Why should a contemporary Lutheran church bother with animal suffering?

- Reasons for an extended circle of compassion

A literary study
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.

(Pope Francis, 2015) ¹

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1.3 Introduction

In June 2015 Pope Francis made a statement in social media where he stated it is “contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly”.\(^2\) And in his recent *encyclical* (one of the Church’s most important and authoritative theological documents) the Pope called on his followers to be more compassionate towards animals.\(^3\) He goes on saying that “it is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential ’resources’ to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves.”(§ 33). In the same encyclical he also states that

we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s
image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination
over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context
(§ 67)

From one perspective it is not surprising that the leader of the biggest church in the world speaks out on the matter, and that he does it now. Today animals are being killed to an extent that dwarfs the killing of animals at any other point in history, and they are being killed for sport, entertainment and commercial purposes rather than survival. What is surprising, however, is that not more churches speak out against it. After all Christianity is a religion preoccupied with suffering, the suffering of Jesus, the suffering of the apostle Paul, and the suffering of the subsequent martyrs; it’s a religion whose primary symbol is a symbol of torture - the cross, and that symbol is found on the altar in almost every shrine. The Lutheran World Foundation has release several documents and statements on the environment, and the Church of Sweden wants to adopt a creation-orientated outlook on life with the wellbeing of our planet in mind – but there is no mention of the abuse of animals that goes on in Sweden and the rest of the world. Often animal cruelty is not accepted as such, and often the discussion of animal treatment is subsumed into the general discussion of care for the environment, or the Creation. This is questionable as the Cartesian view of animals as soul-less machines is no longer valid in most churches today. Mammals are increasingly considered sentient beings with a capacity to experience both pain and a desire to live (Sommarregn, 2008). This makes the amoral status of animal suffering look like a statement; that the distinction between human suffering and the suffering of non-humans is important.

If so, this distinction is founded in a worldview that dates back to the dawn of the western thought.

Animal suffering or man’s relation to animal has always been a peripheral feature of Western ethics. From Aristotle till today not much thinking has been spent on the issue. Till the 1600’s and the dawn

\(^2\) Twitter, 19 Jun 2015, https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/611684848130879488?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw
of modernity animals were seen as *álóga zoé*, life without logos/reason. The value of animals was only an instrumental value, but they were still considered having a soul, just not a rational one. After Descartes the animals lost also their souls.

Since the 1970’s and the publication of Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* the question of animal rights has been increasingly included in philosophical discourse. In Christian theology to a lesser extent. In fact the opposite seems to have been the case; that churches has opposed the idea of animal rights as if the church - in the words of Pope Pius IX – “has no obligations towards the animals” (Linzey 1976, p 9).

My reason for writing about animal suffering is manifold. For one many of us seem to have contradictory ideas about what animals are and how people are to relate to animals. Also it is a kind of suffering that goes on around us, largely unquestioned, *as if* unproblematic. But at the same time the suffering is tucked away - the industrial killing takes place out of sight - from the public as if it is *not* unproblematic. For: if the showing of the slaughter process in detail would benefit sales probably that would already be the case. But this is not the case and that is a circumstance that strengthens the suggestion that animal suffering is not as unproblematic as it sometimes is presented.

This essay will also show that the low status of animals is reinforced by a general anthropocentric tendency of western theology to interpret the Bible, and other key texts, in a way that exaggerates the power of mankind, as well as the unicity of mankind The concept of reason for example became in Augustinian theology the sign of man’s unique relationship to God, which made man closer to God and at the same time animals – that did not have reason – even farther from god.

A discussion of the man-animal-relationship and to what extent – if any – human beings have responsibility for the treatment of animals will sooner or later touch upon the concept of reason. For if reason is border between man and beast, as it is often held, then the question of what reason really is becomes important.

This tendency to emphasize the human domination has led to more suffering for non-human beings, but possibly also for mankind. The down side of being elevated, above and superior, is alienation and a sense of detachment from the Creation. Alasdair McIntyre argues that one driving force behind the glorifying of ourselves is a cultural phobia of acknowledging the fact that humans and non-humans do share many important aspects of life.

Critiquing the exaggeration of human superiority probably means critiquing the role of reason. This is where Luther gets in. For Luther the glorification of reason is an enemy of the salvation of the soul. Reason can do nothing to save mankind from her fallen state. In fact reason, and therefore the whole scholastic paradigm, is more likely to lead people away from God. Why is this? Because the Aristotelian scholasticism fools people into the false notion that God is to be found in the high, in the
heavens, and in the beauty of the world, when in fact the truest knowledge of God is found in the suffering of the cross. God is found in the weak and despised and lowly.

So why should a Lutheran church bother with animal suffering? One answer is: of the same reason as all churches should bother with all kinds of suffering in the Creation; because suffering does not belong to the intended plan as described in Genesis and should therefore be treated seriously as other consequences of the Fall such as inequality, oppression of women, war, and harshened life conditions. But also because the traditional disregard of the issue is becoming increasingly controversial as animal suffering is increasingly addressed elsewhere. Moreover the theological arguments need to be looked over. When it comes to animal rights in a theological context most of the thinking is yet to be done (Linzey, 1976)

As Peter Singers preference-utilitarianism is hard to reconcile with Christian idea of an intrinsic value it cannot be a theoretical position for a Lutheran church and a Lutheran theology. A better option is Andrew Linzey’s theocentric rights where God is the justification of rights and where rights are not instrumental or dependent on utility. This perspective opens up for the possibility to extend moral solicitude to include not only humans.

Lastly the situation for animals is different today than in the days of Augustine and Luther. The post-industrialization commercial killing of animals is a feature of modern society that few people seem to be fully at peace with, and that calls for a theology that deals with it. The argument that intellectual superiority is a sufficient justification for an absolute right to treat animals as commodities has unpleasant consequences that are hard to fit into a Christian frame of ethics. That the acquisition of abstract reason frees us from all responsibility towards all other creatures could be viewed as the work of slack thought.

In taking seriously, instead, man’s relationship to animals the (Lutheran) church could gain credibility as a voice of progressive ethics, particularly so as the question of animal cruelty is increasing addressed by other institutions of society.

1.4 Methodology

The title of the essay is Why should a Lutheran church bother with animal suffering but as this field of or animal theology is something of an terra incognito in the Christian context, and as Luther himself did not give much attention to animals per se, I will therefore start in the broad scope of general western theology and at times narrow it down to a more Lutheran specific relevance.

By animal theology I mean a theology that recognizes that animals – with or without the ability to “think” – are sentient beings with the right to live in virtue of being created by the same God – not insofar as they are beneficial for human existence.
The reason for choosing a Lutheran angle is that Lutheranism is still the dominating religious tradition in Sweden, with more than 2/3 of the population being members. But also because Lutheranism has placed a greater emphasis on creation theology, historically, making man’s relationship to animals more crucial (Rhoads 2013). 

Furthermore the history of theology and the history of philosophy are in many parts intertwined in the west. In a similar way it is not easy to distinguish between the view on animals of the church and of the rest of society, being in constant interaction throughout history. Viewing these institutions as separate is a modern invention. For these reasons I will, in the historical parts, variously speak of theology, philosophy, and the church, without much distinction.

In animal rights discourse it is sometimes referred to the will to expand the circle of moral regard or moral obligation (to include a larger group of beings) and my “circle of compassion” is simply referring to that. To incorporate in an ethical discourse is what I mean with “bother with”. Lastly by “animal suffering” I mean suffering inflicted by human beings. It is sometimes suggested that animals cannot suffer (as it presupposes certain cognitive capacities) but that animals can feel pain. I don’t find that distinction to be of great importance for reasons I will get back to and will therefore use the terms synonymously.

1.5 Theory

The birth of the modern animal rights movement can be traced to the mid 1970’s and with the publishing of Peter Singer’s Animal liberation (1975). In it Singer popularized the term specism – the anthropocentric tendency to, just like racism and sexism, favor one’s own group, in this case the survival and pleasure of mankind, on the expense of other species. Singer also criticized the anthropocentric tendencies of Christianity. The impact of Animal liberation and Singers subsequent work is huge, predominantly outside the Christian church. Within the churches of the west animal rights has never been a question of priority. And after Animal liberation the lack of involvement of the churches turned to suspicion or even hostility. The hostility could be explained by Singer’s theoretical starting point of preference-utilitarian which was considered incompatible with the (Christian) idea of sanctity of life.

Also Singer’ utilitarianism moves away from the traditional anthropocentricity of western thought. Instead of anthropos - human being - Singer speaks of person. Being is a person is what matters, being a person is the basis of rights. And being a person could be defined as the ability to uphold an identity over time. Since this quality is shared by other species the circle of rights is expanded to more than humans only. Mankind loses her superior status as of moral rights.

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The emphasis on personhood has the possibility to improve the lives of many mammals around the world. It has also attracted a lot of attention. In 2016 a chimpanzee in Argentina was freed from captivity on the bases of legal rights acquired in the Argentinian court. But one inconvenient consequence of attaching rights to the possession of personhood is that there are people that do not match the definition a personhood - for example newborns, severely mentally disabled people, or people suffering from dementia - and therefore are left without rights. And replacing the idea of sanctity of life with preference-utilitarianism is also difficult to reconcile with traditional Christian theology. Firstly it renders everything a relative or an instrumental value. The killing of a human being is not more immoral than the killing of a non-human being. Moreover the killing is only immoral if the preferences of the many – and the utility for the many – are neglected; if the disadvantages of the killing outweigh the advantages. The problem here is of course who is to discern whose preference is the one with the most utility. For to do this kind of evaluation utilitarianism is dependent on some kind of objective perspective or a “cosmic point of view”, and this trait of Singer’s preference-utilitarianism makes it the look like a religious system. But since Singer denies the existence of deities or “impartial beholders” this could be seen as a weakness of the theory (Williams 2011).

Another take on animal rights is Tom Regan’s subject-of-a-life-theory. Here being a “subject-of-a-life” means having a desire to stay alive, a “feeling” that one’s life matters and that death is unwanted. According to Regan many mammals display traits that qualify them for being “subjects” in that sense.

The theory draws on the Kantian imperative to always treat people as ends-in-themselves (and never as a means to an end) but Regan expands the circle of concern to include also non-human beings. Most mammals qualify for being subjects of a life, and should therefore be treated as ends-in-themselves. They also therefore have both moral rights and inherent value Animals (Linzey, 2009).

