

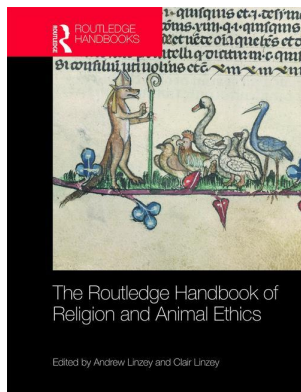
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ANIMALS IN CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM THOUGHT

Creatures, Creation, and Killing for Food

Carl Tobias Frayne

Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened.

– *Anatole France*

Introduction

In industrialized societies where mechanistic forms of killing have become the norm, animal exploitation is more widespread than ever before. Animals (with the exception of companion animals) are often seen as little more than mere objects, commodities, or food machines to be used for human ends. The number of animals exploited is staggering; in the United States alone, fifty-eight billion of them are killed each year, and countless others suffer various forms of ill-treatment such as being hunted for sport or used in fights for entertainment.

Yet at the same time, moral sensitivity to animals has grown significantly in the past forty years. Philosophers such as Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and many other contemporary ethicists have argued that the inclusion of certain animals in our circle of moral concern is rationally justified. Could concern for animals also be warranted on theological grounds? A rising number of religious scholars are now speaking out against animal abuse.¹ However, these individuals tend to draw influence primarily from the secular Western animal rights movement, and their views remain well outside the religious mainstream.

In this chapter, I shall offer a comparative exegesis and critical assessment of the Christian and Muslim views of animals. This chapter is divided into three parts. First, I shall examine the similarities between the Christian and Muslim views on the place of animals in creation. Second, I shall look at the two greatest moral exemplars of the two traditions. Third, I shall address the issue of diet and the broader ethical implications of killing for food. My hope is to show that Christianity and Islam are much more sympathetic to the cause of animals than it is often presumed and that these traditions can provide valuable insights into our relations with our fellow creatures.

Christianity and Islam on the Place of Animals and Humans in Creation

Subordination and Exploitation

It is sometimes claimed that animals can be exploited because humans have dominion over them. At first glance, there appears to be scriptural evidence supporting this thesis. Genesis 1 tells us, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and *rule* the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”² Carol Bakhos notes that the Hebrew word translated here as “rule” is *radâ*, which means “power, authority and control of an individual or group over another.”³ Similarly, the Qur’an states, “[Allah] has subjected to [humans] *all* that is in the heavens and on earth.”⁴ Thus, it seems that God created a clear hierarchical system in which humans have authority over all other creatures. As St. Thomas Aquinas writes, “all animals are naturally subject to man.”⁵ Hans Küng goes even further and claims that the whole creation is for humankind: “God wills *nothing* but man’s advantage, man’s true greatness and his ultimate dignity. This then is God’s only wish: man’s well-being.”⁶ It is easy to see how such claims lead some to assert that animal exploitation is justified because it is God’s will for creation. In this view, only human beings, human suffering, and human well-being matter. For some, it seems that the order of creation is such that animals are made to be dominated as slaves by humans, who are not only the pinnacle of creation but also its sole purpose.⁷

In truth, subordination need not entail exploitation. It does not follow from the fact that humans are given dominion over the animals that they can use them as they wish, with no moral limitations whatsoever. As Bakhos rightly argues, “hierarchy . . . does not perforce lead to unmitigated subjugation.”⁸ Likewise, Paul Waldau writes that “differences in . . . hierarchy . . . do not *automatically* imply the propriety of dominance, let alone tyranny.”⁹ The higher hierarchical position of humans over other creatures is not analogous to the relationship between master and slave; it is more akin to the relationship between a father and his children. If a father plants rose bushes in his garden, this does not mean that his children are allowed to trample upon them carelessly. By analogy, humans, as children of the Almighty Father, ought not to treat animals in a reckless manner. Proverbs tells us that “a righteous man cares for the needs of his animal.”¹⁰ A hadith recounts the story of a woman who was harshly reprimanded for imprisoning her cat.¹¹ In the same way, the Qur’an specifies, “This she-camel of God is a sign to you; so leave her to graze in God’s earth, and let her come to no harm, or you shall be seized with a grievous punishment.”¹² Therefore, it is clear that there are moral constraints in both Christianity and Islam as to how humans ought to treat animals.

Theocentrism

One may maintain that humans are entitled to use animals for their own ends and that even if animals do have moral worth, they were created for the benefit of humans alone. As Abu A’la Maududi claims, “everything has been harnessed for [man]. He has been endowed with the power to subdue [animals] and make them serve his objectives.”¹³ Various Qur’anic verses suggest that animals benefit humans: “[it is he who creates] horses and mules and asses for you to ride.”¹⁴ Stressing the moral implications of this account, St. Thomas writes that it is an error to say “that it is sinful for man to kill brute animals, for by divine providence they are intended for man’s use according to the order of nature. Hence it is not wrong for man to make use of them, either by killing them, or in any other way whatever.”¹⁵ It may be argued that it is only a small step from this position to conclude that animals have only instrumental value; they been created

to serve human interests. In other words, the sole *raison d'être* of animals, in this view, is service to humankind.

