humanity.

Whilst it is laudable that Francis (2015, 2) challenges people who forget that they 'are dust of the earth', I believe that he fosters this forgetfulness at the same time by elevating human beings above nature, for example by claiming that 'Christian thought sees human beings as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures' (Francis, 2015, 119). Whilst this ontological division and hierarchy between humanity (superior) and nonhuman nature (inferior), except God, does not, ipso facto, justify an exploitative attitude towards nonhuman animals, if a value-neutral perception of reality is not possible, this ontological division might both stem from and reinforce an unjustifiable instrumentalisation of nonhuman, non-divine nature. The reverse may also be true, as recognised by Deane-Drummond (2016, 411) where she writes that 'the knowledge that distinctive human consciousness did not come about alone, but in companion with other creatures, might give pause for deeper reflection before treating such creatures as having purely instrumental worth'.

The clearest articulation of his apparent lack of appreciation of this knowledge is found where Francis (2015, 81) writes that 'our capacity to reason' is a sign of our 'uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology', the emergence of which 'presupposes a direct action of God', and which would invite us 'to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object'. I reject the idea that anything 'transcends the spheres of physics and biology', if what is meant by this is a division between a divine and a natural reality. Deane-Drummond (2016, 398) is very polite where she states that this text signifies Francis's 'tension between his approach to natural science and theology', as this text smacks of dualisms between God-nature, human-nonhuman, subject-object, where the first term in each pair is regarded as superior to the second, and where the suggestion is made

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that this superiority grants some the power either to create or to objectify others. This superiority is also emphasised a little bit further on. As humanity depends on God, so nonhuman nature appears to depend on humanity, as Francis (2015, 83) writes that humanity is 'called to lead all creatures back to their Creator', a theme that also appears in the Catechism (1992, 358). I do not know what this means, but the theme that human beings must do particular things to bring back or redeem nonhuman entities is rooted deeply into Christianity.[24] Whilst the idea is a logical possibility, it fails to convince me, and the idea that humanity must 'lead' suggests a superiority that I reject. Whilst I agree with Catholic thought that we ought to bestow special moral significance upon humanity, I reject the view that human beings are superior compared to other animals. Adopting the former does not imply that one also ought to adopt the latter.

Whilst the power of human beings over other things is limited, given that it must be exercised in line with the divine will, which is why Francis (2015, 82) questions viewing 'other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination', it is unclear to me whether there is a divine will or what such a will might be. In spite of Francis's text, we must objectify other living beings in order to live ourselves. It is unclear, for example, whether Francis would see the killing of nonhuman animals in general or the killing of particular animals as instances of treating them as 'mere objects'. He does not seem to be too concerned, given that he never questions the human killing of other animals. Nevertheless, what is clear, and more so in Laudato Si' than in the Catechism, is that the notion of nonhuman things having intrinsic value is invoked to question the unrestrained usage of nonhuman entities by human beings for their own ends. This is a welcome message in an age wherein human beings exploit nonhuman nature in an unprecedented way, which is probably the main concern that engages Francis here. Whilst Francis appears to be concerned mainly about the scale, the manner in which human beings use nonhuman nature is questioned as well, for example in relation to his discussion of cruelty. Whilst human cruelty is questioned, this is never associated directly with the practices that turn living animals into dead products for human consumption.

An interesting question is whether the Catechism prohibits the human killing of animals. The official English translation suggests that we should avoid actions that cause animals to 'die needlessly', but this is likely to be a questionable translation of the Latin text, where the word '*inutiliter*' (needlessly) may apply only to actions that result in the infliction of pain ('*dolores inferre*') (Catechism, 1992, 2418). Does the Catechism question here all actions that cause animals to die? If this were the case, the Catechism might be perceived to demand that people adopt largely vegan diets, for example, or at least diets that do not rely on the intentional killing of animals. I think this interpretation is highly unlikely as I am not familiar with any texts where the magisterium either questions all intentional killing of nonhuman animals or recommends largely vegan diets. I believe that the Latin word that is translated in English by 'die' ('*dilapidare*') must rather be translated in terms of a particular kind of destruction. Etymologically, the word '*dilapidare*' is closely related to the word '*lapis*' ('stone'), which is why I think that only particular kinds of destruction are questioned here, for example those associated with stoning someone to death. In spite of the fact that Francis (2015, 92, 130) cites this text from the Catechism twice, his concern with the use of dynamite and cyanide in fishing, as well as the wastage of bycatch, are based on the view that the former has negative impacts on ecosystems and that the latter might jeopardise human food security, rather than on a concern with the human killing of nonhuman animals per se (Francis, 2015, 40-41). In relation