A weakness of the theory is that the larger part of the animal kingdom is not mammalian, and is therefore excluded from inherent value and rights. So are also some human beings – for example comatose patients or again newborns – as they don’t, in a verifiable way, fit the requirements of being subjects-of-a-life. This makes the theory a theory for healthy adult beings on the upper end of the phylogenic tree. And although it expands the circle of rights it still isn’t compatible with a Christian doctrine of intrinsically value of all (human) beings. (ibid.)

Deep ecology is yet another theoretical framework. It claims to promote the intrinsic worth of living beings. Here the world is an interconnected ecosystem, a whole where everything plays its part. But in deep ecology the whole is the primary concern, not the parts that makes up the whole. And this gives the individuals, the parts, only instrumental value relative to the (eco-) system (Singer 2002, p 246). An inconsistency is also visible in that mankind - despite the focus on the whole – in deep ecology has

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6 “Nonhuman Rights Project Praises Argentine Court’s Recognition Of Captive Chimpanzee’s Legal Personhood And Rights” Lauren Choplin on December 5, 2016, http://www.nonhumanrightsproject.org/in-the-news-2/
a unique status by virtue of being conscious (implicitly nothing else is). Were the interests of a human being and a slug ever to collide the human being has an exclusive right to prioritize herself. In short deep ecology is ultimately anthropocentric and can only provide a relative value to non-human beings.

In this essay the works of reverend and theologian Andrew Linzey will be of great importance. The same year as the publication of Animal liberation Linzey published his Animal rights – a Christian assessment which could be described as a classic in the field of Christian animal rights. Linzey has spent most of his career on the issue of animal rights in the Christian context.

Linzey solves the problem of the cosmic point of view by not denying it but rather building upon it, placing the existence of God at the center of the justification of rights. Thus it’s a matter of theocentric rights. God is the bases of what Linzey calls theos-rights. In short theos-rights can be described as the inherent rights that are the consequences of being created by a God that is fundamentally benevolent towards “his” Creation. With theos-rights humankind is still created in the Image of God, and humankind still has a unique role in the Creation. But the theos-rights restricts humankind’s claim on the earth as the world is ultimately owned by God. There are no rights that is not related to God. Hence the historical interpretation of Genesis 1:26 is wrong when it frees human beings of all responsibility. That interpretation has lead to an exaggerated self-image for man as well as a theology at the expense of the weakest beings on earth.

In this essay I will use the term “animal” despite the fact that the term is both arbitrary and not very precise, as we will see, and this I will do to simply make reading easier. I will also use the term “non-human animal” or even “non-human being” about what is typically referred to as animal. Also not very precise I believe the latter have their benefits. For one they underline co-existence between species of this planet. And emphasizing co-existence and shared conditions doesn’t necessarily diminish the grandness of humanity as both biology and Christianity believe in a common origin, be it the process of natural selection or a benevolent God. And: having the same Father, as the Scriptures teaches, actually renders man and beast not only relatives but in fact siblings.

A second reason for the use of “non-human animal” is that we – human beings – can be said to gain from seeing ourselves as part of the Creation and not outside. It is possible that a greater feeling of belonging could be found in not exaggerating the difference between human beings and other species. The (catholic) philosopher Alasdair Macintyre uses the term frequently and consciously and he argues that the western history of philosophy has been wrong in denying our intimate connections with the

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animals. Macintyre suggest that we have a lot to gain from acknowledging our “animal condition”.
(McIntyre, 1999)

To give a comprehensive and detailed overview of the development of manind’s relationship to the animals in the west lies outside the intention of this essay. Rather my aim is to paint a broad picture of the development of the “western view” of animals, with focus on the theological construction of the category of “animal”.

Lastly, animal suffering is in my view a relevant issue for the church from both a theological-ethical perspective and from a credibility-point of view. As animal welfare is being increasingly addressed in public discourse not having an ethics or a theology could damage the faith in the church as a relevant voice in ethical issues in society. Focus of this thesis will however be the theological-ethical point of view.

1.6 Previous research

Countless studies have been conducted on the role of animals in the Bible; the symbolism of animals or the role of animal sacrifice in the Hebrew religion, and so forth. But research questioning the instrumental role of animals in Christian theology is a new phenomenon of recent decades (Petterson, 2014)

Apart from the literature of the animal rights veteran Andrew Linzey there is a growing body of theological literature problematizing and investigating mankind’s relationship to animals. A few of them deserves to be mentioned. First of all Good eating by professor of theology Stephan Webb, a relatively easily read book in the service of animal rights. Another on is the didactic Is God a Vegetarian? Christianity, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights (1999) by Richard Alan Young, professor of New testament. Yet another one is Jesuit, author and lecturer John Dear’s Christianity and Vegetarianism: pursuing the Nonviolence of Jesus where veganism is tied to non-violence Jesus’ serving the Creation. In Sweden associate professor Helena Röcklingsberg, SLU, has published a number of books and internationally published articles in the field of (animal-) ethics

2. BACKGROUND

The roots of the Western view of animals animal suffering is found in the Bible and in ancient Greek philosophy. As for the Bible Genesis 1:26 is of particular importance. There God says:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.
The traditional theological interpretation of Genesis has given human beings a superior status as of moral rights but also a freedom without duties. This interpretation would however not be possible without the Hellenization of western Christianity that took place, in the first centuries, as the Hebrew religion spread into the larger context of the Greek-Roman world.

2.2 Genesis and the Jews – the Bible

In the first chapter of Genesis God creates man “in his own image” (1:26) and commands mankind to subdue the earth and "have dominion over (...) every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen 1:27-28).\(^8\) These are probably the most commonly referred to verses when the question of how humans should relate to the animal kingdom is brought up. God creating mankind in the image of God has traditionally been interpreted as God giving mankind a unique role in creation. The *Imago Dei* is the sign of this unicity. The fact that man is commanded to have dominion over all other living things has been seen as the confirmation of this unicity (Gen 1:20). This interpretation has found support in Adam’s naming of the animals. Man’s superiority over the animals is God-given and absolute and therefore humans have no responsibility for the animals (Kieffer 1999).

But the question is of course, as we will see, how to interpret ‘having dominion’. Was absolute freedom from responsibility really what the author(s) of Genesis had in mind? And is the traditional interpretation the only possible interpretation? Is it even the most plausible one? For: if being created in the image of God means superiority and freedom without responsibility, and the right to kill for pleasure, it implies that God has the same rights towards us. But the idea that God would actually exercise this right to kill (us) for pleasure is repelling and not acceptable.

Also, right after Adam is given dominion over every living thing Adam is proscribed a strict “vegan” diet of fruit trees and seed-bearing plans (Gen 1.:29). This verse is less referred to. The tradition has emphasized the dominion-part.

In the New Testament there are also several verses that have been normative for man’s relation to animals. For example Peter’s revelation on the roof, when in a trance he sees a sheet with animals of different (unclean) kind being let down before his eyes. In his trance God tells Peter to “get up (...) kill and eat”. When Peter refuses God repeats the imperative three times (Acts 10:13).

Often these verses are interpreted as a carte blanche for laying aside the dietary laws of Leviticus once and for all and enjoy the freedom of Christ to eat whatever appears on the plate. This is a misinterpretation though, as the meaning of Peter’s revelation is not about food at all but metaphorical and concerning people; God is instructing Peter - the church – that the circle of compassion is wider.

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\(^8\) The Hebrew name if the God in question is *Elohim*, possibly meaning ”Gods”, plural of ”El”
than they’d believed; that God has made all people around the world “clean” and the subjects of salvation (acts 10:28). The literary context in Acts supports this interpretation.

In Corinthians 8 Paul speaks of the weak that “eat only vegetables” and it is often claimed that Paul ridicules vegetarians (and therefore promote a meat-diet). But vegetarianism was of no concern for Paul, nor was the eating of meat per se of much concern. What the verses are really about is the eating of meat sacrificed to pagan gods. Paul doesn’t say much at all about animal suffering or meat eating, but he does say that people should not judge anyone for his/hers eating habits (Rom 14:3).

Of Jesus Christ it has been suggested that he stands firmly in the Jewish tradition of tsaar baalei hayyim, the obligation to avoid inflicting pain on animals. While that might be true the fact that Jesus most likely took part in the animal offerings in the temple - or that he turned two fish (and five loaves of bread) into food for several thousand people, or that he is recorded eating broiled fish after his resurrection (Luk:24:42) - does complicate the story. One could argue that the suggestion that the biblical Jesus was vegetarian is simply wrong, if being vegetarian implies an absolute position of never consciously eating animalia. Most animal rights theologians of today such as Linzey, Stephen Webb, Richard Alan Young, don’t think Jesus was vegetarian in the modern sense of the word (Spalde & Strindlund 2012).

It is also argued that Jesus allowed “a lesser evil”. The story of how Jesus sends several thousand pigs off the cliffs of Gadarene is taken as an example. It is argued that redeeming the demonic men was more important than the lives of thousands of pigs. However, first of all, the main point of the story is not the saving of two demonic men but showing Jesus as the anointed one that will bring about the new Kingdom. Also pigs were among contemporary Jews symbolically identified with the Romans and the story of Jesus and the pigs is actually a revolutionar anti-Roman text (Mitternacht & Runesson, 2006). Secondly the idea of Jesus allowing “a lesser evil” sits badly with the traditional doctrine of Jesus as free from sin.

Jesus’ words of how not one sparrow will fall to the ground without God knowing it - in other translations ‘without God caring for it’ – has been used by those who have wanted to see in Jesus an animal lover. Yet others who oppose this idea have pointed to the following verse where Jesus says: “don’t be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows” (Matt 10:31). Still, that a human being is worth more than many sparrows does not mean that animals are without value. This is often overlooked. Also it is often claimed that mankind (only) has an infinite value, implying that animals

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9 This slightly absurd story was probably much less absurd within the contemporary Jewish context. The sudden Latin/Roman word in the text [legion] and the fact that the pig was a common symbol for the Romans at the time, utilized also by themselves, strengthens this interpretation. And more: Roman soldiers were common in the area of Gadarene and The tenth legion, Legio X Fretensis, happened to be stationed in this very area. Their symbol was a wildbore. It was this legion that extinguished the Jewish rebellion 66-70, that destroyed the monastery of Qumran, an that was involved in the massacre of Masada the year 72. Lastly the pigs that drowned in the water was, for the Jewish reader at the time, an obvious analogy to the old testament story of how Pharaoh’s army, the oppressor at the time, perishes in the water (Exo 15:4).
only have a finite value. The problem with this perspective is that it renders animals principally worthless (Linzey & Yamamoto; 1998).

