# THOMAS AQUINAS' ECO-THEOLOGICAL ETHICS OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC CONSERVATION

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**ABSTRACT**

**This essay explores the much-debated question regarding the extent and viability of Thomas Aquinas as a theological source for expanding Christian ethical concern for the nonhuman creation, particularly nonhuman animals. This exploration focuses on the intersection of two foundational issues in Aquinas' theological framework, nature and teleology, as well as the effects of this intersection in Aquinas' work concerning nonhuman creation. From these examinations, I suggest that Aquinas can provide significant contributions for augmenting concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals because his theological framework demands that humans preserve the natural order through conservation. However, Aquinas' eco-theological ethics of conservation is foundationally anthropocentric and only permits indirect moral concern for the nonhuman world.**

In the face of an ever-growing recognition regarding the validity of ecological issues, many religious scholars have turned to voices in the Christian narrative to widen ethical concern for the nonhuman creation. One such voice is that of Saint Thomas Aquinas. However, scholars disagree on the nature and extent of Aquinas' potential contribution to the intensification of an ethical emphasis on the nonhuman creation. Furthermore, many ethicists and theologians who draw on Aquinas do so—positively and negatively—with an ease that often falls short of capturing the complexity of his thought. This diversity warrants a clearer exploration into Aquinas regarding the fundamental question: Does his theological framework, either as it stands or through a critical retrieval, provide a viable source to widen ethical concern for the nonhuman creation? If so, in what manner does it enable such a widening? Even more to the point: what are the boundaries of Aquinas' contribution?

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In this article my focus will be limited to an emphasis on nonhuman animals. Within this limitation, I will seek to provide *an* answer to the above questions through an exploration of the intersection of nature and teleology in Aquinas' theological framework. My aim is to delineate how Aquinas' appropriation of these ideas establishes a cosmological theocentrism that grounds, in temporal practice, what I label an eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation. By this phrase I mean that the *telos* of living nonhuman entities is exhausted in the temporal realm in which they exist for the sake of humanity. Hence the ethics is anthropocentric. This teleological view of nonhumans is coupled with the claim that they exist for the *entire* human community, both present and future. Thus, humans must use the nonhuman creation in such a manner as to preserve it for all people, including those not yet born. Hence the ethics calls for conservation of the natural order. Within this framework, Aquinas provides a clear opportunity to enlarge ethical concern for nonhuman animals *indirectly*. However, his views concerning nature and teleology exclude the possibility of including nonhuman animals in the category of direct moral concern.[1]

Ultimately, I will suggest that the import of Aquinas' contribution depends on what one desires to claim. If scholars aim at conservation of the nonhuman world in its "natural" state for the sake of humanity in relation to God, Aquinas provides a powerful source. If, however, they seek to include the nonhuman creation (and animals in particular) in the realm of direct moral concern—which is a way of saying they seek to maximize intensity over the concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals—such a move is something Aquinas' theological framework cannot bear.[2] By arguing that such is the case, I hope to clarify contemporary

[1]Two points require clarification, one regarding definitions, the other regarding presuppositions. Regarding definitions, the phrases "direct moral concern" and "indirect moral concern" serve as a convenient taxonomy to categorize Aquinas' arguments. The former refers to moral concern in which the subject of that concern has its own intrinsic value. The latter refers to moral concern in which the ultimate end is not the well-being of the subject itself, but rather another subject. Indirect moral concern views the subject in question as a means whose value is predicated upon an end outside itself (as opposed to an intrinsic value). In the present project, the subjects are nonhuman animals and the end outside of them is human happiness. Regarding presuppositions, I hold that direct moral concern is a better approach to animal welfare than indirect moral concern. However, the aim of this paper is not to argue this point, but rather to examine where Aquinas falls between the two positions. I will argue that Aquinas is limited to an "anthropocentric conservationism." The word "limited" is not meant to imply that this finding imposes an *a priori* defect or short-coming in his thought. Rather, it merely recognizes that, as far as a scale of concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals is concerned, direct moral concern tends to be more intense than indirect moral concern (e.g. in cases where the welfare of the animal is at risk but no detriment to humanity can be detected).

[2]Three points arise here. First, my argument is not that Aquinas cannot make a positive theological contribution to ecological ethics (i.e. attempting to prove a

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debates, thus moving them forward, concerning the question of Aquinas' potential contribution to ecological thought, particularly with regard to nonhuman animals.

## *I. Recent Interpretations Regarding Aquinas' Eco-Theological Potential*

When it comes to Aquinas' potential contribution for widening concern for ecological issues, scholars provide a diverse interpretative spectrum. At one end, they chastise Aquinas for promulgating an anthropocentrism that has contributed to the ecological crisis itself. At the other end, they praise Aquinas for a theocentric worldview that, once applied to contemporary issues, provides one of the most powerful voices in decrying the degradation of the nonhuman creation. In what follows, I will explore a number of voices on both sides of this spectrum, highlighting the interpretative tension they create.

Lynn White, though not explicitly mentioning Aquinas in his 1967 essay, certainly has him in view when he writes, "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."[3] In the wake of White's contribution, "anthropocentrism" has become an inherently pejorative term, and this context framed one of the central debates concerning Aquinas: Is he anthropocentric or theocentric?

The accusation of anthropocentrism was sharply leveled against Aquinas in Peter Singer's seminal work, *Animal Liberation*.[4] Singer claims that Aquinas excludes nonhuman animals from the realm of morality with the one exception in which harming them may result in harm to humanity. Says Singer: "No argument could reveal the essence of speciesism more clearly."[5] Singer goes on to lament the uncritical appropriation of Aquinas' anthropocentric grounding for the eating of animals in the magisterial pronouncements of the Catholic Church.[6]

negative), but rather that his theological framework is essentially anthropocentric in a manner that denies direct moral concern to nonhuman animals. Second, while I find Aquinas' position unsatisfying, my argument is neither that it is incorrect nor requires revision. Christian theologians and ethicists must decide if such a move is warranted. If so, then Aquinas' theological ethics would require revision. Third, while I find attempts to retrieve Aquinas as a champion of an essentially theocentric ethics unsatisfying, my reading is simply a reading of Aquinas that views his ethics as essentially anthropocentric.

[3]Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 189.

[4]Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), 193, 201–04.

[5]Ibid., 203.

[6]Ibid., 203–04.

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From the perspectives of animal rights and animal welfare, Singer's negative treatment of Aquinas sets the general tone. In *The Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare*, Aquinas is mentioned only a few times. Joyce Salisbury argues that Aquinas excludes nonhuman animals from an ultimate *telos*, and furthermore claims that, for Aquinas, "here on earth there [is] no need to preserve animals that [are] seen as 'useless.'"[7] In the same volume, Andrew Linzey identifies Aquinas (and Scholasticism in general) as contributing to three "major tendencies" in Christian thought that exclude animals from the moral community: instrumentalism, anthropocentrism, and dualism.[8]

David Kinsley also examines these three tendencies in his cross-cultural exploration regarding the convergence of the intersection of nature and spirituality.[9] Kinsley places Aquinas in the chapter entitled "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful," claiming that his hierarchical view of the world, in which the natures of nonhuman animals "are defined in terms of their subservience to human beings," constitutes a problematic ecological outlook.[10] Kinsley further claims that, for Aquinas, "the perfection or renewal of human kind in salvation leaves the less-perfect world of material creation and the lower creatures behind."[11]

In his exploration of the modern struggle against speciesism, Richard Ryder laments that, although Christianity has the framework (i.e., love) to extend the boundaries of moral concern to include animals, instead it "magnified the gulf between human and nonhuman, eventually espousing the anthropocentrism of St Thomas Aquinas."[12] In Ryder's estimation, Aquinas is the culmination and full expression of anthropocentric tendencies in the history of Christian thought. Furthermore, his view "eventually triumphed in Christian theology" over and against the hospitable practices of earlier saints toward animals.[13] In Ryder's estimation, Aquinas' thought has provided

[7]Joyce E. Salisbury, "Attitudes toward Animals: Changing Attitudes throughout History," in *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare,* eds. Marc Bekoff and Carron A. Meaney (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 78. For my critique of this claim, see below.

[8]Andrew Linzey, "Religions and Animals: Christianity," *Encyclopedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare,* 286–87.

[9]See David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 103–07.

[10]Ibid., 109–10. Given this critique, it is not clear how Kinsley so effortlessly classifies Augustine as a positive ecological voice in Christianity (118–20).

[11]Ibid., 109–10.

[12]Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes towards Speciesism* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 27.

[13]Ibid., 34–36.

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the justification for "several centuries of outstanding cruelty" toward animals.[14]

J. Claude Evans engages Aquinas briefly in the introduction of his work that seeks a middle ground between an ethics of extension (in which we delineate the boundaries of direct moral concern based on some attribute or quality) and indirect moral concern by placing humans in the context of the world. Aquinas appears under the heading "Traditional Anthropocentrism" and is identified by Evans as providing one of the "classic statements of anthropocentrism."[15] Thus Evans casts his lot with those that critique Aquinas' anthropocentrism.