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to the exhortation not to inflict pain needlessly, I agree with Frías Urrea (2014) that it remains unclear when the magisterium would consider the infliction of pain to be unnecessary.

I agree with the magisterium that, at least in some situations, people should be allowed to kill animals in order to feed and to clothe themselves, as well as to domesticate them. However, formal logic does not demand that we connect our care for animals with these examples of usage. Caring for animals might also be compatible with avoiding animal consumption, domestication, and experimentation. If we take the Catechism's text about animal experimentation literally, hardly any of it would be justifiable, at least if it is agreed that experimenters can hardly ever be reasonably sure in advance of an experiment whether or not animal experiments might help human beings.[25] In relation to the taming of animals, the Catechism makes no distinction between situations where this might be justified more easily, for example the use of cows and bulls in agriculture where not using them would cause a significant reduction in human food security, and situations where I believe this to be much more difficult to justify, for example the taming of birds by locking them into cages so that people can admire their beauty. It is also questionable whether the Catechism does well in demanding that we reserve the concept of '*affectio*' for relationships between human beings, even if there are likely to be unjustifiable modes of showing one's affection towards nonhuman animals, for example bestiality.

It is time to take stock. These Catholic texts adopt the view that nonhuman entities have intrinsic value, but the ontological and moral meanings of this much-debated concept have not been articulated. Ontologically, the concept might be associated with the view that animals have interests, where moral discussions might argue that these ought to be granted moral significance. However, as an analysis of intrinsic value is lacking, we are left in the lurch as to what the precise role of this concept is in these texts' questioning of the unrestrained human usage of nonhuman animals and how we should weigh the intrinsic values of different entities. Whilst I embrace this questioning wholeheartedly, it does not go far enough. This stems partly from my unease with these texts adopting the views that human beings have dominion over other animals and that all nonhuman animals are destined for the good of humanity, who are elevated above other animals. As this elevation would imply that we should not reduce each other to the status of objects by virtue of our reasoning capacities, the implication is that those who are not thus elevated can be reduced to the status of objects. Whilst I agree with the condemnation of all forms of cruelty, it remains unclear when and why the infliction of pain or death on an animal would lack moral justification.

4. A Weak Anthropocentric Alternative to Recent Catholic Thought on Animal Ethics

Both the Catechism and Laudato Si' raise questions about the moral duties we have towards nonhuman animals. Little is said about the particular ways in which humans use other animals. With regard to the use of animals for clothing and for experimentation, I agree with the view that using animals for these purposes should be permitted in some situations, for example where people lack the means to wear other suitable clothing or where the experiment might help the animal in question. However, in spite of the fact that Francis (2015, 68) questions

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what he calls 'a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures', his outlook remains strongly anthropocentric. Whilst his anthropocentrism is qualified theocentrically in the sense that the human treatment of nonhuman entities must abide by divine rules, nonhuman things are perceived to have been designed as resources for humanity. There is no mention of people being resources for other entities, in spite of the fact that there should be no scientific doubt that the human body is being used by other organisms whilst we are alive and is completely consumed by other organisms after death. The view that nonhuman entities have been designed to be human resources is also used to legitimise their use. Because of this strong anthropocentric framework, the writers of these documents are likely to think that we should be entitled to use nonhuman animals for clothing and experimentation in many situations where it would not be acceptable to do so in the weak anthropocentric perspective that I adopt. This is why, in relation to the Catechism's treatment of animal experimentation, for example, Aseneta (2017, 234) has pointed out rightly that 'almost any experiment would appear to be permissible, if it is justified as an effort to care for or save human lives'.