It does not follow from the fact that creation benefits humankind that creation's sole purpose is to serve humans. It is crucial to stress that the Christian and Muslim worldviews are *theocentric*; God is the locus of all value. Centuries of anthropocentrism have greatly obscured this fundamental theological point.¹⁶ The anthropocentric view of creation is arrogant and petty, as well as biblically and Qur'anically inaccurate; it deifies the human species. By putting humankind on a golden pedestal, we have turned ourselves into the idols we sought to abolish. This kind of idolatry rests on the assumption that "the interests of human beings [are] the sole, main, or even exclusive concern of God the Creator."¹⁷ This assumption belies the Christian and Muslim views of humans' place in creation.

In reality, for Christians and Muslims, humans are not the measure of all things; creation is first and foremost for the glory of God.¹⁸ Both the Qur'an and the Bible specify that creation belongs to the Creator: "to Him belong all that is, in the heavens and in the earth"¹⁹; "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."²⁰ Thus, humans do not own animals, let alone the rest of nature; they are, alongside other living beings, part and parcel of creation. Indeed, all creatures originate from the same divine source and share the same inexorable fate: "all things have been created through Him,"²¹ and "what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return."²²

The Creator's interests go beyond the human species. As it is stated in the Qur'an, "the earth He has assigned to *all living creatures*."²³ There are also numerous biblical passages that point to the importance of the more-than-human world: "The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made."²⁴ "Look at the birds in the sky! They do not plant or harvest. They do not even store grain in barns. Yet *your Father in heaven takes care of them*."²⁵ The church father Basil of Caesarea asserted as early as the fourth century that "animals live not for us alone, but for themselves and for God."²⁶ In summation, animals have intrinsic value and were not created for human purposes alone. We should not judge them from our severely limited anthropocentric perspective but should always treat them with the respect they deserve as God's creatures.²⁷

Responsibility

In what sense are animals then subordinated to humans? After all, the Qur'an clearly states that humans have a special place in creation: "certainly, we have created Man in the best make."²⁸ And the Bible declares that God has made humans in his "image and likeness."²⁹ The special status of humans is that of *caretakers* of creation; God entrusted humans with the task of caring for creation.³⁰ As beings made in the *imago Dei*, we are commissioned by God to look after the world. As Andrew Linzey writes, "this image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his *activity* and *function*. This function is to represent God's lordship to the lower orders of creation."³¹ Similarly, paraphrasing the Qur'an, Jaafar Sheikh Idris argues that "[humans] shall be rulers who shall judge among the others in accordance with [God's] commands."³²

It should be borne in mind that all human power is derived and dependent power. We are both lamb and shepherd; we lead, but ultimately, we are also led. As such, we must look after animals as God looks after his creation – namely, with care, compassion, and love. This is clearly expressed in Genesis, where humans are placed in the Garden of Eden to keep it and serve the creatures living in it.³³ We are to tend rather than exploit, to serve rather than dominate, and to

cherish rather than abuse. Moreover, as the caretakers of creation, humans are responsible for the way in which they treat animals. As Karl Barth explicitly contends, “if there is a freedom of man to kill animals, this signifies in any case the adoption of a qualified and in some sense enhanced responsibility.”³⁴ This responsibility is the duty to “care for creation as God’s own representatives on earth.”³⁵ Thus, the notion of dominion is better understood as *stewardship* and “accountable authority.”³⁶ We are the custodians or vicegerents (*khalifa*)³⁷ of creation. Our only power over animals is the power to care for and look after them in accord with God’s will.³⁸

Animals’ Relation to God

Islam and Christianity suggest that animals have a direct relationship with God.³⁹ Various Qur’anic passages indicate that animals worship God in their own way: “there is not a thing but hymneth His praise; but ye understand not their praise.”⁴⁰ As Abdul Said puts it, animals “have their own form of prayer.”⁴¹ They also may receive some kind of divine revelation: “your Lord revealed to the bee, saying: ‘make hives in the mountains . . .’”⁴² This is why Muhammad Siddiq claims that “the animal world should be treated as a silent partner . . . of humankind.”⁴³ In a similar fashion, some Sufi practitioners believe that animals have a deep spiritual life that is unknown to us. For instance, Rumi asserts that animals have a “natural, God-given instinct” of which humans often lose sight due to their “intellect and false imaginings.”⁴⁴ For Rumi, animals may share a closer connection to God than many humans. In Rumi’s own words, “if only creatures had tongues; they could lift the veil from the Divine mysteries.”⁴⁵

Some Christian scholars also have argued that animals praise God. For instance, Lukas Vischer and Charles Birch claim that “all creation is a single hymn of praise in which humans, animals and nature as a whole praise God with one voice.”⁴⁶ Animals are sometimes portrayed as “bearers of God” or *imitatio Christi*, imitators of Christ.⁴⁷ For example, one story describes a deer being pursued by a hunter. As the hunter is about to kill his prey, he sees a cross in the deer’s antlers and hears the voice of God asking, “Why are you pursuing me?”⁴⁸ Albeit sometimes anthropomorphic, stories that recount the connection between God and his nonhuman creatures reiterate that animals are intrinsically valuable beings and that the Creator has interests above and beyond the human species.