One of the more critical voices of Aquinas has come from the burgeoning field of animal theology. Andrew Linzey, to date perhaps the most influential and prolific writer in the field, provides brief engagements with Aquinas' thought in many of his works. In *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, he cites Aquinas in conjunction with the "deeply anthropocentric" nature of contemporary Christianity.[16] Though the overall Christian tradition is ambiguous regarding the moral status of nonhuman animals, Aquinas is one of the negative voices on account of his hierarchical and despotic interpretation of "dominion."[17] Linzey is also critical of Aquinas' anthropocentric classification of souls and its resulting androcentrism.[18] In *Animal Theology*, he writes, "We may summarize Aquinas in this way: considered *in themselves* animals have no reason and no rights, and humans no responsibility to them."[19] Linzey is careful to distinguish between direct and indirect moral concern, but nonetheless maintains that Aquinas is strictly anthropocentric, even seemingly suggesting that Aquinas permits humans to cause unnecessary pain to animals.[20] This speciesist viewpoint, Linzey charges, "has left a bitter legacy in Christian theology."[21] In a still more recent work, Linzey challenges six dominant arguments that theologians and philosophers use to exclude nonhuman animals from the moral community, including the natural hierarchy of Aristotle and Aquinas.[22] For Linzey, Aquinas'

[14]Ibid., 43.

[15]J. Claude Evans, *With Respect for Nature: Living as Part of the Natural World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), viii.

[16]Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 22.

[17]Ibid., 24–25. Linzey does soften his critique of Aquinas by acknowledging Aquinas' context (27).

[18]See Ibid., 36, 56, 141.

[19]Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 15.

[20]See Linzey's comparison of Aquinas and Humphry Primatt (ibid, 17).

[21]Ibid., 19. On Aquinas' influence, see also 64–65.

[22]Andrew Linzey, *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology, and Practical Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10–29.

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anthropocentrism exceeds Aristotle's in that it is established in nature *and* solidified by divine providence.[23] From this claim, Linzey charges that Aquinas only permits one instance of (indirect) concern for animals: "where cruelty practiced on animals might adversely affect the human perpetrator."[24]

Paul Santmire balances negative and positive views of Christianity's potential contribution to ecological sensitivity by exploring both harmful and promising voices in Christian history.[25] There are diverse and influential sources in the Christian tradition that promulgate, on the one hand, a "spiritual motif" in which the nonhuman world becomes merely the stage of the divine-human drama and, on the other hand, an "ecological motif" in which the nonhuman world has an integrity in journeying with humanity in the divine-world drama. Santmire notes certain tensions in Aquinas' thought, but overall paints his view in a negative light.[26] Following John Hickery Wright, Santmire labels Aquinas' theological framework as an "intramundane anthropocentrism" in which "nature is seen more as an object for human use, which satisfies biological needs and serves spiritual knowledge, than as a subject in its own right."[27] He concludes that "this kind of anthropocentrism surely stands in an uneasy relationship with Thomas's theocentric understanding of the diversity and gradation of creatures in the universe."[28]

Robert Wennberg, in arguing for a widened scope of moral concern from within Christianity, offers an overview of historical developments regarding the moral status of nonhuman animals. In his overview, he places both Aquinas and Kant in a common category of indirect moral concern.[29] He goes on to claim that Aquinas adheres to a moral theory "that has no place for animals"; violence done to nonhumans is morally wrong only "because of what it might prompt us to do to human beings."[30]

[23]Ibid., 14.
[24]Ibid., 14, 170.
[25]H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985).
[26]These tensions include divine immanence and transcendence, creaturely integrity and providence, the goodness of creation and sin, and anthropocentrism and theocentrism; see Santmire, *Travail of Nature*, 84–95. That Santmire's view of Aquinas is fundamentally negative is seen in the section heading which charges Aquinas with "the subordination of nature" (84).
[27]Ibid., 91–92. Here Santmire contrasts Aquinas with his more positive reading of Augustine.
[28]Ibid. 92.
[29]Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge Our Moral Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 120–31.
[30]Ibid., 121.

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Lastly, in his work tracing the dominance of anthropocentrism in Western philosophy (as well as the minority of dissenters from this view), Gary Steiner categorizes Aquinas as "the apex of medieval anthropocentrism."[31] Steiner claims that Aquinas' unyielding line of an essential distinction between humans and nonhuman animals establishes an ethics of dominion in which humans have no direct duties to animals.[32] Steiner is more balanced than others in his negative judgment on Aquinas, but nonetheless maintains that for Aquinas the only concern in harming animals is that "our conduct toward animals has implications for our conduct toward other human beings."[33]

Given these negative readings of Aquinas and their charge that he contributes to a milieu enabling ecological degradation, how do his supporters respond? The dominant response has been to recover Aquinas' cosmological theocentrism and thus challenge charges of anthropocentrism in his theological framework.

For example, Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough, in their introduction to *Creaturely Theology,* critique Linzey's edited volume *Animals on the Agenda* because, in their view, its historical investigations are structured only "to set up certain theologians as instigators and culprits of a negative attitude toward animals."[34] As an alternative to such allegedly biased interpretations, they point to John Berkman's entry in their text as a "critical, but far more sensitive, reading of Aquinas."[35] Berkman acknowledges Aquinas' justification of human utility of the nonhuman creation in the temporal order. But he quickly qualifies this acknowledgement with an affirmation of Aquinas' theocentrism in which "the entire physical universe (for example plants, birds, non-human and human animals) is ordered towards 'ultimate

[31]Gary Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 126.

[32]Ibid., 130–31.

[33]Ibid., 131.

[34]"Introduction," in *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (London: SCM Press, 2009), 6–7. This critique is no doubt aimed in part at Dorothy Yamamoto's argument by which she attempts to critique presuppositions in Aquinas' thought regarding both the ability to observe nature purely and objectively and thereby derive universal moral principles, and the establishment of an essential and unproblematic line of demarcation between all humans and all nonhumans. Yamamoto critiques the former from a consideration of the historically-located observing subject, and the latter by acknowledging again the location of the observing subject, the ambiguity in the larger tradition, and deeper understandings of animal life in modern thought. See Dorothy Yamamoto, "Aquinas and Animals: Patrolling the Boundary?" in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animal Ethics for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 80–89.

[35]Deane-Drummond and Clough, *Creaturely Theology,* 7.

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perfection,' which is in turn ordered to God, and by its perfection gives glory to the goodness of God."[36] Thus Berkman can argue that, for Aquinas, "God's plan in creation…is by no means anthropocentric."[37]

For her part, Deane-Drummond, in her *Eco-Theology*, engages Aquinas in her explorations of evil, wisdom, and Christology. First, his understanding of evil as absence maintains both the goodness of the world and God as Creator of all that exists.[38] Second, his affirmation that "creation is an expression of God's wisdom" suggests that God's wisdom is still at work in the ongoing processes of the created order.[39] While qualifying her affirmation of Aquinas ("his own view of a hierarchical universe created through a chain of being obviously needs some adjustments in the light of evolutionary biology"),[40] she seeks to take the basic premise of his thought (that the created order is a reflection of divine wisdom) and appropriate it in light of scientific understanding. In her discussion of Christology, Deane-Drummond criticizes the "simplistic" accusation that Aquinas contributes to a milieu that disparages the nonhuman creation. She defends him against this claim by acknowledging the interplay between grace and nature in his thought.[41]

Anne Clifford, in her contribution to a work published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, explores various sources available in Catholicism to address ecological concern.[42] She claims that "a major part of Aquinas' legacy to the Roman Catholic tradition is his sacramental view of material creation"—the entire creation is good and reveals the goodness of the triune God in its vast diversity.[43] Thus, Clifford claims that intemperate destruction of the created order without respect for its integrity can lessen the "discernable traces of the Trinity" in that order.[44] Furthermore, she contextualizes Aquinas' claims regarding hierarchy and utility. While acknowledging that the notion of hierarchy "obviously leaves Aquinas' theology open to the critique that it is anthropocentric,"[45] she argues that, on account of his sacramental vision of the entire created order, such negative

[36]John Berkman, "Towards a Thomistic Theology of Animality," in *Creaturely Theology*, 24.

[37]Ibid. Berkman goes on to offer a fine exploration of Aquinas' understanding of nonhuman animal capacities (25–33).

[38]Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008), 122.

[39]Ibid., 159.

[40]Ibid.

[41]See ibid., 103–04, 213–14, n. 23.

[42]See Anne Clifford, "Foundations for A Catholic Ecological Theology of God," in *"And God Saw That It Was Good": Catholic Theology and the Environment*, ed. Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996).

[43]Ibid., 38.

[44]Ibid., 39.

[45]Ibid., 40.