Whilst I object to this view, I will focus in the remainder of this article on sketching the contours of a weak anthropocentric alternative to what these Catholic texts imply for the human use of nonhuman animals for food, challenging what Frías Urrea has called the 'cold Thomistic intellectualism' that underpins the current position.[26] I call my approach weak anthropocentric not because I agree with the Catholic position that, ontologically, a divine being would have bestowed upon humanity a central place and subordinated all else in the universe to humanity. I disagree with the position that a divine being has given cosmological priority to the human species and entrusted the care of all else to humanity. The reason my approach is anthropocentric does not stem from the ontological claim that humanity would have a central place in the cosmos, but from a moral conviction that it matters morally whether or not a particular entity is a member of Homo sapiens, as members of our species should be granted moral priority. I am a speciesist as I believe that mere membership of the human species is sufficient to be granted a level of moral significance that should exceed the moral significance that we should give to any member of any other species. My speciesism is weak as, whilst human beings should be given moral priority, many nonhuman animals, and particularly those who are the most closely related to us biologically, ought to be granted almost as much moral significance as human beings. Contrary to Martin (2021), the first step towards greater recognition of the interests of nonhuman animals does not lie in a 'reduction of speciesist prejudices'. Rather, it lies in the recognition that speciesism is not the only thing that matters. Evolutionism matters too. It is an extension of speciesism in that it attributes some moral significance to how closely nonhuman animals are related to us (Deckers, 2016). In addition, the experiential capacities of nonhuman entities matter, where an organism X with smaller capacities might sometimes justifiably be attributed less moral significance compared to another organism Y, even if X may be more closely related to me.

My position is anthropocentric not only in outcome, but also in method. I think not only that the interests of human beings should prevail over the like interests of members of other species, but also that morality is best conceived as an attempt to determine what our morally significant interests are, and which should be prioritised over others. Without denying that other things have interests (including an interest in being treated well), I think that people should focus on the following question when they theorise morally: How should human interests be weighed up? What I mean by an interest here is what the Catholic theologian Janssens calls the good ('*bonum*'). In his

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words: 'We experience that certain realities are suitable or beneficial for one or more dimensions of our person. Hence we call them goods' (Janssens, 1999, 56). This focus on the human person does not mean that non-human interests or goods are insignificant. Rather, they are subsumed already in the question of what is important to the human person. It is undoubtedly important for human beings to recognise and to defend morally important non-human interests, or —in the words of Janssens (1999, 56)— 'that we aim at the protection of the total system'. Without doing so, we are unable to make moral decisions, which is fundamental to moral beings.

This is tantamount to the position that human health, conceived holistically, is paramount in moral theory. Applied to the specific issue of whether or not we ought to consume animal products, the question must therefore be asked whether doing so serves human health optimally. In earlier work, I have shown that human diets that contain animal products tend to have more negative health effects than other diets, including those associated with climate change, hunger, the development of new diseases (including new viruses), and the loss of biodiversity (Deckers, 2016). Although people also have an interest in eating animal products, despite these physical consequences, I think that we should also remember to look after our mental health interests. In this regard, I think it may be important to avoid eating animals, especially those who are genetically closely related to us. Many people will recognise that there are problems associated with eating human beings who had died naturally, even if we could eliminate physical health risks. Because of my evolutionist position, similar problems beset the consumption of other animals, even if they had died natural deaths. Whilst our interest in not eating animals does not distinguish between eating animals whom we have killed and those who have died naturally, I believe that we also have an additional interest in avoiding the consumption of animal products where doing so necessitates the killing of animals, and especially of those who are closely related to us and of those with relatively highly developed experiential capabilities. The moral relevance of these interests, as well as of how to balance these with our interest in eating animal products, has been argued elsewhere (Deckers, 2016, esp. 159-165).