Moral Exemplars

Pious individuals in both the Christian and Islamic traditions have often shown great care for animals. The Sufis Sofyan al-Thauri and Ebrahim al-Khauwas and the Catholic saints St. Francis of Assisi and St. Kevin of Ireland are among the many names that could be mentioned to illustrate this fact.⁴⁹ Describing the lives and deeds of these great saints, seers, and mystics goes beyond the scope of this chapter. Let us instead focus our attention on the two central figures of Christianity and Islam: Jesus and Muhammad.

For Christians, Jesus is God incarnate. Although many scholars acknowledge the significance of Jesus’ humanity, few have realized that this humanity is also “animality.” In other words, by taking human form, God also took animal form, for to be human is to be animal also. Hence, it would be more accurate to say that God took the form of a particular creature: man, or a human being. The Word became flesh so that we may honor *all* flesh.⁵⁰ As Stephen Webb puts it, “*all* bodies matter because God became embodied.”⁵¹ Thus, through the incarnation, God affirms the worth of all embodied creatures.⁵²

Jesus is often associated with the animal realm. For example, the author of the Gospel of Mark compares Jesus to the Passover lamb.⁵³ Jesus himself likens the lives of animals to his

itinerant life.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in the Old Testament, the Messiah is compared to a defenseless and inoffensive animal: “he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”⁵⁵ In sum, Jesus, as both divine Father and embodied son, dwells among animals and identifies with them.

It is also worth noting that many of the early Christians emphasized Jesus’ concern for the animal world.⁵⁶ As Roderic Dunkerley points out, “kindness to animals was an aspect of Christian charity which the Early Church largely ignored.”⁵⁷ There are actually several non-canonical texts that illustrate Jesus’ relations with animals. For example, in the Gospel of the Ebionites, Jesus and John the Baptist are portrayed as vegetarians. According to this gospel, Jesus rejects the Passover meal and says, “I have no desire to eat the flesh of this Paschal lamb with you.”⁵⁸ It has also been suggested that Jesus may have been a member of a Jewish sect called the Essenes, whose members were vegetarians. The historical and theological validity and reliability of these accounts are doubtful, to say the least, but they are valuable nonetheless,⁵⁹ for although the stories may be exaggerated, they shed light on the different interpretations of Jesus’ message and reveal aspects of his life that may have passed unnoticed in the canon of the New Testament. As Linzey remarks, “early apocryphal Christian literature, from the first to the eighth centuries, often developed and embellished canonical accounts of Jesus’ relations with animals.”⁶⁰ Therefore, the fact that there are various strands of Christianity, some of which evolved in parallel to the early church, that depict Jesus’ concern for animals is theologically significant.

It is important to stress that Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet. His moral teachings thus also hold true for Islam. For Muslims, Muhammad, the last prophet, is also regarded as a great moral exemplar. Indeed, the Qur’an states that he is a “beautiful model” (*uswa hasana*).⁶¹ Muhammad treated animals kindly and compassionately and encouraged Muslims to do likewise.⁶² Many hadith recount Muhammad’s compassionate behavior toward animals.⁶³ He is reported to have said that “for [charity shown to] each creature [that is alive], there is a reward”⁶⁴ and that “whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself.”⁶⁵ According to a hadith, a sinner was forgiven of all his sins after having given water to a dog dying of thirst.⁶⁶ The many ill-treatments that the Prophet condemned included hunting for sport, using animals in fights for entertainment, branding animals, or hitting an animal on the face.⁶⁷ Muhammad also reminds Muslims that they are accountable for any life they take: “if anyone wrongfully kills even a sparrow . . . he will face God’s interrogation.”⁶⁸ In short, Muhammad severely rebuked animal abuse and urged people to treat animals with benevolence and mercy.

Diet and Killing for Food

The main way that humans use animals is by eating them. One’s diet is no trivial matter; it has momentous moral implications for many areas of life, such as one’s health, the environment, and world hunger. Hence, as Webb tells us, “the unexamined meal is not worth eating.”⁶⁹ Although there have been (and still are) many individuals from various branches of Christianity⁷⁰ and Sufi orders⁷¹ who have advocated a vegetarian diet, they remain few and far between. Besides, the abstention from eating animal flesh seems, more often than not, to be an ascetic practice rather than an extension of moral consideration to animals as such. Today, the vast majority of (wealthy) Christians and Muslims consume meat, and the predominant view is that doing so is perfectly acceptable. Is this the accurate interpretation of their sacred texts? Is it congruent with the aforementioned teachings of Christianity and Islam regarding the place of animals in creation?