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interpretations of particular passages in Aquinas can stand only when they are "read in total isolation from other passages in which he affirms the inherent goodness of all creatures as unique manifestations of the Trinity and if his theology is interpreted ahistorically."[46]

In a more recent work, Jame Schaefer explores concepts from patristic and medieval sources in an attempt to construct a theological model adapted to the demands of contemporary science and thus able to address modern ecological issues.[47] Schaefer's text is somewhat problematic in adjudicating the boundaries of Aquinas' contribution to the welfare of nonhuman animals because she admittedly sidesteps both the "is-ought" problem of nature and ethics and patristic "concepts that are not helpful or can be constructed as harmful."[48] While she does provide an eco-theological vision interpreted through the lens of science, she is at times either unaware or purposefully silent concerning tensions in her thought.[49] Nonetheless, Schaefer acknowledges accusations of anthropocentrism in Aquinas' theology and thus recognizes the need for reconstruction.[50] However, she also criticizes such accusations, claiming that they "have not been explored sufficiently from several perspectives," the dominant of which is contextual differences between modern readers and ancient writers. Schaefer continues: "Nor do these criticisms take into consideration the constraints that patristic and medieval theologians imposed on human use of Earth's constituents and their teachings about the faithful's responsibility to their neighbors and to God for how they regard and use other creatures."[51]

William French is another defender of Aquinas' potential contribution to ecological concerns.[52] Over against the Cartesian reduction

[46]Ibid. Here, Clifford's critique is specifically aimed at Santmire (see ibid., 46, n. 44).

[47]Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic & Medieval Concepts* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009).

[48]Ibid., 6, 8.

[49]One example is her affirmation of three concepts: the macro- and micro-evolution of creatures, the notion that each creature acts according to its nature to achieve its divinely intended end (and thus the non-falleness of the nonhuman order), and her acknowledgement that human beings, as rational co-creators, can produce immensely adverse effects in the created order. If humans, through sin, greatly distort the created order and nonhumans adapt to this distortion, is it not true that the nonhuman order is in some sense adapted to sin? Schaefer does not address this tension. See Schaefer, *Theological Foundations*, 124–26, 270–72.

[50]Ibid., 8–9.

[51]Ibid., 9.

[52]See, for instance, William French, "Catholicism and the Common Good," in *An Ecology of the Spirit*, ed. Michael Barnes, (University Press of America Press, 1993), 182–83, 191; idem, "Beast Machines and the Technocratic Reduction of Life," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, ed. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (New York: Orbis, 1993), 24–43.

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of nonhuman animals to machines, French positively evaluates the positions of St. Francis of Assisi and Aquinas: "Both thinkers present an understanding of humanity as a participant within the broader community of creation, and this general portrait offers the basis for generating a strong prophetic challenge to the modern technocratic vision of nature as a mere resource bank and field of things."[53] While Francis has often been praised for ecological sensitivity, French notes that "Aquinas' views are not typically so well regarded."[54] For French, this disregard is not without warrant, since Aquinas' instrumental view of animals in conjunction with his refusal to extend to them direct moral concern "helped establish a tradition of misnaming which has plagued Catholic moral theology until only very recently."[55] Even so, French laments that critiques of Aquinas miss another aspect of his thought: his cosmological theocentrism. He sees in Aquinas' theological framework an interconnected cosmos in which each part contributes to the good of the whole, which has God as its final *telos*: "Sadly many who know little of Catholicism cite certain unfortunate parts of a long and varied tradition to dismiss it as holding no helpful resources for promoting responsible care of animals or the eco-system."[56]

An even more qualified reading of Aquinas is offered by Mark Wynn in his contribution to *Ecological Hermeneutics*, a recently published collection of essays deriving from a research project at the University of Exeter.[57] Wynn begins by examining both critical (e.g. Linzey) and sympathetic (e.g. Deane-Drummond) readings of Aquinas. In response to voices such as Linzey, Wynn seeks to establish a broader context within which to better understand Aquinas' anthropocentric passages that cause critics dismay. Wynn's position is that the hierarchy evident in Aquinas' view of teleology and nature must be interpreted in light of his cosmological theocentrism. Creatures, in their variety of being, reflect God's subsistent existence (i.e., that God *is* being itself). This reflection constitutes the good of the cosmos as a holistic system, of which all things are integrally a part and nothing is without meaning. Hence, the individual parts of the created order have a good *telos* that "cannot simply consist in their service to human beings."[58] Rather, Wynn claims that "the fulfillment of the nature of 'lesser' creatures, and even of non-animate creatures, can count as a

[53]French, "Beast-Machines," 35.
[54]Ibid., 36.
[55]Ibid., 37.
[56]Ibid., 37–39, at 39.
[57]Mark Wynn, "Thomas Aquinas: Reading the Idea of Dominion in the Light of the Doctrine of Creation," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al., (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 154–67.
[58]Ibid., 157.

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good, even when this results in a human being suffering some deprivation of good."[59] In short, when the *telos* of a human being is at odds with the *telos* of the created order, it is not always the former that trumps the latter.

Finally, Willis Jenkins also laments overly simplistic critiques of Aquinas. In *Ecologies of Grace* Jenkins approaches ecological issues from a soteriological perspective rather than starting with cosmology.[60] In this vein, he offers Aquinas as an influential foundation for eco-justice, a view that he claims is dominant in the Roman Catholic tradition and draws on the notion of sanctifying grace.[61] In the first chapter that he devotes to Aquinas, Jenkins charges that "those who think that Thomas's anthropocentrism offers only problems for environmental theology miss the way he sets humans within a cosmos of creatures bearing their own integrity."[62] To challenge these misappropriations, Jenkins delineates Aquinas' "cosmology of desire" in which all created things desire the good (i.e., God) in a manner consistent with their nature. For Jenkins, this common desire is creation's "integrity."[63] It also facilitates a "common dignity" to all creatures.[64] For humans, unique in the created order, desire for God includes knowing the world and using it properly, primarily in the contemplative sense. Thus humanity acquires, through grace, an "ecological literacy."[65] Such literacy requires a genuine engagement with the created order, an engagement that Jenkins defines as charity. He explores the place of virtue in human engagement with the nonhuman order. Charity qualifies Aquinas' anthropocentrism with a theocentrism in that virtuous humans will view creation as an invitation to divine friendship. In this sense, "rightly loving and using nonhuman creatures incorporates the ordinary into the beatific, inviting our natural relations into a noble friendship with God."[66] Ultimately, Jenkins seeks to demonstrate "that [Aquinas] escapes facile categorization by cosmological centrisms. Instead he harmonizes anthropocentrism, theocentrism, and ecocentrism, precisely because he sees that God chooses to move

[59]Ibid., 162.

[60]Thus Jenkins's starting point is not (as in many who write in the wake of Lynn White's critique of Christianity) the question of anthropocentrism. Rather, he seeks to couch the question of anthropocentrism in the large scheme of soteriology in order to understand it from the standpoint of grace. See Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10–19.

[61]Ibid., 16–17.

[62]Ibid., 118.

[63]Ibid., 120–21.

[64]Ibid., 123.

[65]Ibid., 127.

[66]Ibid., 142.

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creation to Godself by inviting humans into a friendship shaped by their intimacy with all creation.[67] Jenkins thus provides a serious and erudite ecological reflection on Aquinas with a force that surely requires revision to boilerplate critiques.

## *II. Aquinas' Theological Framework for Anthropocentric Conservation*

These conflicting voices regarding Aquinas' potential contribution to the intensification of ecological concern suggest that further investigations into his work are warranted. The question is the extent to which his overall framework can aid in constructing an eco-theology for contemporary Christian thought. A response to this question must address the tension indicated in the interpretive spectrum regarding the relationship between Aquinas' anthropocentrism and his cosmological theocentrism. I will address these issues by exploring two central and intersecting pillars of his thought, namely nature and teleology. At this intersection, I will argue that Aquinas' contribution to eco-theological ethics fits into the category that I call "anthropocentric conservation."

For Aquinas, there is a multiplicity of formal distinctions in the created order. All of these forms, whether human or nonhuman, are good.[68] However, as "formal distinction always requires inequality," the multiplicity in creation entails also a hierarchy of created things in which some are more perfect than others (*ST* I, q. 47, a.2). Regarding the forms of life in these distinctions, Aquinas posits three hierarchically arranged classifications of soul: vegetative, sensitive, and rational.[69] At the lowest rung of the hierarchy of souls is the vegetative soul, lacking both sentience and rationality.[70] At the second rung is the sensitive soul; here Aquinas places all nonhuman animals, which possess the exterior and interior senses in addition to vegetative qualities but lack rationality.[71] Thirdly, there is the human soul, possessing the qualities

[67]Ibid., 150.

[68]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947–48), I, q. 5 a. 3 [hereafter *ST*; references will appear in the text in parentheses]. Furthermore, creatures are good (and indeed have being) only by participating in God's own goodness (and therefore God's own being). However, for Aquinas all beings participate in God's goodness in diverse ways. This participation determines the level of their perfection. See *ST* I, q. 44 a. 1; q. 47 a. 2.