These interests are paradoxical as I defend the importance of eating animal products and the importance of abstaining from the consumption of animal products at the same time. In some situations, the consumption of animal products is moral, whereas in other situations it is immoral. In each situation, we must address the question of which interest we should prioritise. In a situation where we have to choose between dying or staying alive by eating an animal, I think it is responsible to eat an animal. However, in many other situations where we can eat plants to feed ourselves and where the use of plants is ecologically sound, I think that it is better not to use animal products. In other words, I advocate qualified moral veganism: in most cases, abstaining from the consumption of animal products serves human health optimally.

5. Objections and Refutations

Qualified moral veganism is not free from controversy. In the final section of this article, I would like to engage briefly with five putative objections that deserve serious consideration.

A first objection stems from those who argue, together with a reviewer of this article, that it is problematic to base a moral position on an evolutionist interest. This objection can itself be

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split into two different objections. The first is that it would be wrong to base a moral position on human interests. To do so would be to commit the is-ought fallacy, or to derive a moral obligation from a non-moral fact. Whilst I agree that it is logically impossible to derive a normative claim from a non-normative fact, I also believe that it is impossible not to base ethics on a study of what our interests actually are. This is because any ontological classification of human interests includes the human interest in acting morally. Whilst it is not the case that all human interests, think for example of the interest that some may have in torturing animals, are good, it is impossible to understand morality without recourse to a study of human interests. The crucial thing for moral theory is to distinguish morally irrelevant interests, e.g. whether to wear green or blue socks, from morally relevant interests, for example whether to value morally an interest in inflicting pain or an interest in avoiding the infliction of pain on another. When I speak of an evolutionist interest, I do not argue that we ought to prioritise those who are biologically closely related to us, ceteris paribus, because they are closely related to us. To do so would be to commit the is-ought fallacy. Rather, I argue that we ought to prioritise those who are biologically closely related to us, ceteris paribus, because the feeling that those who are biologically closely related to us matter more, ceteris paribus, is deeply ingrained in us. It is a fundamental human interest. This takes me to the second part of the objection: whilst it might be granted that morality should be based on human interests, one might reject the view that evolutionism is a morally significant human interest. Just as we do not attribute moral significance to the pleasure that some might derive from torturing animals, we should not attribute any moral significance either to the feeling that some may have that those who are biologically closely related to us matter more. Many scholars in animal ethics would have it that we should focus mostly on whether or not animals can feel pain, and to what extent they might be able to experience it, and turn a blind eye to the question of what species the animals in question belong. For them, the idea that we ought to value not inflicting pain on another is an unargued axiom, even if many contend otherwise. I do not dispute the value, but I argue that other unargued axioms matter too, including the interest in attributing greater value to those who are biologically more closely related to us. Elsewhere, I have discussed this issue in greater detail, for example against the charge that defending evolutionism is tantamount to defending racism (Deckers, 2016, 82-83).

A second objection can be summed up in this way: there is nothing wrong with the consumption of animal products, as long as animals were not intentionally harmed in the process, either by being killed or by being made to feel pain. For example, it would be appropriate to eat animals who had been the victims of traffic accidents. My counterargument is that there are other things that matter in our relationships with animals. People do not eat human victims from traffic accidents either. Why? I think this is about recognising a bond with other human beings that connects us with these human beings, even when they are no longer alive. This bond would be violated if we consumed them. It would be as if we were eating them whilst alive. Some non-vegans will probably recognise that they have such a bond with some others, for example when they consider the thought of consuming human bodies or companion animals. This bond may be weaker with nonhuman animals, with animals who are more distantly related to us, and with animals who are not companion animals, but it does not mean that the bond is not there, even when people manage to suppress this bond in the interest of consuming animals. My claim is that the human interest in consuming animals should rarely be strong enough to override this feeling of kinship, which would be incompatible with consuming animals. The feeling that there is something wrong with the consumption of an-

imal products may be less pronounced when these products can be separated from animals without undermining their integrity. This is why, at least in some situations, the consumption of unfertilised eggs and milk products may be less problematic. However, I think the feeling that there is something that is problematic might also be there, even if widely accepted practices may have suppressed it in many people.