The Christian Diet

In the Bible, humans and other animals – who were all made on the final day of creation – were originally given a strictly vegetarian diet:

And God said, “See, *I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.* Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.⁷²

It is only *after* the Fall⁷³ that these dietary restrictions appear to be revised: “Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, *I now give you everything.*”⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the permission to kill for food is not unconditional: “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal and from each human being.”⁷⁵ Prima facie, this passage appears to be contradictory; how can one kill an animal without the shedding of blood?⁷⁶ It is important to consider these verses in light of their original context: the world had been corrupted, and God had decided to flood the earth to wash away the sins of humanity. Subsequently, God entered into a new covenant with humanity,⁷⁷ and he allowed human beings to kill for food as part of this new covenant.⁷⁸ The permission to kill seems to be a consequence of sin – a “necessary evil” for human survival.⁷⁹ The eating of flesh is therefore, *inter alia*, the result of the alienation between humans and animals, which is due to the fall of all creation. As Pope John Paul II writes, “murderous violence profoundly changes man’s environment. From being in the Garden of Eden, a place of plenty, of harmonious interpersonal relationships and friendship with God, the earth becomes the land of Nod, a place of scarcity, loneliness and separation from God.”⁸⁰

This argument is far from novel; several church fathers noted that animals and humans lived in peace and harmony in the prelapsarian world.⁸¹ For example, St. Jerome, a fourth-century doctor of the church, claims that the permission to consume animal flesh after the flood was due to “the hardness of human hearts.”⁸² More recently, John Berkman, who also argues that the consumption of animal flesh is a description of eating practices in a postlapsarian world, has pointed out that “it is not at all clear that [the eating of flesh] should be seen as a *prescription* for [all] human eating practices.”⁸³ Rather, it seems that God allows humans to kill for food under conditions of necessity – that is, when not doing so would pose a threat to human survival. This was the case in the post-flood era when food was scarce. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that the exception of the post-flood era can be turned into a permanent rule.⁸⁴

Several theologians have contended that the divinely ordained diet for humans is that of Genesis 1. The Garden of Eden should be seen as the quintessential vision of peace – “a primitive golden age” of harmonious coexistence.⁸⁵ The Catholic tradition has referred to the Edenic state as the state of “original justice.”⁸⁶ Early on, St. Basil of Caesaria invited Christians to strive to lead a life akin to that of Eden and paradise.⁸⁷ This includes refraining from consuming animal flesh, for in Eden, humans and animals lived in a state of nonviolence; there was no necessity to kill since the garden’s fruits provided them with sufficient sustenance. As Berkman explains, “eschatological abstinence is an element of a broader perceptive on the Christian life, which seeks to embody a particular vision of the world, a world that existed prior to the Fall and a world that will be restored in the *eschaton*.”⁸⁸

Whenever Christians recite the Lord’s Prayer, they pray for the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” Universal peace is at the heart of the kingdom of God. There will be “reconciliation in the world of nature,

and the ancient enmity between man and beast shall be done away.”⁸⁹ In the book of Isaiah, the biblical writers allude to the vision of this peaceable kingdom, which they believe will ultimately be restored in accordance with God’s original plan for creation:

Then the world shall live with the sheep,
and the leopard lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall grow up together,
and a little child shall lead them;
the cow and the bear shall be friends,
and their young shall lie down together.

...

They shall not hurt or destroy all in my holy mountain;
for as the waters fill the sea,
so shall the land be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.⁹⁰

To sum up, a Christian theological account of killing animals for human nourishment must take into consideration the doctrines of creation and the Fall as well as the vision of the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The Muslim Diet

Islam allows the consumption of the flesh of some animals who are tended and slaughtered in accord with Islamic law (Sharia). Although some Qur’anic verses seem to promote a plant-based diet,⁹¹ several passages explicitly state that eating meat is religiously sanctioned with certain restrictions: “lawful to you is [the flesh of] every beast that feeds on plants,”⁹² but “forbidden to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh, of the swine, and that over which any name other than God’s has been invoked, and the animal has been strangled, or beaten to death.”⁹³ Halal, or permissible, meat is flesh taken from the body of an animal who has been kept and slaughtered according to Sharia, Islamic law. However, most people tend to focus only on how the animal is slaughtered, not on how the animal is tended during his or her life. In truth, both are equally important factors and should be given due consideration.⁹⁴ The problem is that halal meat producers regularly buy animals from farms that do not tend animals in accordance with Sharia.⁹⁵ Given that in many societies a lot of meat comes from intensive systems of farming, it is almost impossible to be certain that any given animal product is halal.⁹⁶ For example, eggs and dairy products sourced from mistreated animals are clearly not halal. People are often unaware of the provenance of their food. Were they to find out more about the journey of meat from the killing of the animal to their plate, some might choose to become vegetarians because of their religious convictions.