[69]See *ST* I, q. 78 a. 1. See also Judith Barad, *Aquinas on the Nature and Treatment of Animals* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1995), 29–30.

[70]Aquinas ascribes three types of power to the vegetative soul: nutritive, augmentative, and generative. See *ST* I, q. 79 a. 2.

[71]Aquinas acknowledges degrees of gradation within nonhuman animals. See *ST* I, q. 72. On the lack of rationality of all nonhuman animals, see *ST* I, q. 78 a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles* ed. Joseph Kenny (New York: Hanover House, 1955–57), II.66 [hereafter

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of both the vegetative and sensitive souls but excelling them with rationality.[72] Aquinas claims that it is this unique rational dimension of the human creature that constitutes the *imago Dei*.[73]

I will return to Aquinas' depiction of the hierarchy of beings below. My immediate concern is the link between the nature and *telos* of a creature. What is the proper end of the human creature that, with its rational soul, occupies the highest tier of the corporeal hierarchy? In Aquinas' thought, the answer is two-fold (*ST* I-II, q. 61, a. 1). The first end proper to the human creature pertains to temporal matters. The second is the ultimate *telos* of humanity, which Aquinas defines as "happiness" (*ST* I-II, q. 1 a. 8).[74] For Aquinas, "God alone constitutes

1955–57), II.66 [hereafter *SCG*; references will appear in the text in parentheses]. Here, Aquinas also notes a distinction between sensitive souls with regard to the power of locomotion. Even within the realm of sensation, in which Aquinas considers five exterior and four interior powers, he posits a distinction between humans and nonhumans. Regarding the exterior powers, see the curious explanation for nonhumans excelling humans (*ST* I, q. 91 a. 3, Ad 1–3). While certain nonhumans have estimative powers, only the human has cogitative powers. Likewise, while certain nonhumans have memory, only the human can reminisce (*ST* I, q. 78 a. 4). Furthermore, Aquinas holds that retention of universals is proper only to human intellect. Nonhuman memory is limited to particulars (*ST* I, q. 79 a. 6, ad 1). Finally, the appetite of the human is subordinate by virtue of rationality to the will of the human, which Aquinas labels "the superior appetite" (*ST* I, q. 81 a. 3). Rationality enables humans to act freely from judgment, as opposed to instinct alone, which is the case with all nonhuman animals (*ST* I, q. 83 a. 1). These differentiations considered, Barad asserts that Aquinas also holds a high level of continuity between the various levels of hierarchy (*Aquinas on the Nature and Treatment of Animals*, 41–43; see also chapters 5–7). Barad also offers a helpful chart of Aquinas' divisions of sub-divisions of the hierarchy (ibid., 48).

[72]The human contains all dimensions of the soul because she is both corporeal and incorporeal, a microcosmic being that "is in a manner composed of all things" (*ST* I, q. 91 a. 1 and q. 96 a. 2). See also *ST* I, q. 75 a. 4, q. 77 a. 2; q. 76 a. 4–5, where Aquinas argues that all forms of higher perfection contain the lower forms: "What belongs to the inferior nature pre-exists more perfectly in the superior" (q. 76 a. 5). Following Aristotle's rejection of Plato, Aquinas posits that the different dimensions of the soul are unified (see *ST* I, q. 76 a. 3; *SCG* II.58). Furthermore, the unified human soul (vegetative, sensitive, and rational) is substantially unified to the human body as its form (see ST I, q. 76 a. 6; for the order of this soul, see q. 77 a. 4). Even so, "some operations of the soul are performed without a corporeal organ, as understanding and will"; in this manner, Aquinas posits that the intellectual powers of the soul do not have the soul-body composite as their subject (*ST* I, q. 77 a. 5). Hence, when the human body dies, the powers of the soul that depend on corporeal organs become dormant in the soul (see q. 77 a. 8).

[73]Aquinas claims that all creatures bear a likeness to God in that they reveal a trace of God's design (*ST* I, q. 45 a. 7). Even humans, in their physical bodies, bear this trace. For nonhuman animals, the trace is the limit of their likeness to God. For Aquinas, nonhumans bear the trace of the divine "just as the shape of a house points to the idea of the architect" (*ST* I, q. 93 a. 6). In humans, only the rational component (the mind) bears the likeness of God as image: "this image of God is not found even in the rational creature except in the mind." As such, "the intellect or mind is that whereby the rational creature excels other creatures" (*ST* I, q. 93 a. 6; cf. a. 2).

[74]Elsewhere, Aquinas defines the ultimate end as "that beyond which the agent seeks nothing else" (*SCG* III.2.3). See below on the possibility for imperfect happiness in the temporal realm.

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man's happiness" (*ST* I-II, q. 2 a. 8). As such, God is the ultimate *telos* of the human creature. Moreover, God is the end of every individual human creature in a manner unique to humanity's nature. Hence, "happiness" denotes the particular way in which humanity is directed toward God as an ultimate end. This *telos* of happiness is a shared life with God in which the rational soul contemplates the divine.[75] In short, for Aquinas, the ultimate *telos* appropriate for the nature of the human creature is the Beatific Vision.[76]

Regarding the temporal *telos* of humanity, Aquinas posits that an imperfect happiness is possible in the temporal realm. This happiness "depends, in a way, on the body" (*ST* I-II, q. 4 a. 5). Furthermore, "for imperfect happiness, such as can be had in this life, external goods are necessary, not as belonging to the essence of happiness, but by serving as instruments to happiness, which consists in an operation of virtue" (*ST* I-II, q. 4 a. 7; see also *SCG* III.48). This passage indicates that the temporal ends of the humans (1) include care for the body[77] and (2) are directed toward their ultimate end (*ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 6). It also reveals the centrality of teleology in Aquinas' understanding of virtue.[78] For a human to live virtuously in the temporal realm is for her to live toward her proper *telos*, whether temporal or ultimate.[79] This point will bear

[75]While the vision of God is the shared end of all humanity, Aquinas argues that "fellowship of friends is not essential to [perfect] happiness." However, "fellowship of friends conduces to the well-being of happiness" (*ST* I-II, q. 4 a. 8). Nonetheless, commentators assert that Aquinas understands the ultimate *telos* of humanity to be a communal affair. See Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq. 49–70)" in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 126.

[76]"Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence" (*ST* I-II, q. 3 a. 8). Aquinas goes on to link happiness to "union with God." On this point, see also *SCG* III.37. While the Beatific Vision is an appropriate end for humanity's nature, it also requires a surpassing of that nature: "Now man's happiness is twofold...One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead" (*ST* I-II, q. 62 a. 1). For this "surpassing" happiness, humans require grace by which God infuses the theological virtues. See Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 53.

[77]The temporal life of human creatures includes a dependence on their animal bodies, one which mandates that humans meet the needs of their vegetative soul which include nutrition, augmentation, and generation (*ST* I, q. 79 a. 2). According to Aquinas' redactor, this dependence will cease at the resurrection (*ST* suppl., q. 81 a. 4).

[78]Stephen J. Pope, "Overview of the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 32. Alasdair MacIntyre has provided important contributions to the recognition of Aquinas' teleological view of virtue; see his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 53, 185.

[79]Like Aristotle, Aquinas understands the cardinal virtues as directed toward temporal ends (*SCG* III.34–35). He holds that these virtues exist in Christians and non-Christians alike (*ST* I-II, q. 65 a. 2; see also Kent, "Habits and Virtues," 121–22). However,

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significance when we consider whether or not humanity's ultimate *telos* is shared with nonhuman animals.

What about the *telos* of the nonhuman creation, including animals? The two ends of humanity, the temporal and the eternal, do not exhaust Aquinas' teleology. All life is teleological by nature (*ST* I-II, q. 1 a. 2; *SCG*, III.2) and the *telos* of a creature is its good (*ST* I, q. 5 a. 1, 4).[80] Since God is the ultimate good for the entire creation (*SCG* III.17), all creation has God as its end.[81] In this teleological sense, there is a commonality between humans and nonhumans.[82] For, in acting according to their unique natures—and thus toward the ends proper to those natures—all creatures in their multiplicity glorify God:

> For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever (*ST* I, q. 47 a. 1).

For Aquinas, then, God is the ultimate good of the entire creation because God provides creatures with variegated natures predisposing them toward the appropriate *teloi* for which they live. In the multiplicity of its formal distinctions, then, the created order glorifies God and reveals God's goodness (*ST* I, q. 65 a. 2; I, q. 47, a. 2). Yet while all life is directed from and toward God, there is a sharp disparity concerning the manner in which God is the *telos* of different creatures (*ST* I-II, q. 1 a. 8; *SCG*, III.18). This disparity, an important aspect in my overall

he argues that for Christians infused with the theological virtues, the cardinal virtues are perfected beyond what is possible for those who lack the former (*ST* I-II, q. 65 a. 2). The perfection of the cardinal virtues occurs because, with the theological virtues, they are redirected from merely temporal ends to humanity's ultimate *telos*. See Kent, "Habits and Virtues," 118; David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123. The point is that what it means for a person to be virtuous is predicated upon the end proper to that person.

