

Beyond Orthodoxy: A Pluralist Approach to Animal Liberation

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“Every animal, by instinct, lives according to his nature. Thereby he lives wisely, and betters the tradition of mankind. No animal is ever tempted to belie his nature. No animal, in other words, knows how to tell a lie. Every animal is honest. Every animal is straight-forward. Every animal is true – and is, therefore, according to his nature, both beautiful and good.” – Kenneth Grahame, author of The Wind in the Willows

Introduction

Animal liberation¹ theorists (ALTs²) face two challenges: an external challenge and an internal one. The first challenge involves offering robust arguments that relevantly address the experience of non-human animals in our times. Given that our society is constantly finding new ways to use and abuse non-humans,³ ALTs must respond to cruel social practices by honing existing arguments and by proposing new ones. The second challenge concerns the need to achieve greater unity within the body of animal rights literature. That is, if the ultimate goal is to advance the cause of animal liberation, then energies should not be mostly spent on squabbling over specific philosophical and ideological points (e.g., whether deontology is superior to utilitarianism), but on developing robust arguments that advance the emancipation of non-human animals.

I will argue that some important ideas in Aquinas’ and Marx’s writings articulated through Nussbaum’s capabilities approach⁴ can help surmount these two challenges in a twofold manner. First, Aquinas’ concept of *telos* and Marx’s critique of alienation address the key problem, alienation, which is faced by non-human animals used in the food and pharmaceutical industries. That is, the crux of animals’ experience in modern industries is that they are systematically deprived of any opportunity to live, eat and breed in accordance with their instinct. Second, the harmonizing of a Marxist and Thomistic Christian perspective with a theory of justice like Nussbaum’s, shows the possibility of a pluralistic approach to animal liberation that moves beyond basic metaphysical disagreements.

It could be argued that the reading of Aquinas and Marx I will provide is highly selective and not representative of their overall philosophy. To respond, my reading will be purposively selective. There is no use in quoting Aquinas’ dictum that we owe nothing to animals and that there is no possibility of friendship with them, when our experience and our intuitions indicate the contrary. As Andrew Light argued, it is silly to pretend that merely citing a “chapter and

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verse” of Aquinas by itself will “carry some weight.” Great thinkers are a valuable resource as long as we are able to discern the good, useful insights from the bad, worthless ones. Aquinas’ Christian teleological worldview is highly valuable, for it offers those who come from this tradition a base on which to support the cause of animal liberation, while also offering an alternative position within the animal rights literature that transcends the classical approaches to animal liberation. The same argument, *mutatis mutandi*, applies to my reading of Marx.

The Choice

Prima facie, the choice of Aquinas and Marx might seem counterintuitive. After all, Marx is well known for his critique of religion as a symptom of an alienated society. Furthermore, Aquinas believed that “since charity is a kind of friendship and we cannot be friends with other animals, we cannot [even] feel charity for them” (Barad 143), Marx affirmed in the Holy Family that hunting and fishing are “innate rights of men” (118), suggesting that the human need (or desire) for animal flesh has ascendancy over non-human animal life.

In spite of this, my choice of these two thinkers is deliberate and purposeful. First, Marx’s critique of capitalism in terms of exploitation and alienation is still a relevant depiction of the human and non-human experiences of abuse, and recognition of this relevance does not depend on agreement with animal liberation goals. Marx’s and Engel’s words in The Communist Manifesto apply very well to our times:

The cheap prices of its commodities [i.e., the bourgeoisie’s] are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls...It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production...It has agglomerated population, centralized means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. (22-23)

Not only are citizens of Third World nations forced into exploitative productive relations, as in the case of workers in Pacific Rim countries who earn less than two dollars a day to produce brand-name shoes (Sample 8), but animals⁵ in agribusiness have gone from dwelling on small farms to being housed in massive complexes with millions of their kind, waiting for their body parts to be harvested (Marcus 9).