A third objection is that, where vegan diets harm more animals compared to other diets, it would be better to adopt other diets. Indeed, a vegan diet is not necessarily better for non-human animals. Consider, for example, arable farming, which kills many animals, for example when ploughing. A 'carnist' who kills, freezes and eats a large animal such as a bull, could therefore kill fewer animals than a vegan, because they would eat fewer plants and, therefore, rely less on arable farming, a term that is used here —as in recent publications of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations[27]— to refer to land that is regularly cultivated for growing annual or biennial crops. One might even bolster this objection by pointing out that many forms of deliberate killing can inflict death quickly and with relatively little pain compared to the unintended killing that goes on in arable farming. Four things are important in assessing this important objection. Firstly, there is a moral difference between intentionally and accidentally causing harm, where at least some arable cropping systems, for example organic systems that do not use insecticides, mainly cause accidental harm. Although it may not make much of a difference to many victims whether or not their being killed or injured is deliberate, I think that it is more problematic for us to kill and to inflict pain deliberately than to do so foreseeably, at least when it is not in the interest of the animal to be killed, for example to release an animal from great pain or suffering (euthanasia). Secondly, not only numbers matter, but also the kind of animal whom we harm through inflicting pain or death. I think that we should be particularly concerned with harming those animals who are closely related to us and those who have highly developed experiential capacities (Deckers, 2016). Whilst it is impossible to determine what the experiential capacities of non-human animals might be, I think that a 1 day old chicken in an egg, for example, experiences less than a 38 day old chicken, and that it is less problematic to kill the former. If we apply this to the context of arable farming, the fact that some forms of arable farming, for example forms with minimal ploughing, kill mainly insects who are less closely related to us and who may have lesser experiential capacities than mammals, for example, is morally relevant. Thirdly, whilst it is theoretically possible for carnists to cause less pain, suffering, and death on other animals, this theoretical possibility may not be common in practice. The reason for this is that many animals who are consumed by humans also consume plants from arable farming. Although some animals are fed exclusively on non-cultivated crops and crops that require relatively little tillage, such as grasses, the farmed animals' sector generally uses a large amount of arable land. A recent study estimates that 40% of the world's cultivated arable land is used to grow crops consumed by nonhuman animals (Mottet; de Haan; Falcucci, 2017). Finally, we must not only consider what the consumption of animals means for nonhuman animals, but also what it means for ourselves. Whilst some carnists inflict less harm on other animals compared to some vegans, this does not provide a definitive argument in favour of the carnist view. We must also consider what the consumption of animal products does to the physical and mental health of human beings. Whilst I do not have the scope here to assess its impacts on our physical health,[28] I have mentioned above that an important consideration should be what eating animal products implies for our bonds with other animals.

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A fourth objection is the following: if other life forms apart from animals are also related to us and have experiences, and if it is impossible to know what other things do or do not experience, then it is arbitrary to draw a moral line between the consumption of animals and the consumption of other organisms. In a sense, it is true that this line is arbitrary. However, humans are moral beings. I believe that an interest in drawing clear boundaries is part and parcel of morality (although it is, of course, also good to question these boundaries). Whilst I think that it is hard to separate animals from other biological organisms both biologically as well as morally and that we cannot know what other entities may or may not experience, I do think that we are affected more by the pleasure and suffering of animals than by the experiences that plants may or may not have. If I am right that we are affected more by the fact that a lot of pain and suffering is experienced in a slaughterhouse than by the possibility that arable farmers and gardeners may also inflict a great deal of pain and suffering on plants, then I think we should take this difference seriously. Nevertheless, vegans should continue to reflect on the fact that they create a moral discontinuity in a world where, ontologically, there is only continuity.