[80]Cf. Pope, "Overview of the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas," 32. See also Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue*, 35–47 for a helpful explanation on the distinction between beings as good and the *telos* of beings as their good.

[81]This theocentric cosmology constitutes a central focus in applying Aquinas' thought to modern ecological concerns. See Berkman, "Towards a Thomistic Theology of Animals," 24.

[82]Aquinas states that "created things are made like unto God by the fact that they attain to divine goodness." Furthermore, all creatures move toward the likeness of God in their movement toward preservation (*SCG* III.19; also *ST* I, q. 4 a. 3).

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argument, is predicated upon the difference between the nature of humans and nonhumans (*ST* I, q. 91 a. 3; *SCG*, III.22).[83] It is here that we encounter the anthropocentric dimension of Aquinas' eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation.

Of the three classes of souls Aquinas delineates (vegetative, sensitive, and rational), he assigns greater goodness to the creatures with the capacities entailed by the higher souls (*SCG* III.20.3). These creatures are more perfect than those below them:

> [F]rom the order observed by nature...the imperfect are for the use of the perfect; as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore it is in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be master over animals (*ST* I, q. 96 a. 1).

Because of their lower disposition in the hierarchy of the created order, non-rational animals are "naturally under slavery" (*SCG* III.112).[84] Aquinas thus follows Aristotle in claiming that humans can hunt nonhuman animals as a "natural right" (*ST* I, q. 96 a. 1). Aquinas sees an affirmation of his position in the language of the biblical creation narratives: "In describing man's production, Scripture uses a special way of speaking, to show that other things were made for man's sake" (*ST* I, q. 91 a. 4, ad 1).

These passages appear quite anthropocentric. What of the claim that Aquinas is theocentric rather than anthropocentric? After all, Aquinas does claim that "the entire universe, with all its parts, is ordained towards God as its end" (*ST* I, q. 65 a. 2). While lesser creatures in the hierarchy exist for the sake of humans, the entire created order, including humans, exist for God. Is it then inaccurate to claim, as many critics of Aquinas do, that nonhuman animals exist essentially for the sake of humanity? Are the above passages, as Aquinas' defenders claim, simply read out of context? Does not Aquinas' cosmological theocentrism trump his purportedly anthropocentric ethics? John Berkman puts it this way:

> If we look at Aquinas' larger picture, we see that for Aquinas the entire physical universe . . . is ordered towards "ultimate perfection", which

[83]See also Schaefer, *Theological Foundations*, 22–24.

[84]Aquinas is here influenced by Aristotle's understanding of "slave" in which the term denotes that which is by nature at the disposal of another with regard to the pursuit of the good. Thus in Aquinas' view slavery according to nature would not be without moral imperatives of restraint. The point is that nonhuman animals are, by nature, at the disposal of humanity's pursuit of the good. This pursuit must, of course, be informed by the virtues. Thus, the disposal is not without limits.

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> is in turn ordered to God, and by its perfection gives glory to the goodness of God. Each creature manifests the goodness of God by living according to its own *telos*. Furthermore, all species by existing according to their own degree of goodness make a necessary contribution to the perfection of the universe. . . . Thus, for Aquinas, God's plan in creation, while hierarchical, is by no means anthropocentric.[85]

In a fashion similar to other defenders of Aquinas, Berkman argues that those who provide an essentially anthropocentric interpretation of Aquinas miss the theocentric heart of his theology. Many retrievals of Aquinas' theocentrism likewise fail to acknowledge (or at least firmly downplay) that his affirmation of nonhuman creation's end in God is true only inasmuch as nonhuman creation has God as its end *for the sake of humanity*.[86] Thus Aquinas holds that "the intellectual nature is the only one that is required in the universe, for its own sake, while all others are for its sake" (*SCG* III.112.3).[87] As Paul Santmire states, Aquinas' cosmological theocentrism grounds his ethical anthropocentrism in that "all creatures lower than the 'spiritual' human creature in the hierarchy. . .assimilate that divine goodness *by serving the human creature!*"[88] In short, the nonhuman creation is *for God*, *through humanity*. In this sense, Aquinas' cosmological theocentrism actually reinforces his ethical anthropocentrism; the justification of humanity's use of nonhuman animals is, for Aquinas, solidified by the providential ordering of the cosmos. Thus, while his reading of Aquinas is to some extent misguided, I concur with David Kinsley's claim that, in Aquinas' theology, "all creatures serve the good of the whole . . . by serving human purposes and needs."[89] Similarly, Andrew Linzey notes that Aquinas exceeds Aristotle by claiming that divine providence establishes natural order: "subordination is justifiable *because God has ordained it*."[90] Thus, Gary Steiner is correct in claiming that "a theocentric worldview is compatible with an anthropocentric

[85]Berkman, "Towards a Thomistic Theology of Animality," 24.

[86]Aside from Berkman's too-simplistic reading, see Clifford, "Foundations for A Catholic Ecological Theology of God," 40.

[87]Based on passages such as this one—even contextually considered—I find Schaefer's position untenable. She claims that Aquinas' sacramental view of the cosmos imbues it with intrinsic value. She is certainly correct in noting that all creatures contribute to the fullest perfection of the created order ("Valuing Earth," 791–92). However, this perfection is always for the sake of humanity. Without humanity, the created order would have no value *for anyone* (see *SCG*, III.112.3; *ST* II-II, q. 64 a. 1, ad 1). In this sense, the value of nonhuman animals in particular is fully predicated on their value *for* something or someone (in this case, for humanity). This view is an instrumental valuation, but I fail to see how it is intrinsic.

[88]Santmire, *Travail of Nature*, 91.

[89]Kinsley, *Religion and Ecology*, 109.

[90]Linzey, *Why Animal Suffering Matters*, 14.

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worldview."[91] The former in fact grounds the temporal necessity of the latter. Therefore a claim like Berkman's that, for Aquinas, "God's plan in creation... is by no means anthropocentric" is as overly simplistic as exhausting his cosmology with anthropocentrism.

The anthropocentric dimension of Aquinas' cosmological theocentrism is further evident in the very point that defenders of Aquinas use to exonerate him from accusations of anthropocentrism: that the entire created order, in its multiplicity, reveals to us the glory of God better than one life form could.[92] For, this revelation can only have meaning to those with the capacity to appropriate it through contemplation, that is, rational creatures (*ST* suppl. q. 91 a. 1).[93] If humanity, for whom the multiplicity of creation has revelatory meaning, reaches ultimate happiness (understood as the Beatific Vision) at the eschaton, nonhuman creation will be rendered superfluous with regard to this *telos*. That is, when humanity "sees God as God is," nonhuman creation will lose one of its central meanings—revelation of the divine to humanity. While this point might not be a logical necessity—for instance, God might enjoy the multiplicity of creation beyond its necessity for humanity—Aquinas' redactor in the supplement to the third part thought it an explicit point of his theology:

> We believe all corporeal things to have been made for man's sake, wherefore all things are stated to be subject to him. Now they serve man in two ways, first, as sustenance to his bodily life, secondly, as helping him to know God, inasmuch as man sees the invisible things of God by the things that are made (Rom. 1:20). Accordingly glorified man will nowise need creatures to render him the first of these services, since his body will be altogether incorruptible, the Divine power effecting this through the soul which it will glorify immediately. Again man will not need the second service as to intellective knowledge, since by that knowledge he will see God immediately in His essence (*ST* suppl., q. 91 a. 1).

According to this passage, the corporeal nonhuman creation exists for the sake of nourishing human bodies and revealing God's glory to humanity. As these functions will no longer be necessary when humanity is glorified, the redactor holds that Aquinas rejects the presence of the nonhuman creation at the eschaton. Yet the redactor highlights a tension here, affirming that all creation will experience the

[91]Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 1–2.

[92]E.g., Wynn, "Thomas Aquinas," 158–62.

[93]As Aquinas puts it, "reasonable creatures...have in some special and higher manner God as their end, since they can attain to Him by their own operations, by knowing and loving Him" (*ST* I, q. 65 a. 2).

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glory of renewal: "[M]an merited that this glory should be bestowed on the whole universe." Does nonhuman creation then have an eternal *telos*? The redactor's affirmative answer is a limited one; nonhuman creation is renewed "in so far as this conduces to man's increase of glory" (*ST* suppl.,q. 91 a. 1).[94] Thus the renewal of creation is still for humanity's sake. Furthermore, the redactor holds that "the whole universe" is only the inanimate universe.[95] However, regarding the presence of nonhuman animals and plants in the renewed world, the redactor states that "if the end cease, those things which are directed to the end should cease. Now animals and plants were made for the upkeep of human life...Therefore when man's animal life ceases, animals and plants should cease" (*TS*, Supplement to the Third, q. 91 a. 5).[96]

Consistent with these redacted passages, Aquinas follows Augustine in claiming that "man's last end is happiness . . . but 'happiness is not possible for animals bereft of reason'. . . . Therefore other things do not concur in man's last end" (*ST* I-II, q. 1 a. 8). Of corporeal creatures only the human has a particular ultimate *telos*.[97] Happiness, in the ultimate sense, is an end suited only for the nature of humans.[98] As Carlo Leget states, "In Aquinas' theology, 'eternal life' is a name for both the destination of humankind and for God."[99] Because nonhuman animals lack a rational soul, they also lack the capacity for ultimate happiness, that is, contemplation of the Beatific Vision. In short, for nonhumans, the temporal realm is the extent of their particularity.[100] The death of their

[94]This point reflects Aquinas' own thought; see *SCG* IV.97.