In sum it seems like the same parables and the same verses, of the Bible, are the source of diverging interpretations. This suggests either an ambiguity of the Scripture itself, or/and the importance of a certain hermeneutic awareness. It is also possible to detect an anthropocentric tendency to interpret the Scripture in a way that exaggerates the superiority of mankind and filters out passages that problematizes this superiority and the implications of it.

2.3 The Greeks and the Hellenization

The learned Greek world was an urban world where the intimate relationship to the animals of the Hebrews seemed foreign. Here human beings where elevated above the animals in a fundamentally new way. One reason for this was the divinization of reason.

In ancient Greek thought reality was ultimately *logos*, or reason. Logos was the structure of the visual world as well as ultimate substance of the eternal universe. When Christianity spread to the Hellenistic world the God of the Israelites, YHWH, became the God of Reason. And Jesus, the provincial Jew from Nazareth, became the cosmic Logos, the logos of the Prologue of John’s gospel. The new de-contextualized Christianity was easier to reconcile with the Hellenistic world as well as easier to universalize.

St Augustine (354-430) who was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy identified reason with the Imago Dei that Genesis tells of. That mankind only was created in the image of God meant that mankind only had reason, and hence reason is the boundary between man and beast. This, viewing the theoretical rationality as a specifically human asset, was already established in the philosophy of Aristotle but it is St Augustine that inoculates it into western theology and informs Luther’s view of animals.

For Augustine animals were created solely to glorify God, and the only way they could do that was by being used by human beings. Animals were of no importance theologically or ethically. Animals were aethical and atheological and this is why Augustine speaks of ”the Manichaean error” which in his mind was the erroneous opinion that the sixth commandment, thou shall not kill, included animals (Linzey & Yamamoto; 1998; p 75). Killing animals for pleasure was in itself not a sin. The suffering of animals was just like the darker parts of a painting; they were ”necessary to the artist’s integrity and [the] beauty of the total picture” (Linzey & Yamamoto 1998).

What does it mean that the suffering of animals is the darker parts of the painting? It means that the suffering is metaphorically given an aesthetical value rather than an ethical: that St Augustine is not willing to ascribe the suffering an ethical status. But interestingly he does admit that it is a feature of
the painting (The World) that is dark and integrity-rendering for the artist (God). This inconsistency of, on the one hand, admitting that animal suffering is the darker parts of the painting but, on the other hand, not being willing to give it an ethical status is a way of reasoning that is still frequent today, which I will get back to later.

Aristotle, a well-known defender of slavery, saw the world as a sloping hierarchy of men and women and animals where the lower existed for the higher. Animals were the natural slaves of man. Thomas of Aquinas, the theologian of medieval church, adopted this view on animals without much augmentation. In Thomist theology the divine order of the Creation was that “the imperfect is for the use of the perfect” (Linzey 1987, s 25). Thomas did not allow the animals the rational soul, which was reserved for mankind, but he – following Aristotle – allowed them a sentient soul. Still animals had a soul.

But at the dawn of modernity animals lost this sentient soul. In the emerging mechanistic worldview animals became automata, machines driven by instincts whose behavior could be explained in terms of mechanic forces. For the clergyman and influential philosopher Rene Descartes only the soul of man was spirit. Syllogistically expressed: Since matter doesn’t think, and every soul of beasts is matter, no beast thinks. And as thinking is the essence of the soul animals don’t have souls. Descartes says that ”the greatest of all prejudices we have retained from our infancy is that of believing beasts think” (Linzey, 1976, p 13).

By turning animals into automata the ethical problem of animal suffering, if there ever was one, is out of the way. As of moral rights an animal is now equal to a rock and consequently caring for animal suffering becomes the object of mockery. In the words of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) caring for animal suffering is “womanish sentimentality” (Spalde & Strindlund; 2012; p 43).

Still today the idea of animal rights is sometimes met with scorn within Christian contexts. This is due to a western church that has ignored animal suffering. Christian churches cannot claim to have contributed to the protection against animal cruelty. Rather they have often been active in opposing people or originations that have raised concerns over the treatment of animals (Linzey, 2009).

Eastern theology has historically held a somewhat more appreciative attitude towards animals, at least amongst early church fathers like Chrysostom and Saint Isaac the Syrian, or Basil the great who prayed for the salvation of animals. That said animal suffering is a marginal issue in eastern theology as well (Linzey; 1987).

Lastly, attitudes have of course varied throughout history and there are for example vegetarian strands of thinking within the body of western churches. The Seventh-day Adventists are often vegetarians or vegan in their dietary recommendations. That is however not an ethical statement of concern for animals primarily, but rather a concern with health emanating from a more intimate relation to
Leviticus. It is fair to say that animal suffering is something of a blind spot, ethically, in the Anglo-Saxon west. The ancient church and the medieval church accepted the views of Aristotle, and reformers like Luther and Calvin did not add much to the discourse. For Luther mankind did not always behave better than animals, but mankind was still unique as of moral rights. It seems as if Christianity from the very start has been a particularly anthropocentric religion. (ibid.).

3. DISCUSSION

At the heart of animal cruelty in the western world lies, according to Linzey, one largely unquestioned assumption: that mankind has “a superior and privileged status in the universe as of moral rights” (Linzey, 1976, p 5). This assumption is founded in a theology (and certainly anthropology) that stresses the difference between the animal kingdom and the world of human beings. Adam and not the animals received the Imago Dei. Mankind and not animals is endowed with a rational soul. And from this it is inferred that mankind is free from all responsibility towards the animals (Linzey 2009).

This is however an arbitrary inference. Freedom of responsibility does not necessarily follow from superiority. In fact the opposite is more reasonable; that it is precisely because of our superiority that we are not freed from responsibility, as responsibility demands a free choice.

3.2 Rights & rationality

The idea that animals can possess moral rights has often been opposed by the western churches. By claiming that matter is worthless and that animals are only matter the question is solved. But if one admits that animal cruelty (for example hunting for sport or as Augustine had it: killing for pleasure) is an ethical problem - which is increasingly the case - animals are already included in the realm of ethics. And giving animals a certain ethical status but refusing to give animals certain morals right seems counterintuitive. Often it is put forward that moral rights must necessarily be related to a moral subject (individuals capable of thinking in terms of right and wrong), and since animals are not considered moral subjects, they don’t have rights. But the question is how exactly does an intellectual capacity give a person moral rights, the rights not to be killed for pleasure, for example? Or reversed, why does the absence of a particular intellectual capacity render a subject rightsless? And: are we ready to accept the implications of attaching rights to intellectual capacity?

While animal rights are still controversial in many parts of the western world the idea of (inherent) human rights is almost considered self-evident in every day life. This in spite of the fact that natural science does not acknowledge (moral) rights whatsoever, and that establishing universal human rights, without invoking gods or some kind of “impartial beholder”, has proven a difficult task that has occupied philosophers since the days of the Enlightenment (Linzey, 1987). Human rights as expressed
in *The United States Declaration of Independence* are dependent on the idea of a Creator, an idea that was considered scientific at the time but now is a matter of faith.\(^{10}\)

Next question is what would happen if animals actually were ascribed moral rights? Would that lead to legal rights, and were animals to be incorporated in our legal system; could misbehaving animals be prosecuted? Even though it seems wrong - and certainly is - similar things have happened before. In 1386, in Falaise, France, a pig was sentenced to death by hanging after killing a three month old baby. Absurd as it may be it is one of many examples of how animals have been given a moral status (Linzey, 1976). Thus, giving certain animals certain rights wouldn’t be the first time. Moreover animals already have rights in the western world. Slaughter animals are incorporated in our legal system in virtue of being someone’s property. And pets - culturally defined as cute and cuddly - are protected by heavy legislations as long as they are someone’s property. In other words some animals do have rights already insofar they are beneficial to human existence. And to clarify: it is never suggested that non-human beings should have *human* rights.

Since the days of St Augustine mankind has viewed itself as possessing an absolute freedom from responsibility towards animals by virtue of possessing the Imago Dei; the logos: rationality. The professor of philosophy and animal rights-sceptic Ingemar Nordin stands firmly in the humanistic ratio-centric tradition. Nordin’s version of the ancient argument is that humanity has inviolable rights by virtue of possessing a *disposition of rationality*. A disposition of rationality can be understood as having the potentiality of rationality. By placing the rights-giving entity in the possession of a potentiality of rationality and not in the possession of rationality itself Nordin aims to get around the fact that *not* all humans possess rationality and would hence have no rights, which is one of the unacceptable features Nordin sees in Peter Singer’s utilitarianism. This way even the "gravely retarded" child, as Nordin eloquently puts it, have inviolable human rights (Nordin, 1997, p 33).\(^{11}\)

But this argument has weak premises. Nordin is using arbitrary categories and black-and-white reasoning that simplifies the issue. For example he seems to assume that there is only one kind of rationality and that this kind of rationality is the only important one. Also Nordin assumes that simply

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\(^{10}\) The modern concept of human rights borrows for its justification the idea of a Creator. In *The United States Declaration of Independence* of 1776 is says that originally men (sic) were “endowed by their *Creator* with certain unalienable Rights” (National archives, *my ital.*).\(^{10}\) Interestingly while the belief in a Creator has plummet in the west the belief in – or at least the talk of - human rights has not. And without the Creator upon which rights can be founded the argument for inherent human rights, in virtue of being human, becomes either circular or an easy target of relativism.

\(^{11}\) Nordin also writes that only human beings are capable of empathy, morality, culture, history, civilization; that only human beings have language with symbolic function; that only mankind has “managed to break out of the prison of biological necessity “ (p 21). Some of these claims are obviously not true while some claims – for that humanity has broken out of biological necessity - are hard to comment as he doesn’t define biological necessity. And that animals don’t have culture and civilization is, again, a matter of definition. The same has been said of many non-European peoples. And as for empathy and morality within the animal kingdom we cannot really know, but that there are social laws and hierarchies, which is a kind of morale, is an established fact. A slight epistemological humility is in place.
by having a human brain the “gravely retarded” child is having a disposition of rationality. But how can Nordin know that? And how meaningful is that disposition if it will never become more than a disposition? And more broadly: why does the absence of a disposition of rationality render a subject without rights?