Some Muslim scholars oppose vegetarianism on the grounds that “one may not forbid something which God has made permissible.”⁹⁷ For example, Mawil Izzī Dien asserts that “vegetarianism is not allowed under the pretext of giving priority to the interest of animals because such decisions are God’s prerogative.”⁹⁸ As a result, various Muslim individuals who have decided to abstain from eating meat have been heavily criticized by their peers. For example, Abu Nasr ibn Abi Imran, an eleventh-century theologian, reprimanded the poet Abu’l-‘Ala al-ma’arri for “trying to be more compassionate than God.”⁹⁹ Similarly, Zaynad, a female Sufi, was persecuted for her refusal to eat meat.¹⁰⁰ More recently, popular preacher Zakir Naik claimed that “vegetarianism is not permitted (*haram*) unless on grounds such as unavailability or medical necessity.”¹⁰¹ Thus, it seems that in this account, Muslims are required to eat the flesh of animals.

But it does not follow from the fact that meat is permissible that refraining from eating it is forbidden.¹⁰² More importantly, there are some practices, such as slavery (or perhaps polygyny), that were morally sanctioned in the Prophet's day but that no longer apply today. Likewise, it may be argued that whereas meat was a vital source of nourishment in the time of the Prophet of Islam, it is now a luxury that one can easily do without. Muhammad is reported to have said, "Avoid . . . the killing of breathing beings which God has forbidden *except for rightful reasons*."¹⁰³ In addition, Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes between three levels of necessities: vital needs (*masala zaruriyya*), comfort needs (*masala hajuyya*), and luxury products (*masala tahsiniyya*).¹⁰⁴ The category to which meat and other animal products belong will vary depending on the circumstances in which one finds oneself.

Convergence and Temperance

Food scarcity was the prevalent condition for the vast majority of people over the course of human history. There are still many societies wherein meat appears to be a vital need. For example, the Innu people could not survive in the harsh environment of the Great White North without the protein, fat, and other nutritional properties of the animal flesh that constitutes most of their diet. Under such circumstances, it may be justified to kill for food. On the other hand, in many affluent industrialized societies, it is perfectly possible for people to sustain a healthy and well-balanced diet without consuming any meat (or any animal products whatever).¹⁰⁵ Hence, for people living in such societies, meat is but a luxury product for which killing does not seem morally warranted. It is, in the words of Stephen Clark, "empty gluttony."¹⁰⁶

To reiterate, I am not claiming that it directly follows from Christian and Muslim doctrines that meat should be categorically forbidden. First, the crucial point here is that one should face the fact that meat is the flesh of an animal whose life has been cut short – a life that has intrinsic value in God's eyes. Second, one should be mindful of the different *contexts* in which an animal is killed; although it may sometimes be permissible to kill animals, it is not permitted to do so carelessly. As Linzey argues, "properly speaking, there is no *right* to kill"; "killing is always a grave matter."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, al-Hafiz B. A. Masri writes, "To kill animals to satisfy the human thirst for inessentials is a contradiction in terms within the Islamic tradition."¹⁰⁸ It may be morally justifiable to take the life of an animal for such reasons as drastic food scarcity, self-defense, or mercy killing, but outside of such circumstances, one should refrain from killing. Christians and Muslims ought to reflect deeply on the theological and moral significance of the act of killing in relation to their scriptures and the values they promote. Given the broader moral teachings of Islam and Christianity about love and compassion in addition to animals' intrinsic worth, there does not appear to be any rightful reason for slaughtering animals in wealthy industrialized societies (not to mention the abhorrent mass killing of factory farming). As Peter Singer argues, "practically and psychologically it is impossible to be consistent in one's concern for nonhuman animals while continuing to dine on them."¹⁰⁹ The question one should ask oneself is simple: Should I injure what has value in God's eyes? Should I take the life of that which God loves and hence that which I too ought to love?

Concluding Remarks and Summary

In this chapter, I have endeavored to debunk some of the misconceptions about Christianity and Islam regarding their views of animals. I have focused on the similarities between the two traditions and have laid the emphasis on the moral teachings that are sympathetic to the animal cause. However, this chapter is by no means supposed to be an exhaustive survey of the place of animals in Christianity and Islam. It is important to acknowledge that there are various ways

in which these two traditions differ on issues that I have not addressed, such as animal sacrifice. Nevertheless, all in all, I hope to have shown that the Christian and the Islamic religions can be sources of inspiration for our relationships with nonhuman animals.

The anthropocentric biases that have invaded Christian and Muslim thought are all too often more Cartesian,¹¹⁰ Aristotelian,¹¹¹ or Stoic than biblical or Qur'anic.¹¹² The dismissal of the importance of other creatures is largely due to a misconception of the notion of dominion and humans' place in creation. It often rests on the erroneous view that humans are made in the image of God only insofar as they have a rational soul and that this supreme status gives them absolute authority over animals, who are excluded from the moral community.¹¹³ In this view, animals have no value in and of themselves; they were created to serve humankind.

I have argued that this anthropocentric account of creation is prideful and fails to do justice to the central tenets of the Abrahamic worldview. In Christianity and Islam, God is the measure of all things, not humankind. The Creator has interests over and beyond the human species; creation is for all living beings. Humans do have a unique status, but it is not one of limitless power over every creature who creeps on the face of the earth. Rather, we are placed as stewards of creation, and as such, we must assume the responsibility to care for animals as God cares for humans – namely, with love, compassion, and mercy.