[95]See also *ST* I, q. 65 a. 1. These passages show that Kinsley is incorrect in claiming that Aquinas excludes the entire "material creation" from eschatological life. He is correct, however, in claiming that "the lower creatures" will be left behind. See Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 109–10.

[96]See also *SCG* IV.97.5. On humanity's animal life ceasing, see *SCG* IV.83–86.

[97]Given Aquinas' definition of the ultimate end as the final aim of an agent (*SCG* III.2), it may be more appropriate to claim that the ultimate end of nonhuman animals is the sum total of their temporal ends since, in meeting temporal needs, nonhuman animals fulfill their ultimate aim: to continue to live. In other words, an end is good in which its appetite terminates (*SCG* III.2, 16), and the terminus of nonhumans' appetite is never more than temporal needs.

[98]Aquinas is explicit on this point: *ST* I-II, q. 1 a. 8.

[99]Carlo Leget, "Eschatology," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 370.

[100]"All the creatures of God in some respects continue for ever, at least as to matter, since what is created will never be annihilated, even though it be corruptible" (*ST* I, q. 65 a. 1). Hence there is a sense in which Aquinas posits an eternal *telos* for nonhumans. However, that *telos* in no manner maintains their individuality, which for Aquinas is inseparable from their material form. Thus "death comes to both [humans and nonhumans] alike as to the body, but not as to the soul" (*ST* I, q. 75 a. 6, ad 1; also *SCG*, II.79). Furthermore, as the human soul contains the vegetative, sensitive, and rational dimensions in a unity, the sensitive dimension of human soul is incorruptible only "by reason of its being intellectual" (*ST* I, q. 76 a. 3, ad 1). Thus a particular eternal *telos* is predicated upon rationality.

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bodies is the annihilation of their sensitive souls, which in Aquinas' view are necessarily and wholly dependent on their physicality.[101] Hence, referencing the incorruptibility that humanity (and the inanimate creation in service to humanity) will attain in the eschaton, Aquinas states, "But the other animals, the plants, and the mixed bodies, those entirely corruptible both wholly and in part, will not remain at all in that state of incorruption" (*SCG* IV.97.5).

Given these points, one can justifiably claim that the redacted passages express explicitly what Aquinas strongly implies elsewhere in his writings: the only *telos* proper to nonhuman animals, both generally and individually, is a temporal *telos* in which they exist for the sake of humanity, to nourish them and reveal God's glory for contemplative use. The nature of nonhuman animals thus excludes them from the eschatological community, an exclusion that bears ethical consequences and is consistent with Aquinas' teleological understanding of virtue. The extension of charity to nonhuman animals is improper because "charity is based on the fellowship of everlasting happiness, to which the irrational creature cannot attain" (*ST* II-II, q. 25 a. 3).[102] In my reading, then, Aquinas does not consider nonhuman animals as subjects of direct moral concern because their nature precludes them from the purview of God's redemptive scope.[103] Humans, on the other

[101]Aquinas does hold that the human soul is united to the body as its form. By the phrase "necessarily and wholly dependent" I mean to say that the soul of nonhuman animals has no excess beyond the corporeal operations of the body. For Aquinas, the difference between nonhuman and human souls is that the latter are self-subsistent (*ST* I, q. 75 a. 2–3). Hence, while the souls of humans are incorruptible, "the souls of brutes are corrupted when their bodies are corrupted" (*ST* I, q. 75 a. 6; cf *SCG*, II.82). Furthermore, the souls of humans and nonhumans differ regarding generation: "[S]ouls of brutes are produced by some power of the body; whereas the human soul is produced by God" (*ST* I, q. 75 a. 6, ad 1).

[102]Aquinas delineates two further reasons why one should not (or cannot) extend charity to nonhuman animals. First, "friendship is towards one to whom we wish good things, while, properly speaking, we cannot wish good things to an irrational creature, because it is not competent, properly speaking, to possess good, this being proper to the rational creature which, through its free-will, is the master of its disposal of the good it possesses." Second, "all friendship is based on some fellowship in life....[and] irrational creatures can have no fellowship in human life which is regulated by reason. Hence friendship with irrational creatures is impossible, except metaphorically speaking" (*ST* II-II, q. 25 a. 3). Therefore, Jenkins' argument (*Ecologies of Grace,* 140–41) that Aquinas' view demands charitable engagement for the nonhuman creation for its own sake lacks validity. On this point see also Eberhard Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 251–54.

[103]Jenkins argues that Aquinas balances the goodness of creation with the ambiguity of death and suffering by the principle of double effect; that is, God wills the goodness of creatures (e.g., the ferocity of a lion) with the indirect "evil" effect that the lion then devours the gazelle (*Ecologies of Grace*, 137, 144–45). It is somewhat unclear, though, whether or not Aquinas considers predation evil; he seems to suggest that predation is not a sign of the privation of good in the form and integrity of predatory animals (*ST* I,

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hand, are proper subjects of direct moral concern because of their rational nature, directed as it is toward their ultimate *telos* (*SCG*, III.117.2–3). Rational creatures "stand out above other creatures, both in natural perfection and in the dignity of their end" (*SCG* III.111). Furthermore, "there should be a union in affection among those for whom there is one common end. Now, men share in common the one ultimate end which is happiness, to which they are divinely ordered. So, men should be united with each other by a mutual love" (*SCG* III.117.2).[104]

What, then, is the temporal end proper to nonhuman animals? They are directed toward the well-being of humanity. Furthermore, humanity's use of nonhuman life is directed toward humanity's ultimate (and unique) *telos*: "Man must, of necessity, desire all, whatsoever he desires, for the last end" (*ST* I-II, q. 1 a. 6). The nature of nonhuman animals renders them as resources meant to meet the needs of human creatures, both contemplative and bodily, as they journey toward God.[105] It is this point that Mark Wynn fails to address sufficiently in his defense of Aquinas. He claims that nonhuman animals have value independent of humanity in their showing forth of the

q. 65 a. 1). Elsewhere Aquinas addresses the issue that "certain animals are generated from putrefaction, which is a kind of corruption. But corruption is repugnant to the first founding of the world. Therefore such animals should not have been produced at that time." Aquinas responds that nonhuman animals that are "generated from corruption of animals could not have been produced then [i.e., at the founding of the world] otherwise than potentially" (*ST* I, q. 72, ad 5). In other words, God did not *directly* create creatures that derive from the corruption of animals (e.g. from their carcasses); rather, God created the potential for these creatures within other living creatures, a potential that was actualized when other animals died, *which is part of the natural order*. This interpretation is solidified by Aquinas' rejection of an edenic state of creation without predation (*ST* I, q. 96 a. 1, ad 2). Even so, Aquinas does suggest some difference in the relationship between nature and humanity before and after sin. In reply to the objection that God created nonhuman animals that are harmful to humanity, he states, "since man before he sinned would have used the things of this world conformably to the order designed, poisonous animals would not have injured him" (*ST* I, q. 72, Ad 6). Presumably, then, sinless humanity used the nonhuman creation according to a natural order that precluded harm to humanity but not harm between animals. It is not the poisonous snakes that changed, but humanity, a change that elicited the harmful actions of the snake. Oddly, Jenkins claims that Aquinas writes that humanity, in innocence, would not have used animals for food—without, however, providing a reference to Aquinas at this point (*Ecologies of Grace*, 135). Furthermore, given that Aquinas does not take issue with predation and refers to human use of the world for food and clothing as natural, Jenkins's reading seems quite unlikely. Nonetheless, Jenkins provides a wonderful overview of Aquinas' engagement with natural evil and the notion of a fall (ibid., 144–48).

[104]See also Hollenbach, *The Common Good*, 149; he grounds Aquinas' vision of the common good in humanity's "common origin and destiny." Consider also Hollenbach's strict and repeated exclusion of nonhuman animals from the moral concern predicated on the common good (e.g., 82–83, 130–132).

[105]"Resources," albeit anachronistic, adequately describes Aquinas' view. This term is further taken up, in line with Aquinas' theology, in the magisterial documents of the Catholic Church. See below.