The argument builds on the common assumption that there can be no rights without duties; that if a subject does not have duties, it does not have rights. But what duties could a “gravely retarded” child with only a disposition of rationality have, that would earn it rights? Also even termites – given the right circumstances and the right amount of time - have a potentiality for rationality: that is the whole point of Darwinian macro evolution. Lastly the proposition than animals are devoid of all kinds of rationality, and all kinds of morality, is unscientific, counterintuitive and against empirical facts.

3.3 Theos-rights

The main points of the extensive body of works of Andrew Linzey is that moral solicitude should be expanded to include non-human beings; and that non-human beings do have rights by virtue of being the work of God, the work of which God said it was “very good”. Linzey's theos rights are based on the premises that God is still active in creating the world, and that God is benevolently inclined to the Creation.

Theos-rights could be summed up as: The Creator is in a relation to the created. Therefore mankind’s relation to the created is in a necessary relation to the Creator. The Creator owns the rights to his creation. As a direct consequence mankind i) does not own the right to exploit the Creation, ii) is not the provider of rights to animals and the rest of the creation. The inherent value of the Creation as well as the existence of objective moral values is dependent on God (Karlsson, 2009).

Before we go into the biblical foundations of theos-rights it is worth mentioning a common objection to rights language in a Christian context, namely that God is the only one with rights, hence human rights or any other rights can only be rights against God. This is a justified argument if the rights in question are not justified by reference to a god in the first place. But as God in this case is both the provider of rights and the justification of the same rights, there should be no clash of rights, as it all starts and ends with God.

3.4 The biblical foundation for theos-rights

The biblical foundation for theos-rights Linzey finds in three covenants. The first covenant is when the ruah, the spirit in Genesis 1:2, imbues “the whole creation” and gives the whole creation inherent value. God finds the creation very good and confirms the positive value of Creation. Here humans and animals and all life is embraced by the same ruah. (Karlsson 2009) The second covenant is the Noahic covenant just after the Flood. Adam and Eva are expelled from Eden, enmity is put between man and
beast, and both live in fear of one another. The Flood wiped out the old world and all was restarted. But both man and animal were saved in the ark; again both man and beast enjoys the compassion of God. No distinction is made between humans and non-human animals as for the covenant itself:

‘I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you
and with every living creature that was with you – the birds, the
livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark
with you – every living creature on earth [my ital].’ (Gen 9:8-10)

The Hebrew word in use is nephesh (soul or life or breath) and all living things are talked of as having nephesh, which confirms the spirit-imbued status of the animal kingdom as well.

The third covenant is the incarnation of Christ; the Logos becoming flesh and making “his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). It is a divine embrace of the whole creation, matter and all, and not just the theoretical rationality of man (Karlsson, p 319), and this is an important detail as it is one of Christianity’s more defining characteristics. It is also one of its more provocative.

3.5 Exploitation based on weakness and difference

As mentioned previously the absolute right of man to kill animals for pleasure (as Augustine had it by virtue of being superior is not a necessary inference of Genesis 1:26. Rather it is a biased interpretation in favor of man, exaggerating the unicity of man, perhaps not stemming from blood thirst or indifference but from the unpleasantness of the act of killing a living being with obvious resemblance: giving man an absolute unquestionable right is a way of bypassing the issue.

But more importantly it is an interpretation with some unexpected consequences. Firstly: presumably few people would be prepared to take the full consequences of an ethics where superiority justifies exploitation. For example: If a malicious alien species - hypothetically - ever were to land on earth we would, in order to be consistent, have to accept their right to enslave or eradicate us were they only stronger. Exploitation justified by the weakness of the exploited is, furthermore, an ethics that sits badly with Jesus’s special care for the weak and ill and oppressed. Having their land occupied by the Roman Empire Jesus and the Jews were themselves the oppressed and weak ones. In the New Testament there is a strong undercurrent of desire for liberation.

Secondly absolute rights over the animals legitimized by reference to difference also have some inconvenient sides to it. While it is true that the lifestyle of gorillas differs greatly from a typical urban European lifestyle, and that the 1% something genetic difference between gorillas and humans is of obvious importance, it is still a matter of choice to stress the difference and not the similarities. Without further comparisons this tendency to stress to claim superiority by reference to difference is a familiar trait of colonial discourse that has always been hard to reconcile with New Testament imperative to love one's neighbor as oneself, and to love beyond the socially constructed boundaries in
the manner of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-28). The unique role of mankind is a biblical fact, but the interpretation of the unicity, is a social construct. In fact the New Testament could be described as the story of how God tells the Jews that that salvation is not reserved to their people only; that the Jews now had to share their unicity with gentiles: at the time a provocative message and the cause of much dispute.

The suggestion that animals should have rights – rights not to be killed for sport - is often met with protest. The underlying presumption is that raising the status of one group will lower the status of another, and this argument is common in the history of social change. The idea of women’s right to vote was met with equal scorn and aggression. The acquisition of legal rights of slaves was strongly opposed. Defenders of slavery in America claimed that slavery is natural and therefore by God and that the South would collapse financially if slavery was abolished; in Europe the fear was that the British Empire would fall if slavery was banned. Slavery was both justified and questioned on the bases of the Scripture. That was long ago but it was only sixty years ago since Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat (Spalde & Strindlund, 2012). These social changes seem to all have awoken heated argumentation, but in retrospect presumably the majority of the people of the western world would like to undo these achievements.

Another idea is that caring about animal suffering is psychologically linked to a greater indifference for human suffering. Research shows the opposite, that it is the same people caring for animals that care for the environment, for peace, equality, minority rights (Spalde & Strindlund, 2012) It is simply an inaccurate assumption.

Yet it is not an unusual position. In the otherwise relatively progressive Church of Sweden the former bishop Caroline Krook stated in 2007 that concern for the wellbeing of animals is wrong as long as members of our species suffer. More specifically Krook says that care for animals is a luxury problem and wrong when half the world is starving. The argument that caring for animal is wrong as long as human beings are starving has (maybe) the look of sound reasoning, but at closer range the argument resembles a logical fallacy. In using one weak group to undermine another weak group is a double-binding kind of argument that leads an ethical paralysis. Why is Mother Teresa helping children of Calcutta, but ignoring poor children of south-Saharan Africa? Another example: why does the Church of Sweden in 2016 spend 17 million SEK on the construction of an ecological chicken-slaughterhouse - money that could have gone to orphaned children of Syria?"}

Thus, seeing weakness and difference as the bases for denying animals rights can lead to a philosophy of exploitation that is contradictory and eventually backfires on us. Instead Christian ethics should consider the superior position of man as the basis of our moral obligation to the rest of the living world. If mankind is superior, then that superiority ought to evoke a sense of responsibility. If mankind only has moral judgement and reason shouldn’t it follow that we utilize that reason to improve the situation for those that don’t? If we believe animals lack immortal souls and only get this one life on earth, shouldn’t that make us revere their lives even more? And if we believe animals cannot communicate their feelings and desires with us in a comprehensible way, ought that not make us more careful and not less? For can we rightfully interpret the silence of the animals – the lack of organized protest - as an informed consent? (Linzey; 2009).

3.6 Dominion

Clearly it says in the Scripture that man shall have dominion over “the animals”. Western tradition has as we have seen interpreted dominion as what we would refer to as despotism and tyranny. But the Genesis does not define dominion in satisfactory manner. Tyranny is probably not what the inspired author of Genesis had in mind. On the contrary it is suggested that the Hebrews had the notion of a righteous king in mind, a king that ruled righteously, in the manner of God (Spalde & Strindlund 2004). In short that would mean acting righteously towards animals in the way God is believed to act righteously towards mankind. The idea that God would kill a human being for pleasure is not compatible to typical idea of God love for mankind. In fact that is an idea that in many aspects would disqualify God as a benevolent and moral God. Therefore is the idea that human beings are allowed to kill for pleasure not a reasonable interpretation of dominion.

Today, possibly as a result of growing body of research showing that animals are more complex beings than Descartes made them, the interpretation of the dominion is slightly changed, often pointing towards a responsible and nurturing relationship to the Creation (Linzey & Yamamoto; 1998). But – and this is a circumstance that reveals an important trait of the emerging “animal-friendlier” discourse - new scientific data and new insights does not seem to have any theological repercussions.

While it is not controversial today to suggest that God dislike animal cruelty, since God loves his Creation, it is still controversial to suggest that animals have, or should have, rights. This attitude reveals the contradiction: The suffering of the animal is ascribed significance but the life of the suffering animal is not (Linzey; 1976). The previously mentioned ecological chicken-slaughterhouse of Linköping diocese is one example. The project is motivated by a concern for the environment, as well as the abuse of animals, hence the slaughtering should be ecological and humane. The contradiction: the methodology of killing an animal has an ethical dimension. The killing itself does
not. This is, finally, not unusual situation in the history of social change. Alleviating suffering is virtuous but eliminating the structure that produces the suffering is not. The south-American bishop Helder Camárra once said "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist". In other words the virtue is producing the suffering. Or: the good feeds on the evil.

3.7 Responsibility, stewardship, compassion

Today there are three common theological positions as to how human kind should relate to other living beings: responsibility, stewardship and compassion. But the first two positions - responsibility and stewardship - have an anthropocentric bias that obscure human dependence on the rest of the creation. Responsibility seems to put human beings to much outside of the creation and not part of it. Stewardship is slightly less anthropocentric and has overtones of mutuality as it has a serving quality to it, but it still presupposes an anthropology in which mankind is elevated above the Creation which we are set to serve, which we clearly are not (Linzey & Yamamoto; 1998).

A better interpretation of dominion is compassion. In a daily use it only signifies to pity something or someone, a mere merciful thought, but literally it means co-suffering and it differs from mere empathy in the urge to alleviate the suffering of another. It is stronger than to simply feel for someone, and it connotes co-existence. In its richest interpretation compassion refers to Christ himself “going beneath his dignity” and subjects himself to man and matter: and to ultimately be killed by roman soldiers.