The taking of a life is always a serious matter and can be justified only in certain situations such as drastic food scarcity. Cruelty – that is, inflicting unnecessary suffering upon another sentient being – is never morally warranted. “We may pretend to what religion we please,” writes Humphrey Primatt, “but cruelty is atheism . . . We may trust our orthodoxy, but cruelty is the world of heresies.”¹¹⁴ This is why the current treatment of animals in intensive factory farms – as well as other abusive practices that reduce them to exploitable human property – cannot be justified on Christian or Muslim grounds.

For followers of Islam and Christianity, Muhammad and Jesus are seen as paradigm cases and embodiments of divine virtue. As such, they demonstrate the way in which we should relate to our neighbors, be they human or animal. Jesus and Muhammad both promoted an ethics of love and compassion, of respect and protection. Regardless of one's religious convictions, one cannot deny that they are both great moral exemplars, social reformers, and spiritual sages whose lives we should all strive to emulate. History testifies to the inspiration that many have drawn from their teachings.

Contrary to what some animal rights advocates assert, Christianity and Islam have not historically been inimical to concern for nonhuman animals. Michel de Montaigne's surprise at the sight of “alms and hospitals for animals” in the Islamic world in the sixth century and the creation of the RSPCA by an Anglican priest in 1824 are illustrations of the concern for animal welfare displayed by Muslims and Christians throughout history.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, caring behavior toward our fellow creatures has not been practiced consistently. Many Christian and Muslim communities have lost sight of and strayed from the moral teachings of their sacred scriptures. Though in recent years, new voices defending animals have been emerging from religious spheres,¹¹⁶ indifference has too often replaced compassion in the face of animal suffering. One must be reminded that God is love (*agape/caritas*),¹¹⁷ the most compassionate (*Ar-Rahman*), and the most merciful (*Ar-Rahim*),¹¹⁸ for as the Qur'an tells us, oftentimes “it is not the eyes that are blind, but the hearts.”¹¹⁹ The enlightened way, the path of righteousness, is that of loving kindness.

Notes

- 1 By all accounts, Andrew Linzey and al-Hafiz Masri have been the principal advocates of a reappraisal of the place of animals in Christianity and Islam in recent decades. Linzey was influenced by Humphrey Primatt's 1776 essay *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*. See Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 15–16. For a detailed discussion

- about contemporary Muslim views on animal rights, see Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 86–103.
- 2 Gen. 1:28, emphasis added.
 - 3 Carol Bakhos, “Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Attitudes toward Animals,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 184.
 - 4 Qur’an 45:13, emphasis added. See also Qur’an 7:10, 16:10–16, 22:65.
 - 5 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Kevin Knight (New Advent, online edition, 2008) www.newadvent.org/summa/, vol. 1, Q. 26, Art. 1.
 - 6 Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 251.
 - 7 This commonly held view is what led Lynn White to claim that the Abrahamic worldview is partially to blame for the environmental crisis in his influential 1967 essay. See Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* (155)3767 (March 1967): 1203–07.
 - 8 Bakhos, “Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Attitudes,” 185.
 - 9 Paul Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39.
 - 10 Prov. 12:10.
 - 11 *Sahih Muslim* 4:1215, 1381. Masri notes that this story is recorded by almost all the books of hadith. Al-Hafiz Basheer Ahmad Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam* (Leicestershire: Islamic Foundation, 2007), 46.
 - 12 Qur’an 7:73.
 - 13 Abu A’la Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad (Indianapolis: Islamic Teaching Center, 1988), 114.
 - 14 Qur’an 16:8. See also Qur’an 16:5–6, 23:22.
 - 15 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton Pegis (London: Random House, 1945), 222, emphasis added. Aquinas makes a similar point in his *Summa Theologiae* (vol. 1, Q. 65, Art. 1): “Dumb animals and plants are devoid of the life of reason whereby to set themselves in motion; they are moved, at is were by a kind of natural impulse, a sign of which is that they are naturally enslaved and accommodated to the uses of others.” He follows Aristotle, who claims that “plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute beasts for the sake of man, domestic animals, for his use and food, wild ones for food and other accessories of life, such as clothing and various tools. Since nature makes nothing purposeless or in vain, it is undeniably true that he has made all animals for the sake of man.” Quoted in John Warrington, *Metaphysics* (New York: Dutton, 1959), 16.
 - 16 Andrew Linzey, “Reverence, Responsibility and Rights,” in *Christian Ethics*, ed. Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 299.
 - 17 Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London, UK: Mowbray, 1997), 118.
 - 18 Richard Alan Young, *Is God a Vegetarian? Christianity, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights* (Chicago: Open Courts, 1999), 37.
 - 19 Qur’an 30:26–27. See also Qur’an 7:128. All creation will return to the Creator; see Qur’an 3:105–10, 24:36–43, 19:88–98.
 - 20 Ps. 24:1, 104, 115:16. See also Job 12:9–10; Eph. 1:10.
 - 21 Col. 1:16–20.
 - 22 Eccles. 3:18–21.
 - 23 Qur’an 55:10, emphasis added.
 - 24 Ps. 145:9.
 - 25 Matt. 6:25–26, emphasis added. See also Gen. 1:21 and Luke 12:24.
 - 26 Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 199.
 - 27 Linzey talks about “theo-rights.” That is, animals, *qua* God’s creatures, can be wronged because God can be wronged. Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 87, 96, 98; Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 27.
 - 28 Qur’an 95:4.
 - 29 Gen. 1:26.
 - 30 Qur’an 2:30.
 - 31 Andrew Linzey, *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology, and Practical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 163, emphasis added. See also Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel: A Christian Faith as though Animals Mattered* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), 14.
 - 32 Jaafar Sheikh Idris, “Is Man the Vicegerent of God?,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 103.