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divine goodness. Yet for Aquinas even this showing forth is always a showing forth *for humanity*. It is thus an anthropocentrism grounded in theocentrism. Nonhuman resources, lacking the dignity of human nature, have no grounds for direct moral concern. Aquinas echoes Aristotle on this point: "There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. . . . Wherefore it is not unlawful if man use plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man, as the Philosopher states" (*ST* II-II, q. 64 a. 1).

Aquinas' anthropocentrism notwithstanding, his theological framework does permit an expansion of ecological concern regarding the practice of preservation of the order of the cosmos. It is here that he evinces the conservational dimension of his anthropocentric conservation. While the ethical concern this dimension elicits is always directed toward humanity in relation to God and only indirectly toward nonhumans, it nonetheless provides a firm groundwork for an environmentally friendly ethics in three central ways.

First, Aquinas expresses concern that humans causing gratuitous harm to nonhuman animals might lead to the desensitization of the one causing the harm. This desensitization, in turn, could lead to violence toward other humans:

> Indeed, if any statements are found in Sacred Scripture prohibiting the commission of an act of cruelty against brute animals . . . this is said either to turn the mind of man away from cruelty which might be used on other men, lest a person through practicing cruelty on brutes might go on to do the same to men; or because an injurious act committed on animals may lead to a temporal loss for some man" (Aquinas, *SCG* III.112.13).

In other words, causing harm to sensitive creatures that have no basis for direct moral concern could lead to causing harm to sensitive creatures that do have such a basis.

As already noted, it is here that many critics claim to exhaust the value of Aquinas' possibility to expand concern for nonhuman animals (or ecological issues in general). Such critiques are misguided on two levels. First, as I will show, Aquinas offers other reasons to concern oneself with the nonhuman creation. Second, even if this limitation were the entire extent of Aquinas' contribution, it affords many opportunities to reconsider modern practices. On this point, Aquinas' advocates rightly point out his defense of the goodness of creation occurs in a pre-modern context untouched by Descartes and industrialism. This shift in context should give his critics pause. Although the basis for such moral concern remains anthropocentric,

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nonetheless in Aquinas' thought the possibilities of developing this point in the direction of animal welfare are significant.[106]

The second reason nonhuman animals warrant (indirect) moral concern pertains to a dimension of their temporal *telos*. I have already noted that God is the ultimate good of the entire created order. For nonhuman animals, God is the ultimate good in the sense that they are directed toward temporal ends consistent with their natures. As these creatures seek those temporal ends, they display a diversity in the created order that reveals God's goodness. If humans abuse a part of the created order to the point of causing extinction, the diversity lessens, and there is a concomitant lessening of the revelation of God's goodness.[107] In other words, human activity that lessens the diversity of creation simultaneously robs humanity of the fullest potential to contemplate the divine. As Anne Clifford notes, "From the perspective of an ecological theology based on Aquinas's insights, the destruction of our earthly habitat suggests that discernable traces of the Trinity are lost. When species are made extinct, a unique manifestation of the goodness of God is gone forever."[108] Likewise, Willis Jenkins states, "with the extinction of species and the despoiling of places we degrade our aptitude for naming and praising God."[109] Hence, contra Joyce Salisbury, Aquinas' understanding of the revelatory nature of the universe in its multiplicity renders no creature "useless," for all creatures

[106]One should avoid two poles at this point. On the one hand, one should not downplay the significance of the potential for Aquinas' contribution here. Could not a whole host of practices engrained in a modern (post-Cartesian) view of nonhuman animals and the ethics that flow from this view be subject to reform on the basis of Aquinas' position? On the other hand, one should not overstate the contribution to be made here as if it could provide nonhuman animals with rights. After all, regarding the wellbeing of a nonhuman animal for its own sake constitutes a moral concern for Aquinas. For, such regard evinces a wrongly misplaced compassion. In addressing God's commandments against cruel practices to nonhuman animals, Aquinas recognizes the possibility of the passion of pity arising at the suffering of sentient nonhuman animals. He claims, following Maimonides, that God's aim was to "inculcate pity to the Jewish people" in such a way as to benefit humanity (*ST* I-II, q. 102 a. 6, ad 8). Hence, Steiner claims of Aquinas' position that "we need not concern ourselves for the lives or suffering of animals, expect insofar as this concern makes us better members of the human community" (Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and its Discontents*, 131). See also Barad, *Aquinas on the Nature and Treatment of Animals*, 40–42. An interesting question of praxis within the tension between these two polar readings of Aquinas is the question of ethical vegetarianism, which I shall address below.

[107]Aquinas argues against the creation of multiple worlds by acknowledging the interconnectedness of all created things: "The very order of things created by God shows the unity of the world. For this world is called one by the unity of order, whereby some things are ordered to others. But whatever things come from God, have relation of order to each other, and to God Himself" (*ST* I, q. 47 a. 2).

[108]Clifford, "Foundations," 39; on this point, see also Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 125–27.

[109]Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 131.

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participate in revealing God's goodness more fully.[110] Furthermore, Aquinas' view suggests that his critics overstate their case when they claim that he only concerns himself with harm to animals that *may* elicit harm to humans,[111] for an act against creation that lessens divine revelation is harmful to humanity *in and of itself*. Given these points, one can rightly claim that utilization with disregard for conservation is morally reprehensible for Aquinas.[112] However, the suffering caused to nonhuman animals is not directly the moral issue; on this point Aquinas' critics are correct. The detrimental result of that suffering for humanity is the issue, though the two acts occur simultaneously in this case. Thus, Aquinas offers another significant opportunity to widen ethical concern for the nonhuman creation.

A third way in which Aquinas posits moral concern for nonhuman animals regards yet another dimension of their temporal *telos*. In his theological framework, nonhuman animals "are ordered to man's use in the natural course of things, according to divine providence" (*SCG* III.112). On account of this view, Aquinas maintains that humans may use nonhuman animals "without any injustice, either by killing them or by employing them in any other way" (*SCG* III.112). A careful reader of Aquinas will immediately qualify this claim with the above caveats of indirect moral concern. Furthermore, humanity's use of the nonhuman creation establishes a third instance of moral concern for nonhumans; for, Aquinas takes issue with the destruction of a nonhuman animal that belongs to someone else: "He that kills another's ox, sins, not through killing the ox, but through injuring another man in his property" (*ST* II-II, q. 64 a. 1, ad 3). This claim, predicated as it is upon the relegation of nonhuman animals as property, certainly lacks anything akin to animal rights, and would cause a level of distress in many interested in animal welfare. Nonetheless, one could develop this notion through critical retrieval along the lines of the question of property especially regarding the earth itself. Could not the unjust distribution of land (and "resources") in a consumerist society fall under

[110]Salisbury, "Attitudes toward Animals," 78.

[111]See Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 131; Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Animals*, 121. Wennberg compounds the weakness of his interpretation by claiming that Aquinas provides "no reason whatsoever" to refrain from torturing an animal except that "it might prompt us to mistreat or neglect humans" (ibid., 122). There is no evidence to assume that torture of nonhuman animals provides utilitarian value to humans. In Aquinas' view, such activity, in and of itself, would be an issue of humanity failing to act in accord with the dignity of its nature.

[112]See, *ST* II-II, q. 141 a. 3; *SCG*, III.129. See also Jame Shaefer, "Valuing Earth Intrinsically and Instrumentally: A Theological Framework for Environmental Ethics," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 792. Aquinas holds that God charges the rational human creature with maintenance of the created order (*SCG*, III.78; *ST* I, q. 64 a. 4); see Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue*, 61, 178.

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critique given Aquinas' position? Surely the poverty elicited by a hyper-fascination with progress and profit in our socio-political context meets the Thomistic criterion of "injuring another man," especially given Aquinas' deep-rooted concern for the common good.

These three points broadly frame what Aquinas has to offer regarding the augmentation of ethical concern for the nonhuman creation in general and animals in particular. However, they also recall factors that limit what Aquinas can offer in this vein. On the one hand, humans must preserve the natural order in its beautiful and good multiplicity. On the other hand, for Aquinas this preservation must be for the sake of humanity *in via* toward their unique *telos*. Thus, while Aquinas does provide significant contributions regarding ethical concern for the nonhumans, his theological framework can shelter neither claims of direct moral concern nor an eco-theological ethics that transcends anthropocentric conservation. For Aquinas, humanity, in accordance with the providential ordering of nature, bears the entitlement to benefit from the suffering and death of nonhuman animals. However, this entitlement is carefully qualified by concern for human welfare corresponding to the common good with regard to bodily and contemplative needs and to personal well-being with regard to property.

### *III. What Can Be Said Concerning Summation and Praxis?*

My aim has not been the ajudication of the truth or falsity of Aquinas' position, but rather to express the significance and limits of his contribution to the concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals through an exploration of nature and teleology.[113] The intersection of these dimensions of Aquinas' thought renders him a fine candidate for contributing productively to such a contemporary discussion, but only within the framework of an eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation that elicits indirect moral concern for the nonhuman world, including animals. To grant nonhuman animals direct moral concern would require rejecting either Aquinas' understanding of their nature (and therefore the rights attached to human nature) or the scope of his eschatology (which is based on his understanding of nature).[114] It is difficult, then, to see how even a critical retrieval could provide

[113]In my view, Aquinas' position is unsatisfactory. But my dissatisfaction with his position does not amount to judging his position to be false.