Central to the concept of compassion is in a Christian context to “recognize a continuity of existence” with the other, beyond socially constructed boundaries (Linzey & Yamamoto 1998). The Good Samaritan is of course an image of how Christ went “beneath his dignity” when He did not “consider the equality of God” but rather “emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant” (Phil 2:6-7).

3.8 Christ serving downwards

To serve one another is a Christian imperative. In John 13 Jesus washes the disciple’s feet and says:

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.16

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16 John 13:15-17
The master is washing the disciple’s feet. Peter refuses to accept that Jesus, his master, washes his feet. The reason Peter protests is that things are not done in the “right” order; categories are being mixed up: to wash someone’s feet was the work of slaves or women and when Jesus washes his disciple’s feet he is flipping the current order upside down.

Jesus invites his disciples to follow him, serving “downwards”. Therefor Christ is saying power is best expressed in the higher serving the lower. This is the opposite order of the Aristotelian worldview where the lower is for the use of the higher. The life of Jesus, as well as the end of his life, the crucifixion, clearly expresses that same ethics of serving “downwards”.

Like Peter we might protest and say that Jesus never said we should serve the animals, that that would be an absurd misinterpretation of the Gospel. It is however possible that the absurdity as well our protest arise because we, firstly, a priori exclude animals from the concept of our neighbor, and, secondly, are intuitively repulsed by the idea of following Jesus in serving “downwards”. Serving animals is beneath the dignity of mankind. This is too provocative for our liking. Just as Jesus was too provocative for some of contemporaries when he spent time with the lowly and despised. For serving downwards is the core of the gospels. The unicity of the story of The New testament is the movement from the high to the low: the god that lets himself be flogged by the ones he serves.

Living in a relationship of compassion to other living beings is to recognize the continuity of existence. Serving other living beings because one is superior is a “Jesusian” imperative that is quite different from a Hellenized Christian perspective.

3.9 The dependent rational animal

Clearly the example set by Christ is not to demonstrate power by dominating from above but to serve. To show weakness and to engage from e point of voluntary submission is the core of Christian ethics.

This message differs from the general western philosophy which has, from the start, ignored vulnerability and disability. Human interdependence has been largely disregarded, and the perspective of children and elderly people accordingly. The weak and ill have in western philosophical discourse always been ”subjects of benevolence by moral agents who are themselves rational and untroubled” (McIntyre, 1999, p 2) which in turn has made the weak and the ill or disabled “them”. Weakness and disability has become The other.

The subject position of western philosophy is an independent male adult, and the othering of weakness is partly due to Aristotle failure to acknowledge dependence as a distinguished factor of human existence. This failure can in part be explained in terms of gender. Aristotle’s discourse of male virtues holds that troubling others with your sadness is a female feature because receiving is a passive act and passiveness is female and linked to inferiority. Also is dependence female of the same reason, since it
forces the subject into receiving. Therefore dependence is unfitting for the male subject position of philosophy.

But to a much larger extent the inconspicuous status of weakness is a denial of the “bodily dimensions of our existence” (ibid, p 4). It is a collective denial reinforced by a cultural tendency to conceive ourselves as non-animal. Thus the othering of weakness is related to the unwillingness to acknowledge the ”animal nature” of human life.

But by instead taking seriously the weakness and vulnerability that human beings clearly share with the non-human (death, sickness, fear, the sensation of being alive and desire to stay alive) the field of theology can steer away from implicit contempt for weakness, and at the same time approach the human existence more holistically.

4. Anthropocentrism

The traditional scriptural interpretation of man’s relation to animal suffering can be described as either unconcerned and “silent”, or ambivalent and contradictory (Sommarregn; 2008). First of all this is to be expected as the Bible consists of 66 books of different authors, written in different cultures over a period of maybe 700 years. Could the scriptural answer (of how human beings should relate to animals) be anything but contradictory or ambivalent?

But more importantly the “silence” or ambivalence of the Scripture could be a result of the circular logic of an anthropocentric discourse that disqualifies animals. A closer look at key concepts of animal suffering discourse, such as “animal”, “soul”, “reason” show that they are not self-evident. Rather the concepts are arbitrary, socially constructed and rather elusive. The concepts seem to both depend on, and necessitate, each other. For example defining reason is partly defining what an animal is which is partly defining what human is.

4.2 The concept of animal.

Commonly “animal” refers to all living beings except human beings. And often “animal” is understood dichotomous to “human” in the way that animal is whatever human is not. This dichotomy is also typically hierarchically ordered: a human being behaving like an animal is considered behaving badly whereas an animal displaying human qualities is a typically interpreted intelligent and good (Linzey, 1998). This definition of animal in the sense ‘all beings except human beings’ is however foreign to the Bible. It is a modern invention stemming from the fifteenth century. (Eating Animals, s 45).
Etymologically “animal” is derived from the Latin word animale which means “being which breathes” which per definition refers to any living creature, including humans.\(^{17}\) Animale is in turn derived from anima meaning either soul or breath. Still “animal” is typically used as an invective indicating a particularly unspiritual or immoral behavior.

This shift in meaning of the word could be due to a cultural reluctance to acknowledge the “animal side” of human existence; or a novae-riche-attitude that wants to disacknowledge a shared origin and exaggerate the gap between man and animal. And naturally, the greater the gap, the less reason for wanting to acknowledge likeness.

It is often suggested that Aristotle lowered the status of animals in robbing from them the rational soul, allowing them only a sensory soul, just as it is also held that Aquinas mechanically repeated Aristotle’s view on animals. While there is some truth in that, and that none of them were defenders of animal rights, the typical image of the two philosophers could be an exaggeration of certain aspects of their work.

In Metaphysics Aristotle seems to say that abstract reason is not necessary superior in every aspect to experience. He says ”we see that the experienced are more effective than those who have reason, but lack experience” (McIntyre, 1999, p 5). And Aquinas actually on several occasions speak of non-human animals as ”other animals”; and that (non-human) animals are able to make ”natural judgments”; and that they exhibit a ”a semblance of reason” and that they possess a “natural prudence”.

Both Aristotle and Aquinas do ascribe reason to some non-human beings in the form of phronesis, a fact that blurs the modern sharp boundary line between human- and non-human rationality. (McIntyre 1999, p 55)

Greek thinking also distinguished between the three versions of life - “bios”, “psyche”, and “zoé” – of which “zoé” was the spiritual and richest form of life. Zoé is etymologically related to zoon, and it is the word Jesus used when he spoke of himself: Eimi he zoé - I am Life (Linzey & Yamamoto, p 221).

Thus there is a linguistic connection between the concepts of animal and soul in the ancient languages that is lost today.

4.3 The concept of soul

The typical definition of soul in western Christian theological tradition would something like an immaterial, immortal and specifically human faculty. When human beings die we live on through the soul. When animals die they don’t live on, presumably because they don’t have soul.\(^{17}\) This idea is however foreign to the Old Testament and the Hebrew context. Between the soul of man and the spirit of other living things no important distinction was made. The same Hebrew word – nephesh - was

used for all living things. The old testament gives us "no reason to deny soul or spirit to animals".\(^{18}\) This is a feature that the Hebrew religion shared with contemporary pantheistic religions as well as Hinduism and Buddhism wherein animals as well as rivers and mountains had immortal souls or were part of immortal souls.

Perhaps the most important step in the evolution of the concept of soul is when the Hebrew religion entered into Greek thought. Absent in the Old testament the immortal soul is everywhere in the New Testament.

The modern concept of soul has obvious platonic features. This is the product of Descartes whose anthropology could be described as platonic-Augustinian, and it is from here the contemporary tendency to identify the soul with the self, the mental actions of the non-material “I”. For Descartes “I” is the essence of the human being.\(^{19}\)

For Aristotle the soul was the form of the physical body, soul was the most basic substance. He thus gave it the widest possible definition. He did not separate the soul from the body in the same way as Plato. The soul was dependent of the body. But he did split it up in three parts: plants had a low ‘vegetative soul’ and animals had a ‘sentient soul’ and humans had a ‘spiritual soul’. This soul is split up in two parts: the “psyche” (soul) and the “nous” (mind).\(^{20}\)

Aristotle utilized three different categories when speaking about of living beings; he distinguished between ζώον[zoön] meaning living creature; θηρίον [therion] meaning wild animal or beast; and κτήνος [kténos] meaning domestic animal. Humanity belonged to the first category, ζώον, and Aristotle defined the human species as ζώον πολιτικών [zón politikon] which can be translated into ‘the political animal’ \(\rightarrow\) i.e. living in the polis, the city \(\rightarrow\) the city-dwelling animal.

Due to its elusive and unempirical nature “soul” is abandoned by science and dwells primarily in religious discourse. But, needless to say, as religious discourse cannot be viewed or exercised outside of the rationale of language the concept of the soul causes trouble in the religious discourse too for the same reasons. As Luther asserts, despite all our intellectual capacities “we are still incapable of giving a definition of the soul” (Pelikan, 1958).\(^{21}\)

### 4.4 The concepts of consciousness & suffering

It could be argued that the soul actually still lives on in the concept of consciousness, sharing some of its properties, even its elusiveness. A simple definition could be a self-consciousness and identity over time, or a mental capacity of “apprehending moral and religious truth” (Linzey; 2009; p 28).

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\(^{18}\) “This Sunday (1993) with prof. Andrew Linzey” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDsJ4TD6MAE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDsJ4TD6MAE)

\(^{19}\) The encyclopedia of Philosophy vol 7, P 84, Editor Paul Edwards, Macmillian INC, USA, 1972

\(^{20}\) The encyclopedia of Philosophy vol 7, P 1, Editor Paul Edwards, Macmillian INC, USA, 1972

\(^{21}\) Luther’s works Volume 1,pp 25, Lectures on genesis, Chapters 1-5, Edited by Jaroslaw Pelikan, 1958, Concordia Publishing House Saint Louis, Missouri, US
the existence of consciousness has shown to be difficult though. To observe and measure neurological responses does not tell us about the quality of the responses.

The concept of consciousness derives from the ancient and multivocal concept of conscientia (Latin) but it received its modern content with Descartes and the early modernity. Since then consciousness is the place of all mental acts: sensory data, perceptions, thinking.