- 33 Gen. 2:15.
- 34 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 1961), vol. 3, part 4, 354.
- 35 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4, 29.
- 36 Linzey, *Why Animal Suffering Matters*, 163.
- 37 Literally “successor.” Qur’an 5:65, 2:61, 2:30, 6:165.
- 38 This “creation-friendly” interpretation has gained an “ever increasing acceptance among biblical scholars.” Gunnlaugur Jónsson, “The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research,” *Conietanea Biblica Old Testament Series* 26 (1988): 219.
- 39 This is more strongly emphasized in the Islamic tradition. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis,” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 96; Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 5.
- 40 Qur’an 17:44. See also Qur’an 24:41, 13:15.
- 41 Qur’an 61:1, 16:48–56, 22:18, 24:36–43. See also Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, “An Ecological Journey in Muslim Bengal,” in Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology*, 454–55; and Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Func, “Peace in Islam: An Ecology of the Spirit,” in Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology*, 163.
- 42 Qur’an 16:68.
- 43 Siddiq, “An Ecological Journey,” 454–55.
- 44 Lynda Clarke, “The Universe Alive: Nature in the Masnavi of Jalal al-Din Rumi,” in Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology*, 47.
- 45 Nasr, “Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World,” 96.
- 46 Lukas Vischer and Charles Birch, *Living with the Animals* (Geneva: WWC, 1997), 5.
- 47 Hobgood-Oster, cited in Lisa Kemmerer, *Animals and World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 227.
- 48 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend Readings on the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), vol. 2, 266–67. For further examples of the relationship between God and animals in Christianity, see Helen Waddell, *Beasts and Saints* (London: Constable, 1934); and Kemmerer, *Animals and World Religions*.
- 49 Linzey claims that two-thirds of all saints from both the Eastern and Western traditions have championed the animal cause. Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, 27.
- 50 Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 103.
- 51 Stephen H. Webb, *Good Eating* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001), 162, emphasis added.
- 52 This argument is not new; it was already made by some of the church fathers, such as St. Athanasius of Alexandria in *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. R. W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 115.
- 53 Mark 14:12. Jesus is compared to a lamb many times in the New Testament.
- 54 Luke 9:58.
- 55 Isa. 53:7.
- 56 Andrew Linzey, “Jesus and Animals in Christian Apocryphal Literature,” *Modern Believing* (48)1 (January 2007): 48–59.
- 57 Roderic Dunkerley, *Beyond the Gospels* (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 143.
- 58 For further examples of Jesus’ relationship with animals, see Andrew Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God* (Winchester: Winchester University Press, 2007).
- 59 For further discussion, see for example, John Todd Ferrier, *The Master, Known Unto the World as Jesus the Christ: His Life and Teachings* (Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 1923).
- 60 Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God*, 97–98.
- 61 Qur’an 33:21.
- 62 Nasr, “Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World,” 97.
- 63 For example, see *Sahih Muslim* 4:2593; *Muwatta Malik* 54:15:38.
- 64 *Sahih Muslim*, Bukhari 2:106.
- 65 Cited in al-Hafiz Basheer Ahmad Masri, *Islamic Concern for Animals* (Petersfield, UK: Athene Trust, 1987), 4.
- 66 Masri, *Islamic Concern*, 4:1216.
- 67 Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, 46. See also *Muwatta Malik* 54:15:38; *Sahih Bukhari* 67:449; *Sahih Muslim* 4:2593; *Tirmidhi* 1480.