[114]On the difficulty of the distinction between human and nonhuman nature, see Yamamoto, "Aquinas and Animals," 85–89. Oddly, Alasdair MacIntyre seems to reject the essential distinction between humans and nonhumans; see his *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 57. MacIntyre is ultimately unclear on the issue. On the rejection of the strictly human scope of God's redemptive work, see below.

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more than the indirect moral concern of anthropocentric conservation, unless it rejected points so foundational to Aquinas that it would jeopardize central pillars of his thought.[115]

We thus return to my original claim. Aquinas' suitability for expanding ecological concern depends on what one means by such an expansion. If Christian theology is content with an eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation, then Aquinas is a fine resource for delineating such a position. Such contentment would not be out of the question, as the viewpoint affords considerable opportunities to expand ethical concern for the nonhuman creation—However, if there are difficulties with the resulting denial of direct moral concern to nonhumans (and animals in particular), as well as with anthropocentrism or the ethical limits of conservationism, I do not find Aquinas particularly helpful in addressing such difficulties. For this task, it would be more helpful to look to other sources in the Christian tradition. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons includes nonhuman animals in his eschatological purview; so too does Ephrem the Syrian.[116] Vladimir Lossky notes the transfigurative ethics toward nonhuman animals in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.[117] Likewise, more modern writers, including John Wesley, C. S. Lewis, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Andrew Linzey, Stephen Webb, Stanley Hauerwas, and Sallie McFague, draw on eschatology to promote a concern for nonhuman animals for their own sakes.[118] Even Hans Urs von Balthasar challenges

[115]The official documents of the Catholic Church move in this direction. The *Catechism* states that "animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of...animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including future generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica* [New York: Doubleday, 1995], no. 2415). Thus it is not wrong to use nonhuman animals for food, clothing, and experimentation as long as all present and future humanity benefit (see no. 2417). See also the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* (Pastoral Statement, November 14, 1991), esp. III.E, http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops calls for an "equitable distribution of resources, including sharing land, animals and water." See *You love all that exists . . . All things are Yours, God, lover of Life* (Pastoral Letter, October 4, 2003), 6, http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/pastoralenvironment.html.

[116]See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.33.4 http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm; Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1989), IX.1.

[117]Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), chap. 5.

[118]For example, see John Wesley, "The General Deliverance," http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons; Linzey, "C. S. Lewis's Theology of Animals," *Anglican*

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Aquinas' rejection of nonhuman animals participating in God's eschatological consummation:

> According to Thomas it is only human bodies and the mineral world that enter the resurrection world, while the world of plants and animals simply falls into oblivion; this is because the latter is subject to the *motus caeli* [movement of heaven] that has now been brought to a stop— it was in any case incapable of the vision of God. This cruel verdict contradicts the Old Testament sense of the solidarity between the living, subhuman cosmos and the world of men (Ps 8; Ps 104; Gen 1, and so on) [and] the prophetic and Jewish ideas of divine salvation in images of peace among the animals (Is 11:6-9; 65:25).[119]

There is a sharp divide between these thinkers and Aquinas regarding the ultimate *telos* of nonhuman animals. And if we maintain Aquinas' connection between teleology and virtue, then positing a supernatural *telos* to humans that includes a communal participation in God's life *with* nonhuman animals would affect what it means for humans to be virtuous in the present by refusing to exhaust the *telos* of nonhuman animals with anthropocentric needs in the temporal realm. As Aquinas states, "there should be a union in affection among those for whom there is one common end" (*SCG* III.117.2).[120]

*Theological Review* 80 (Winter 1998): 60–81; Adam McIntosh, "Human and Animal Relations in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Journal of Melbourne College of Divinity* 22 (2009): 20–35; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 69–70; Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology,* esp. chaps. 4–5; Stephen H. Webb, *Good Eating* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001), chap. 3; Stanley Hauerwas and John Berkman, "A Trinitarian Theology of the 'Chief End' of 'All Flesh'," in *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, eds. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 62–74; Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 198–202. For a collection of writings (including Wesley's sermon) addressing the general issue of an eternal *telos* for particular nonhumans, see *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990), Part 3.

[119]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 5: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 420–21. It is not clear how (or if) von Balthasar would rework the interconnected pillars of Aquinas' theological framework. If Aquinas is wrong in excluding nonhumans from the eschaton, is he then also wrong about their nature? If he is wrong about their nature, is he wrong in refusing them direct moral concern? If he is wrong on all these counts, does his framework begin to unravel under the pressure of the many adjustments necessary to affirm, as von Balthasar does, that animals will participate in the eschaton?

[120]Such a mutual union of affection would not be possible in Aquinas' thought, for nonhumans lack the capacity. However, certain hagiographies seem to suggest otherwise. For one among many possible examples, see Tim Vivian, "The Peaceable Kingdom: Animals as Parables in the *Virtues of Saint Macarius*," *Anglican Theological Review* 85/3 (Summer 2003): 477–91.

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Regarding a practical application of my findings, merely as a direction in which this project could progress, I wish to point to a consideration of ethical vegetarianism. How might Aquinas' eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation address this issue today? On the one hand, a Western desensitization to the conditions of nonhuman animals on factory farms might warrant vegetarianism as a viable option, a virtuous counter-witness to a failure in moderation and stewardship. However, such an option would necessarily be for the sake of human well-being, deriving from either a concern for the desensitization of humanity, the immoderate use of certain parts of the nonhuman creation that reveal the goodness of God through their diversity, the genetic manipulation of nonhuman animals (and therefore the disregard for the providential order of nature), or the injustices in the human realm that result from such industrialized farming.

On the other hand, Aquinas holds that nonhuman animals exist for the bodily sustenance of humanity; that is, they are providentially ordered to this *telos* according to their nature. Thus it seems that an ethical vegetarianism deriving from a concern for the nonhuman animal itself (i.e., a direct moral concern) is not only untenable, but would actually constitute a slight on God's ordering of creation. As Dorothy Yamamoto writes, in Aquinas' theological framework, "to refuse to eat meat is to spurn the careful provisions which God has made to sustain human life on earth."[121] I would qualify this claim by adding that it is necessarily true only if the refusal to eat meat is directed toward concern for that which is eaten. So also Jame Schaefer notes that, for Aquinas, "To criticize a creature's nature or its natural inclination is...an insult to the Creator of nature."[122]

Thus, while ethical vegetarianism could be an option within a Thomistic framework, it would entail two fundamental caveats. First, it could only ever be an option. Since nonhuman animals are, by divine providence, ordered to humanity—an order which includes use as food—vegetarianism could never be an imperative or even an ideal, as it is unnatural. Secondly, vegetarianism could only be "ethical" in the sense of an ultimate concern for human welfare. In this sense, one might say that ethical vegetarianism and vegetarianism deriving from a concern for one's health must amount to the same thing for Aquinas: concern for the well-being of humanity. In short, it is significant that Aquinas could offer something in the way of a justification for vegetarianism. Equally significant, however, are the caveats attached to this

[121]Yamamoto, "Aquinas and Animals," 80.
[122]Schaefer, "Valuing Earth," 789.

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justification, for they reveal his eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation.

## *IV. Conclusion*

I began with a few questions: Does Aquinas' theological framework provide a viable source, as it stands or through a critical retrieval, to widen ethical concern for the nonhuman creation? If so, in what manner does Aquinas enable such a widening? Are there limitations to what Aquinas can provide in this vein? Focusing on nonhuman animals in particular at the intersection of nature and teleology in Aquinas' thought, I have delineated answers to these questions. First, considered contextually, Aquinas provides a significant opportunity to expand ethical concern for nonhuman animals indirectly, an expansion which could justify reforms in numerous practices and even ground the practice of vegetarianism. It is here that critiques of Aquinas often fail to acknowledge his theological context and the nuances of his thought. Second, because the nature of nonhuman animals limits them to a temporal *telos* in which, by providential ordering, they serve humanity as resources for instrumental use—both contemplative and bodily—Aquinas' theology, while evincing a cosmological theocentrism, is also inevitably anthropocentric. It is this point that defenders of Aquinas too easily side-step.

In short, for Aquinas, moral concern must be directed to human welfare, which is ultimately directed toward God. Any attempt either to ascribe direct moral concern to nonhuman animals or unhinge what is ultimately an eco-theological ethics of anthropocentric conservation would render central claims of Aquinas' theological framework incoherent. Ultimately, Aquinas provides a powerful resource to expand our concern for the welfare of the nonhuman creation within the borders of an anthropocentric conservation in which indirect moral concern grounds this expansion. If one seeks to move beyond these borders, however, one will have to move beyond Aquinas to other voices in the Christian tradition.

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