Also since Descartes the consciousness became a private consciousness. This is a point that often is difficult to grasp for modern people of the western world; that the Greek world was a collectivistic world and that they really had no concept of a private consciousness. The word “idiotos” – origin of “idiot” - referred to a person with too many private concerns, and not without disdain. Moreover the private consciousness presupposes the development of the social movement of individualism in which the reformation was an important step. Indeed the Christianity with its focus on private salvation and purity of the (private) soul was one major driving force of the process of individualism and the individual consciousness.

It is from a neurological perspective obvious that many animals experience pain and the range of animals believed to be able to feel pain is constantly expanding. Contrary to previous beliefs fish and crabs are now thought to possess a neuro-physical disposition for experiencing pain (Science and Christian belief, p 5). But pain is not in itself a problem or “a bad thing”, rather it is a language of the evolution, guiding and preventing sentient beings from further danger or possible death. The problem is “suffering” which seems to require a more advanced consciousness. The question of suffering is closely tied together with the question of consciousness (Science and Christian belief, s 5) Hence the question of consciousness arises: what exactly is consciousness?

It could be defined as self-consciousness or identity over time, sometimes synonymous to ‘mind’, even though there is no real consensus. It is common to suggest that many animals possess consciousness, but equally common to claim that animals don’t. This is partly due to definitions. It is namely possible to talk about two different kinds of consciousness; one which is could be described as a sentient phenomenal consciousness, and a second type that could be described as reflexive consciousness with a Higher Order Thoughts (HOT) - the ability to think about oneself thinking (Science & Christian belief, p 5). Often the officially recognized neurological conditions necessary for consciousness are based on the human brain, and whether animals are considered having the neurological conditions necessary for consciousness depends on the likeness to our neurological structure. But, importantly, just because the structure of the human brain seems to give rise to a consciousness doesn’t mean a different structure can’t also produce consciousness (Science and Christian belief, s 15)

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22 The encyclopedia of philosophy, p 4
It is argued that suffering requires a consciousness of the second type. But just because a subject doesn’t remember yesterday’s pain doesn’t mean the pain is less today. Nor does it mean that consciously inflicting suffering on a subject is immoral but causing pain is amoral. It is also often argued that reason is crucial for the ability to suffer, or that reason heightens suffering. But is that really the case? Couldn’t actually rational comprehension make suffering less acute? Linzey argues that a human being might dread going to the dentist, but in knowing that the big tools inserted into her mouth is for her own good she can mediate and lessen the suffering. Lacking reason the animal have no way of making sense of the situation and is therefore left with an unmediated terror (Why animal suffering matters, s 17). And just because the animal doesn’t remember having a big tool in its mouth yesterday, doesn’t lessen the horror of having it today. The other way around seems more plausible,

4.5 The concept of reason - logos

If reason is the self-evident barrier between man and beast it should also be self-evident what reason is for the argument to be meaningful. But what reason is has never been the subject of consensus. Neither has the scope of reason, or what reason actually can do, been clearly defined. Often it is understood either as the process of drawing logical inferences, or the faculty of the (human) mind where these logical inferences occur. It is often thought of as universally human and neutral, and therefore the opposite of sensation or faith. But that opposition between faith and reason is not self-evident throughout history. In a way it was also foreign to Plato and Aristotle who did not understand logos entirely separated from psyche - soul. The logos was, like mentioned previously, setting humans in relation to the divine, and the exercise of the logos was in its own way a divine exercise.

The image of reason as a neutral universally human faculty soaring above the world of objects is the reason of the modernity, the rationalist reason of Descartes. Already Hume (1711-1776) did not accept that view. Reason was as he saw it enslaved by passions, tainted by emotions, and not detached from experience at all. Habits are also part of a conclusion-making process. Defining the scope of “pure reason” presupposes a separation from other mental acts such as sensation or will or memories, an operation not easily conducted. For: how do we know that a conclusion is the work of reason and not of experience, or of both?

This was an obvious “problem” already in antiquity and therefor a distinction was made between two sides of reason, or maybe - depending on theoretical position - two kinds of reason: Theoria was the highest and most divine form of thinking, soaring above its object, abstract and detached, providing universal logical connections. The phronesis on the other hand was engaged, active,

phenomenological and supported by experience, working from the inside out. In Kant’s work this distinction is the foundation for his *analytical* (a priori) and *synthetical* (a posteriori) truths.

The theoria-type of reason had a privileged status in antiquity. It was this type of reason that was the divine reason Augustine made the sign of Imago Dei; higher then sensory and bodily knowledge. And still today, it can be argued, this theoria-type of reason has a privileged status in western culture. This despite the fact that it is useless without experience: it is experience that informs the logician what a logical conclusion is and that a logical conclusion must be drawn.

One possible reason for the privileged status of abstract reason in the west is that it human beings seem to possess a lot of it, relatively to animals, which makes it suitable for the sign of humanity. One obvious downside of placing too much human identity in reason is that the level of reason obviously varies between people - newborns for example cannot be said to display or possess the same level of reason as an adult. From here it is easy to end with an anthropology in which it is possible to be more *or less* human. And if reason is the imago dei, and the imago dei is the ticket to heaven, heaven will be a place of only fully functional adults of a certain level of intelligence. (Linzey & Yamamoto: 1998: p 87).

Another unexpected consequence of making reason the sign of humanity is that some animals clearly display more reason than some humans. This makes some animals closer to God than some humans. Jeremy Bentham wrote famously that a dog “is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant”. Probably true this makes a dog more human than an infant.

Moreover, as late as the end of 1800’s, in the wake of colonization, the topic of much European anthropological debate was to what extent the primitive man, encountered in the colonies, possessed reason. Science and contemporary definitions seemed to suggest the primitive man did have some kind of reason but of low grade (Boas, 1901) American anthropologist Franz Boas argued that this conclusion was a fallacy of European ethnocentrism and that reason must be understood in its context. To Boas reason was ultimately is a *mode of thought* and a question of culture.

The assumption that animals are essentially arational is difficult to defend for various reasons. For one we are constantly at risk of the anthropocentric fallacy of expecting reason to appear exactly like we have learned to identify it. For if we cannot understand what a lion say, or think, or what motivates it, we cannot really say that it is *aloga zoé*, life without logos, without resorting to guessing or prejudice (Linzey & Yamamoto, p 48). It is possible that we accept as reason only that kind of reason that is similar to the reason we possess. In the words of J.M Coetzee:

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24 The encyclopedia of Philosophy vol 7, P 84, Editor Paul Edwards, Macmillian INC, USA, 1972
25 Jeromy Bentham, A utilitarian view, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 1789, Chapter XVII, Section 1
reason looks to me suspiciously like the being of human thought:
worse than that, like the being of one tendency of human thinking.
Reason is the being of a certain spectrum of human thinking.

Furthermore, it is difficult to claim animals to be arational since experiments and empirical evidence show the opposite. Since long some mammals and higher primates have shown to exhibit intelligent behavior familiar to that of human beings, be it of a lesser amount. But there are also verifiable memory tests in which gorillas have performed with better and quicker results than humans (Linzey & Yamamoto 1998).

Finally brain-size has been a reoccurring argument for human intellectual superiority and in the days of eugenics the measurements showed that the ancient Greeks had the biggest brains – had the most reason - followed by the Victorian men. At the end of the ladder there were the emotional Italians followed by African peoples and the aborigines of Australia. Interestingly the Neanderthals are believed to have had larger brains than humans, just like many animals today have larger brains than humans (Frostegård, 2008). The sharp line between rational and arational is unempirical.

5. A new situation

There is yet another practical circumstance that calls for a theology that does acknowledge the role and status of other living species: the world is not the same world today as in the days of Abraham, Aristotle or St Augustine; the culture in which Genesis 1:26-28 was written is in many regards different from the western culture of today; the intimate relationship between man and animal of the pastoral culture of the Hebrews is, as a result of the Hellenization of the gospel, probably bot embarrassing and impossible to relate to (Wingren, 1995)

5. 2 Industrial killing of non-human beings

Since the industrialization there is a fundamentally “new” situation at hand. The ritual animal sacrificing of ancient religions or the slaughtering of the agricultural society of the middle ages are dwarfed by the commercial killing of animals today. In Sweden more than 2 500 000 million pigs are (legally) slaughtered annually. The biggest meat producer in Sweden - HK Scan Sweden AB - slaughtered 730 000 pigs in 2015 which means 2000 pigs every day. Or in other words: 1000 pigs before lunch break (Jordbruksverket, 2015).

The Lutheran-Christian Scandinavia has a world leading fur farming industry and Denmark is the biggest fur farming exporting country in the world. Kopenhagen Fur which is Denmark's largest “export commodity to the booming economy in Hong Kong/China”, as it says on the company’s website, is able to produce 150 000 furs, on demand, in one day. The company also takes pride in executing a both sustainable and recyclable production wherein the byproducts - the flayed carcasses - are sold and turned into soap and pet food. 28

While Switzerland, UK, Austria and Belgium has legally banned fur farming on the bases of the unethical nature of the production Sweden has not. 29 Speaking out against animal cruelty means speaking out against powerful companies [a few of the most powerful companies in the world are related to meat-production such as McDonalds, or retailers such as Walmart whose number of employees worldwide exceed 2.2 million)30 and could thus seem like an unwise move. But as animal well-fare is becoming an issue of growing concern outside the church, it could, in the long run, be an opportunity to for the church to gain credibility. The situation is “new” and very different from the times of the church fathers. This makes referring to the low priority of animal welfare amongst the church fathers appear like a fallacious appeal to authority.

One side of this new situation is the desacrilization of nature which is a fundamental condition for the industrialization to ever take place. A desacrilization of nature is a process probably interlinked to urbanization and reduced contact with nature, but the impact of philosophy cannot be overlooked. The Cartesian dualism reinforced the externalization of nature and did also help create a theology where God was “there” and the world was “here”.

Today the extreme instrumentalist Cartesian view on animals is no longer valid. And it is not laughable to suggest that animals are capable of feeling, or are worthy of a minimum of respect (Sommarregn 2008). Care for nature and earth is expressed in churches of the west today and it is not uncommon that people make the connection between Christian stewardship and veganism (ibid.). This suggests an evolution of ethics. But by admitting that animals are capable to feel, for example, however leads into dilemma: if animals are not mere automata but sentient beings mankind’s relationship to animals becomes an object of ethical concern. And if animals can feel pain, the pain of animals caused by humans is unfathomable. And if cruelty against animals is worse today, then the effects of the neglect of the churches is worse.