- 68 Cited in Nomanul S. Haq, "Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction," in Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology*, 149.
- 69 Webb, *Good Eating*, 144.
- 70 For example, William Cowherd, founder of the Bible Christian Church, made vegetarianism mandatory. The Seventh-day Adventist Church promotes vegetarianism. Various saints have also expressed a particular concern for animals, such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Richard of Chichester, and St. Benedict. See Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 203; and Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, 27. Some of the church fathers practiced vegetarianism, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and John Chrysostom. See Stephen R. Kaufman and Nathan Braun, *Good News for All Creation: Vegetarianism as Christian Stewardship* (Cleveland: Vegetarian Advocates Press, 2004), 8. Many of the Catholic monastic orders abstain from animal flesh. For further examples, see Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, 150–59; and Linzey, *Animal Theology*.
- 71 For example, the Chishti order advocates vegetarianism. For further examples, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 348–58.
- 72 Gen. 1:26–30, emphasis added.
- 73 Gen. 3:1–24.
- 74 Gen. 9:1–4, emphasis added.
- 75 Gen. 9:4–5.
- 76 For the early Hebrews, blood was a symbol for life. See Linzey 1994, 128.
- 77 This new covenant is known as the Noachic covenant.
- 78 Gen. 8:1–9:17.
- 79 Anthony Phillips, *Lower than the Angels: Questions Raised by Genesis 1–11* (London: Bible Reading Fellowship, 1983), 48.
- 80 John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*. Encyclical Letter. (Vatican, Holy See, 1995) §9. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.
- 81 John Berkman, "The Consumption of Animals and the Catholic Tradition," in *Food for Thought*, ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 202.
- 82 Cited in Teresa Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 177.
- 83 Berkman, "Consumption of Animals," 203.
- 84 Andrew Linzey, "The Theological Debate about Meat Eating," in *Food for Thought*, ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 192.
- 85 George A. Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 486. See, for instance, Clifton J. Allen, *Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 32; or Linzey, *Animal Gospel*, 126.
- 86 Berkman, "Consumption of Animals," 202. See, for instance, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §376.
- 87 Cited in Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 197.
- 88 Berkman, "Consumption of Animals," 201. The question of eschatology, and the extent to which it can be realized on earth, is a moot point. In contrast with the traditional view, Pope John Paul II contends that "eschatology is not what will take place in the future . . . Eschatology has already begun with the coming of Christ . . . This is the beginning of 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelations 21:1)." John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 184–85.
- 89 Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 249–50.
- 90 Isa. 11:6–9, emphasis added.
- 91 For examples of passages promoting a vegan diet, see Qur'an 15:9–32, 55:1–17.
- 92 Qur'an 5:1. Marine animals also can be killed for food: "It is He who has made the sea subject, that you may eat the flesh thereof that is fresh and tender." Qur'an 16:4. See also Qur'an 52:22, 56:21, 6:145, 16:5, 66, 40:79.
- 93 Qur'an 5:3. See also Qur'an 2:173, 6:145.
- 94 Food should also be *tayyib*, "wholesome, pure, nutritious and sage." Kemmerer, *Animals and World Religions*, 260.
- 95 Richard C. Foltz, "Is Vegetarianism Un-Islamic?," in *Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat*, ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004); Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 118. Foltz notes that some Middle Eastern countries "import much of their meat from places like New Zealand (in which animal remains are typically fed to other animals)." Foltz, "Is Vegetarianism Un-Islamic?," 216.
- 96 Social activist Nadia Montasser gives a list of eight questions that are supposed to ensure that a given animal product is halal and argues that in the vast majority of cases, we would be forced to answer in the negative to at least one of these questions. Nadia Montasser, "So You Think Your Meat Is 'Halal'? Think Again!," *Petpost*, September 2006. See also Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 116–17; Richard C. Foltz, "This She-Camel of God Is a Sign to You," in *A Communion of Subjects, Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 396; and Masri, *Islamic Concern*, 158.

- 97 Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 99; Qur'an 5:87.
- 98 Mawil Y. Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2000), 146.
- 99 Yaqut, cited in Geert Jan van Gelder, *Of Dishes and Discourse: Classical Arabic Interpretations of Food* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 88.
- 100 Margaret Smith, *The Way of the Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 154–62.
- 101 Naik, cited in Izzi Dien, *Environmental Dimensions*, 146.
- 102 Quite the reverse, according to Masri: the Islamic juristic rule is that “what is not declared as forbidden is permissible.” Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, 136.
- 103 *Sahih Muslim* 1606, 271, emphasis added.
- 104 Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, 30–31.
- 105 It is interesting to note that in the ancient world, meat was widely considered to have medicinal properties. Berkman, “Consumption of Animals,” 200.
- 106 Stephen Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 183.
- 107 Linzey 1994, 131.
- 108 Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, 27.
- 109 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: New York Review, 1975), 172.
- 110 Descartes regarded physics as a way of rendering men “the masters and possessors of nature.” Cited in Gary Steiner, “Descartes, Christianity, and Contemporary Speciesism,” in *A Communion of Subjects*, ed. P. Waldau and K. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
- 111 Aristotle believed that all animals were made “for the sake of man.” *Politics*, Book I, chap. 8, para. 1256b12–22, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- 112 I am not claiming that the philosophies of Aristotle, Descartes, and the Stoics are inherently or necessarily anthropocentric, for their respective positions are very complex and cannot be assessed thoroughly in this chapter.
- 113 See Steiner, “Descartes, Christianity, and Contemporary Speciesism,” for further discussion with respect to the influence of different schools of thought upon Christianity.
- 114 Quoted in Linzey, “Reverence, Responsibility and Rights,” 182.
- 115 Cited in Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 5.
- 116 For examples, see Mark Oppenheimer, “Scholars Explore Religious Perspective on Animal Rights,” *New York Times*, December 6, 2013.
- 117 1 John 4:8.
- 118 Ubiquitous in the Qur'an. This is written at the beginning of all surahs but one.
- 119 Qur'an 22:46.

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