A fifth objection is this one: veganism compromises human health as our specific human biology necessitates the consumption of animal products. It is undoubtedly the case that people can survive by eating animal products, and that this is sometimes necessary. Homo sapiens is an omnivore. A few decades ago, the claim was even made that Homo sapiens owes her relatively large brain to eating animal products (Aiello; Wheeler, 1995). This was disputed later on: our large brain would be mainly due to learning to use fire, which allowed us to cook (Wrangham; Conklin-Brittain, 2003). This has also been challenged, for example by the view that we have evolved to thrive optimally on a raw vegan diet (Alvaro, 2020). Although there is no doubt that more will be written on this issue, it is increasingly being accepted that human beings do not necessarily endanger their health by sticking to a vegan diet throughout life.[29]

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have engaged with some important texts from the recent Catholic magisterium with the aim to throw light on how it sees the relationship between humanity and other animals and what this would imply for animal ethics, focussing in particular on the ethics associated with consuming animal products. The Catechism claims that God has given humanity dominion over non-human things, which would exist in order to be used by humanity. Whilst Laudato Si' questions human subjugation more and claims that it might prevent us from recognising the intrinsic value of other things, there is no rigorous analysis of the concept of 'intrinsic value' and of what its recognition might imply for humanity's predominantly instrumental valuations of nonhuman animals. I questioned the idea that a divine being would both legitimise human rule and bestow upon humanity a central cosmological place, and I rejected the strong anthropocentric perspective that underpins these texts. As an alternative, I sketched a weak anthropocentric perspective that demands human beings to adopt qualified moral veganism. Making an ethical decision means that, in every situation, every person should make the decision that causes the most good or the least harm to himself or herself as an integral person. If this principle is acceptable and if vegan diets cause less damage in many, but not all situations, people who can adopt such diets ought to do so in all situations

where such diets promote the greatest good. The greatest good for each individual moral agent is, by necessity, the greatest good for all concerned.

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Notas al final

1. See e.g. Callicott 1980.
2. For an exploration of less recent Catholic thinking, see Deckers 1992.
3. See e.g. Thompson 2016.
4. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 358: '*Deus omnia creavit pro homine*' and 2415: '*Animalia, et etiam plantae atque entia inanimata bono communi destinantur generis humani*.' See also 2402. Note that paragraphs 2402-2418, of which some deal with the topic of animals, engage with this matter in the context of a discussion of the seventh commandment, the duty to respect property and the prohibition to steal.
5. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2415: '*dominatus super entia inanimata et alia viventia*'.

6. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2456: '*dominatus subsidiorum mineralium, vegetalium et animalium universi mundi*'.

7. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2457: '*iustae satisfactioni necessitatum hominis inservire*'.

8. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2417: '*Legitimum igitur est animalibus uti ad nutrimentum vel ad vestes conficiendas*'.

9. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2417: '*si … ad vitas humanas curandas conferant vel salvandas*'.

10. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2416: '*homines eis debent benevolentiam*'.

11. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 2418: '*humanae dignitati … contrarium animalibus inutiliter dolores inferre et eorum dilapidare vitas.*'

12. Franciscus 2015, 140: '*intrinsecum bonum*'.

13. Franciscus 2015, 115: '*intrinsecum … bonum*'.

14. Franciscus 2015, 33: '*dum obliviscimur eas in se ipsas valere*'.

15. Franciscus 2015, 16: '*uniuscuiusque creaturae bonum proprium*'.

16. Franciscus 2015, 69: '*prorsus subici*'.

17. See e.g. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, q.102, a.6.

18. Franciscus 2015, 92: '*Quodvis cuiuslibet creaturae tormentum "humanae dignitati est contrarium".*'

19. See e.g. Sprigge 1987.

20. See e.g. Moore 1903.

21. See e.g.: Singer 1975; Deckers 2016.

22. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 16: '*ad Dei imaginem*'.

23. Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae, 357: '*non est solum res aliqua, sed aliquis*'.

24. See e.g. Grizzle; Barrett 1998.

25. See e.g.: Greek; Kramer 2019; Crutchfield 2020.

26. Frías Urrea op.cit., p. 125: 'el frío intelectualismo tomista'.

27. See e.g. Steinfeld et al. 2007.

28. See e.g. Deckers 2016, pp. 167-190.

29. See e.g. American Dietetic Association 2009.

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