30 Sommarregn, Fredrik, Kristendomens syn på djur, s 15, c-uppats
5.3 A creation-oriented outlook on life

The role of mankind in the creation is central to Lutheran theology, hence is the question of the environment of importance. The Lutheran World Federation - representing the interests of 72 million members world-wide - has released several statements on climate change and environment issues “with outmost seriousness”.\(^{31}\) And the [Lutheran] Church of Sweden says that environmental questions are of great importance and that it embraces a *creation-oriented outlook on life* that emphasizes…

the mutuality of the relations within creation and between God and creation without also giving up human beings’ special role and task,

an attitude somewhere in between romanticism and exploitation that is now widely established in Christian churches \(^{32}\)

That said neither Church of Sweden nor The Lutheran World Federation has released one document on animal issues.\(^{33}\) As it is no secret what is going on in slaughter houses around the globe the silence on the issue is somewhat baffling, unless “animals” are still regarded as soulless *automata*, or a natural resource among others. Besides - even if the Scripture doesn’t say a word about animal cruelty ought not the industrial killing of defenseless living beings, for the sake of business, excite an ounce of empathy, empathy rather than controversy? Mankind is, after all, created in the image of God.

And what exactly does it mean to adopt “an attitude somewhere in between romanticism and exploitation”? The immediate interpretation is that romanticism is the direct opposite of exploitation. Another possible interpretation is that a sound and reasonable perspective of “animals” is neighboring both romanticism and exploitation.

It is suggested that the concern for animals is not absent in Lutheran theology but included in the concern for the environment, hence only an absent *labeled as such*. This is cause for questioning though. Firstly, “the environment” is a depersonalized concept when in fact the environment consists of myriads of sentient living beings, including human beings. In the same way “climate change” is a desensitized concept that obscures its immediate content, for example pollution or nutrient loading, which in other words mean destruction of ecosystems and habitats. Secondly, most people would agree that there is a significant difference between a rock and a dolphin, and that - true or not - dolphins have some kind of mind while the rock does not. Therefore speaking only about the necessity to care for the Creation but hesitating to address the man-animal-relationship looks like a conscious choice of discourse; a choice to A) avoid or dismiss the possibility that there exits an ethical problem, and B) perpetuate a traditional instrumental view of non-human beings.

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\(^{33}\) Email, Stephanie Gallay, LWF Communications
6. Lutheran relevance

Up till now I have discussed animal suffering in a broad and pan-ecclesiastical perspective with a western focus. I have shown that the Greek influence, culminating in Cartesian mind-spirit dualism, widened the gap between humans and non-humans. The divinization or exhalation of abstract reason in has led to an anthropology in which man is neither god nor beast but soaring above, detached, and alienated from the Creation. Even though Luther doesn’t not have an animal theology his theology of creation can provide a deepened relation to the animals that points away from Cartesian desacrilization and cultural phobia of animal likeness.

It is true that Luther has a traditional Augustinian view on non-human beings as “brute beasts”, set on earth for the utility of man. It is also true that Luther never really explore the man-animal-relationship in depth (Pelikan, 1958)\(^3\) But just like Luther’s anthropology is not clearly spelled out but rather deducible from his theology of creation and theology of grace, so – it can be argued - is his animal theology deducible from his deduced anthropology. One place to start is in Luther’s fundamental criticisms of reason.

6.2 Luther’s criticism of reason

Privately Luther often held animals to be more virtuous than people; more patient, more faithful and more honest. And even though this was not expressed in his written theology it still corresponds with an important side of his theology: his criticism of the idolization of human reason. Naming his dog Tölpel (meaning stupid) could be seen as an act of appreciation and not contempt.

Often the Fall is interpreted as the story of man acquiring reason and free will. But that is an interpretation that could lead to the contradiction of acquiring reason and already having it. For: a fair judgement requires a free choice, which the act of eating from the tree is said to provide, leading to the conclusion that reason and free will must have preceded The Fall, in order for God’s expulsion of Adam and Eve to be fair - or the expulsion is not fair. Eating the fruit cannot have provided reason.

Instead the main point of story is a fundamental critique of human reason. Clearly it says in Genesis 2:17 that “when you eat from the tree you will certainly die”. In his lecture on Genesis Luther writes that the serpent “assails the greatest strength of man” (Pelikan, p 150) and uses it to deceive mankind into trespassing against God – eating the fruit of The tree of knowledge that stands “in the midst of the garden” (Gen 3:1). What Luther means is that human reason, the greatest strength, actually is the very weakness that the serpent exploits and that ultimately gets mankind thrown out paradise.

\(^3\) Luther’s works Volume 1, Lectures on genesis, Chapters 1-5, Edited by
Good or bad reason was still the Imago Dei that separated mankind from the brute beasts. But for Luther the Imago was tainted by sin from the Fall and could in no way assist mankind in reaching the salvation of God. On the contrary reason was more likely to lead man astray and put man into conflict with the gospels. Reason was “full of ignorance of God and detestation of the will of God” and those “endowed with a better reason [and] will hate the Gospel all the more bitterly”. And also: “let us maintain that reason in men is most hostile to God” (Pelikan, 1958, p 143).

These opinions he held in conflict with the mainstream scholastic theology of his time, but he did so with support from the apostle Paul who, while being highly educated both in Torah and Greek philosophy, repeatedly speaks of the treacherousness of human reason. For Paul the wisdom of this world was “foolishness in God's sight” (1 Cor 13:19); and the death on the cross was “folly”, in the eyes of worldly wisdom. Tellingly the philosophers of Athens, the capital of reason, made fun of him on the areopage and he never established a congregation there (Badou, p 29). Support for that same kind of anti-intellectualism Luther found in Christ himself who thanked God for having hidden the truth “from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (Matt 11:25). The cross was indeed a scandal for both the Jew and the Greek.

6.3 Theology of glory and theology of the cross

Luther criticism of reason led him into a greater criticism of the whole scholastic paradigm. When Luther speaks of the “theology of glory” he refers to scholasticism which he believed led people into a delusion. Encouraging people to look for God in the high and beautiful and perfect, which Luther claimed the theologies of glory did, would ultimately leave people unsatisfied as God was not to be found there at all. Just like Moses on Mount Sinai (Exo 33:18) who asked to see God’s glory but was shown only the “back “, it is foolish to believe that god will reveal his full glory (Lull, p 44).

The purpose of the theology of glory is to glorify human capacity and it originates, Luther asserts, from man’s love of himself. But more importantly it provides us with untrue knowledge of God, and consequently with untrue knowledge of the nature of grace, which ultimately could jeopardize salvation. Knowledge of God and God’s grace is only found in the full embrace of the cross, but “because men do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded” And he writes that “virtually the entire Ethics of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace”. For Luther suffering showed the true nature of God. Therefore God is to be found in the lowly and the despised, in the foolish and weak.

Out of Luther’s sola gratia a quite different anthropology is deducible, an anthropology in which the fundamental human condition is helplessness and dependence. Here weakness is not the other. Here

35 LW, XXXI, 57, HDT, p 28
36 Lull, 1989, p 45
37 Luther cited in F-Lull, 1989.
the weak and ill are not *them* but us. Weakness is the most salient trait of the subject position in Luther’s anthropology.

**6.4 Luther on creation**

For Luther the Fall was a cosmic fall of all creation, not just man, and animals therefore also bore the punishment of the sin of Adam. Man became predators and the animals became prey. Since the Fall man’s relationship to the animal kingdom is, according to Luther, analogues to the tyrant and his subjugated people. The tyrant’s dominion over his people is in accordance with God’s will, just as man’s dominion over animals is according to God’s will (Linzey & Yamamoto; 1995; p 90. Luther writes that “every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that, by virtue of a spiritual power, he is lord of all things” (Lull, p 606). But, he adds, “this is not to say that every Christian is placed over all things to control them by physical power - a madness with witch some churchmen are afflicted” (ibid.). For Luther mankind’s dominion was always mediated by submission. The ideal human is the lord of all, but at the same time a servant of all: the righteous lordship includes service.  

Furthermore human lordship is always in a relationship to God, which is a relationship mankind is not the lord of. This means that man’s dominion is not limitless but framed by the relationship to God, a thought echoing the *theos*-rights of Linzey (Wingren, 1995).

Indeed, for Luther the way we exercise our dominion is *not* what God intended but a consequence of The Fall. Our dominion subsequent to the Fall only *resembles* the intended dominion. As for the concept of dominion Luther writes "the substance is almost entirely lost" (ibid; p 92). In the Fall mankind lost the ability to grasp the joy the animals gave Adam and it led to a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of animals (Pelikan, 1958). Prior to the Fall Adam would never have killed animals for food and animals did not live in fear of humans, but as Adam opens his eyes after eating the forbidden fruit he has become a predator. The joyful company of animals has become a mere means of survival (ibid; 93).

Again current order of predation was not the intended relationship, and this is where we are not being consistent. Genocide, war, female subordination, poverty and hard labor “by the sweat of your face” are all consequences of the Fall according to Genesis. But presumably few people in Lutheran churches today would hold war, inequality and poverty to be in accordance with Gods intention. Rather, a lot of effort, from many different Christian organizations over the world, is put into combating “the outcomes of the Fall”. For some reason the violent relationship between man and animal is not considered something in need of adjustment.

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38 Om en kristen människas Frihet, Verbum förlag AB, (p 12)
7. CONCLUSION

I have discussed the problematic consequences of the traditional theological interpretation of mankind’s relation to the animal kingdom. The classical dogma, that mankind by virtue of being created in the image of God has no duties to the non-human beings, is ill-fitted to the larger body of Christian ethics. The New Testament ethics and the example set by Jesus Christ leaves little room for an ethics that allows exploitation of the weaker.

The proclaimed silence of the Bible on the matter of animal treatment could be due to an anthropocentric tendency to a priori interpret the Scripture in a way that obscures and disqualifies animals from the discourse, a tendency visible in the exaggeration of both difference and human superiority. The focus on difference rather than the similarities could be stemming from an ambivalence towards the body which in turn, ultimately, could be due to an “fear” of acknowledging “the animal conditions” of human existence.

A compassion-oriented interpretation of our “dominion” over the non-human animals expresses this coexistence as well as frees us from the notion that we are somehow outside of Creation, detached and not really belonging. To blame for this detachment is partly the cultural praise of theoria or the abstract reason. Luther is criticizing the scholastic focus on reason and urges us to turn our eyes from the high heavens and down to the earth, to return to the Christian focus on the weak, the despised and the lowly. This attitude in which we acknowledge our helplessness and dependence on God can be a fertile ground for a renewed relationship to animals.

Animal suffering has been a minor issue in the western Christian tradition. Typically humankind is regarded as having a total dominion over animals that frees humankind from all responsibility. This is problematic as the domination of the Genesis actually suggested not the rule of a tyrant but one of a righteous king, and being righteous exclude the option of arbitrary killing for pleasure. If the justification of killing animals for pleasure is the likeness to God one must also accept Gods right to kill humans for pleasure in order to be consistent.

Instead, Christian ethics should consider the superior position of humankind as the basis of a moral obligation to the rest of the living world. If mankind is superior, then that superiority ought to call for a greater responsibility, not less. Denying animals rights can lead to a philosophy of exploitation that is contradictory and eventually backfires.

Important concepts of the animal theology discourse are not self-evident and objective. The concepts of animal, understood as ‘any species except human beings’ is an invention of 1400’s and it is foreign to the old testament context. Likewise the concept of reason is elusive and has throughout the history of western theology been reserved for humans only. Increasingly different kinds of reason are “found”
in non-humans. Ultimately the binary of man and animal is a matter of faith and narrative, a fact that should surprise no one. The boundary between man and animal is in the eyes of biology one of degree rather than kind. It is also a fact that doesn’t force anyone to abandon the idea of humankind’s special role in creation. But embracing this fact, rather than opposing it, should invite a greater humility, an humility whose absence is on the expense of inferior specious.

It is suggested that non-humans lack a certain type of consciousness that is required for an individual to suffer, but that they can still feel pain. This is a circumstance that can actually heighten the pain of non-human animals as there is limited ways of rationalizing the pain. That said, what consciousness actually is far from an object of consensus.

After the industrialization the situation is changed. Animals are killed for luxury consumption at a fundamentally different rate. Also the scientific knowledge of animals and their behavior is different. This realization has started animal rights movement in different part of the world. But the churches of the west have not yet had their eyes opened to this issue.

Animal suffering is increasingly addressed elsewhere in society. Being an institution preoccupied with suffering and right and wrong the church should address animal suffering as well. A concern for the environment or the Creation that ignores or avoids animal suffering is paradoxical and could lead to a situation where the methodology of killing an animal has an ethical dimension whereas the killing itself does not. In other words: alleviating suffering is virtuous but eliminating the structure that produces the suffering is not. And indeed: the caring for the creation ends up perpetuating the suffering of animals. But since anthropogenic animal suffering per se is considered bad this is a contradiction.

Traditionally the interpretation has been that only Adam (and Eve) was created in the image of God. And since this likeness – in the hands of Augustine - was interpreted as having reason non-human beings could not possess reason. It was okay to kill animals for pleasure. In the process of Hellenization humankind ascended and the non-human kinds descended.

Luther critiqued the elevated position of human reason. It was reason that threw Adam and Eve out of paradise and founded the new predatory world order. God is not found with reason but in the lowly, in the despised and weak, and most of all God is to be found in the suffering of this world. Theoria or abstract reason can do nothing to help human beings reach salvation. On the contrary it can only lead mankind astray. It is all about God’s grace. This gives rise to an anthropology which makes weakness and dependence of God mankind’s most prominent traits. If reason is the barrier between man and animal and reason is of little significance a greater humility towards other creatures of the Creation is
appropriate. Especially as the main narrative of Christianity is that the Logos leaves the high and submits “Himself” to the low; that Jesus is serving mankind, serving “downwards”. For Luther mankind was both the lord of all (earthly things) but also the servant of all. In traditional western theology mankind has only been the lords of all things but not willing to also be the servants. This view of power is visual also in the death of Jesus on the cross. God’s power is not expressed in violence and brute strength – climbing down from the cross and killing the oppressors - but by serving, and as such having a change not only behavior but also hearts.

Serving the animals is a thought that might seem absurd or as an insult. But hadn’t the concept of animal been made the symbol of ruthlessness and unspiritual behavior it would not be the case. And without an exaggerated anthropocentric starting point “our neighbor” could have applied to animals as well, or living beings in general, and not just human beings. The Old Testament Hebrew view did not deny animals the soul and it does not make as strong a distinction between man and animal.

The preference utilitarianism of Peter Singer is not compatible with a Christian idea of intrinsic rights of human beings. Also it seems to be relying on a universal truth or an “impartial beholder” that he doesn’t believe in, making the theory vulnerable. Linzey’s builds his theos rights upon the idea of a God that is benevolent towards “His” creation. The origin of the intrinsic value of all living things is Gods benevolence towards the Creation and that God loves the world.

A contemporary Lutheran church should bother with animal suffering for the same reason as other churches, but Luther’s anthropology emphasizes the total dependence of God, rather than total domination, which provides a possibility to view other living beings with compassion and not disdain.
Summary of conclusion:

- Suffering is at the very heart of Christianity and Christian theology. So is the neglect of animal suffering. But to care only for human suffering is not a necessary position. The idea that mankind has no duties to non-human by virtue of being created in the image of God is ill-fitted to the larger body of Christian ethics.

- That fact that mankind is more powerful should not free mankind from responsibility. Nor should the idea that mankind alone is endowed with a free will. The idea that superiority justifies exploitation of weaker beings is a traditional colonial and Nazi argument that is hard to reconcile with general Christian ethics.

- Interpreting the God-given dominion as a carte blanche for ruling like a tyrant is not in line with the Hebrew understanding of the dominion in which mankind was to rule the earth like a rightful king.

- In Genesis God instructs mankind to eat a vegan diet. The killing (eating) of animals is a consequence of the Fall. It is paradoxical to ignore the killing animals when other consequences of the Fall, such as inequality between people, are not ignored.

- The Christian tradition has emphasized the difference between mankind and animals. It has also exaggerated the difference, on the expense of “the animals”. But the man/animal-dichotomy is not self-evident and is a matter of interpretation, or faith.

- In expanding the circle of compassion there is very little to lose (only a sense of absolute uniqueness) but a lot to gain; for example a greater sense of belonging on earth, a greater reverence for life. Stressing the similarities rather than differences could heal the cartesian wound and be a part of a resacrilization of life.

- In Western philosophical discourse abstract reason is a specifically human property. And in western theology abstract reason is identified as the sign of the Imago Dei, the sign of being created in the likeness of God. Reason is also the sign of mankind’s freedom from responsibility. But for Luther human reason was of little importance. In fact reason was the human weakness which the Serpent assailed and that got Adam and Eve expelled from Eden.

- Luther also taught that mankind is both the lord of all and the servant of all. This contrasts the traditional idea of total superiority without responsibility. It also contrasts the examples set by
Christ of serving downwards. Not only washing his disciples feet but also subjecting himself to human life, letting himself be killed by Roman soldiers.

- Luther taught that God was to be found in the lowly, in the despised, in the suffering. The innocent deaths of sentient beings is of analogical value.

- The gospels are not necessarily quiet on the matter of animal suffering, as suggested by some. The silence could be an illusion produced by an anthropocentric perspective that a priori disqualifies animals from the discourse of ethics.

- St Augustine permits mankind to kill animals for pleasure. That however does not mean that Christians are obliged to kill animals. Nor are the words of Augustine infallible to a Lutheran. But more importantly there is after the industrialization a completely new situation in which animals are killed in vain, not for survival. Despite of this the issue is largely neglected. Moreover there is no need to support industrial killing of sentient beings just because Augustinus in the 400’s said it is ok. It is possible that he would horrified by the vast scale of the killing he sanctioned.

- There is in the Old testament no support for the claim that animals lack souls. On the contrary both man and animals are ascribed soul (“nephers”). And if animals can feel pain, and also have souls, it should cause Christian theology to rethink the amoral status of animal, as it has often been based on the assumption that they lack soul and the ability to feel pain.

- In several places in Genesis God places man and animal in the same category. The man/animal-binary is to a large extent an hellenistic import, reinforced by a cartesian philosophy of modernity. The emphasizing of difference of kind is neccessary to the exploitation of the other, in this case non-human animals.
**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Industrialization has intensified the maltreatment of non-human beings but philosophy has not really dealt with the question yet. This however does not mean that the issue doesn’t bother people. The fact that animal freight cars don’t have windows, or that slaughter houses, just like the gallows hills in old days, often are placed in the outskirts the cities - in Sweden often on the countryside - tells a different story (Spalde & Strindlund, 2012).

And more: the belittling and misrepresentation of animal rights advocates as well as the unwillingness to question the nature of the man-animal dichotomy doesn’t necessarily come out of lack of empathy for the cause but out of a bad conscious. After all, the violence that preludes the Sunday roast is not really a secret, even though it is probably fairly common that parents, at least partly, hide the truth of the steak to their kids.

The fact that some questions are difficult is no good excuse for not dealing with them. The difficulty of verifying the existence of consciousness in lower animals is no good reason to view them as worthless or moving matter. Likewise it is counterintuitive to claim the absence of feelings in a dog that barks and howls when being subjected to violence. By the same scrutiny one must also admit that the existence of consciousness or reason of a newborn is first and foremost a matter of faith, as it is not an empirical fact. Suggesting that non-human beings could feel pain and joy, and that they have a rationality of their own, is sometimes dismissed as anthropomorphism, but as I have tried to show it is more likely a case anthropocentrism denying empirical facts.

One argument frequently employed to oppose the idea of animal rights is that animals eat other animals and therefore we must be allowed to eat animals (and maybe: therefore there are no animal rights?) It is obviously true that a wolf kills a rabbit and eats it. But the question then must be if the world of non-human animals, which is often claimed to be absolutely amoral, really should be the source of human moral? Also it is inconsistent to admit similarities with animals in this very case (only to justify the killing of them) but otherwise deny similarity. Moreover the wolf doesn’t hunt rabbits by the billion in spite of having other means of survival. Being carnivore the wolf has no option. Human beings being omnivore have an option (Spalde & Strindlund, 2012).
Animals run no risk of going to hell.

They are already there.

Victor Hugo
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