Second, Aquinas’ ideas can bring diversity to the body of animal liberation literature. Aquinas’ teleological views not only add a religious perspective⁶ but they are descriptively

accurate of the role different creatures play within nature. That is, Aquinas' philosophy moves beyond the commonly-held (and often-criticized) detached, scientific, Darwinist⁷ view of nature. Such a complaint has been voiced by Barbara Noske, who has criticized biology for its "...reliance on the Darwinist model and consequent imprisonment" (10). Her concerns are seconded by Holmes Rolston III, who has admitted that "[t]he classical theology of design perhaps needs reforming, but the biology of randomness and bloody struggle may need reforming just as much...Theology...may give us, so to speak, sufficient cause to wonder about reverence for creation" (286) That is, conceiving nature as a divine gift might be conducive to greater respect for both human and non-human life, and to the realization that our ever-limited human understanding might preclude us from fully grasping the nature of our fellow non-human beings.⁸

Third, the combination of a Marxist and a Christian perspective has the potential for yielding a revolutionary result. As demonstrated by liberation theology⁹, when religion is infused with revolutionary ideas, a stronger drive for emancipation may ensue. Given that thousands of non-human animals are being killed and tortured every second, the possibility of encouraging activism cannot be ignored.

In the next sections, I will discuss the internal and external challenges faced by ALTs.

The External Challenge

It is widely recognized that the western tradition has been (and is) resolutely anthropocentric. The world is arranged in terms of a natural hierarchy that has placed humans (especially white males) at the apex of the natural order. Take the early example of Aristotle, who in both *De Anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics* discussed the superiority of the rational soul over the appetitive and nutritive soul. This hierarchy resulted in the justified subjugation of the lower kinds to the higher ones: "the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity extends, to all mankind. When there is such a difference as...between man and animals...the lower sort are by nature slaves" (Aristotle 259).

This view of nature was adopted and sustained by mainstream Christianity, which considers humans to be above, and dissociated from, the rest of God's creation. As Lynn White¹⁰ puts it, "no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purpose" (347). The merely instrumental value of non-human creation becomes evident in the episode of the Flood, which, according to Singer, sets a precedent for the human mistreatment of

animals (*Practical Ethics* 266). Similarly, in the biblical episode of the binding of Isaac, God allows Abraham to sacrifice a lamb instead of Isaac, after Abraham proves his loyalty to God. The conclusion that some thinkers such as Singer draw from these two examples is that God had placed little value on much of his own creation, or that the value of the natural world was merely contingent. If God “drowned almost every animal on earth in order to punish human beings for their wickedness,” what else but blatant disregard for nature can be expected from humans (Singer, *Practical Ethics* 266)?¹¹

This attitude of disdain towards nature continued throughout the Middle Ages. Although clearly ambiguous at times, the medieval treatment of non-human animals was often characterized by cruelty, an ethos of animals as marginal to anything important, and a blatant misunderstanding of animals’ nature. As documented by Joyce Salisbury, dogs were hung from their owners’ doorposts, donkeys were mutilated and bulls were executed. The treatment of animals as mere inanimate objects went hand-in-hand with the contradictory belief that animals had some type of agency, as is illustrated in the practice of animal trials. The execution of both humans and non-humans for the practice of bestiality shows the ambivalent human conception of animal nature (Salisbury 100).

However, human barbarism reached new levels in modern times with “[t]he growing use of live animals in experiments...without anesthetics, which were not yet available” (Garner 11). Despite the obvious signs that animals felt pain in the same way that humans do, philosophers like René Descartes justified vivisection on the grounds that non-human animals were mere *automata*. “It is more reasonable to make earthworms, flies, caterpillars, and the rest of the animals, move as machines do, than to endow them with immortal souls” (264). Similarly, Immanuel Kant added that, although cruel, vivisection was justified, “since animals must be regarded as man’s instrument” (270).

While animals in the western tradition up to modern times were treated less than sympathetically, the industrialization of agriculture and the development of new medical technologies have created the worst possible conditions of existence for non-human animals. To illustrate, consider the chilling figures: according to Marcus, “the fastest American slaughterhouses kill 400 cattle per hour on each line they operate” (47). This means that several animals per hour, having been inadequately stunned, are killed while fully conscious, while many more are dismembered, skinned and cooked while still alive.¹² In the U.S. alone, many of the more than 10 billion animals killed annually have ended their lives in this way in 2003 (Marcus 65). In the U.K. alone, 2.79 million animals were used in 2003 in vivisection and laboratory experiments, most of which involve brutal practices such as the Draize or LD-50 tests.¹³ Examples could be multiplied: primates are used in collision tests,

pigs, cats and frogs are dissected in biology classes, mice are engineered to grow cancerous tumors, ducks and geese are force-fed in the production of *foie gras*, and agonized animals with no market value are left to die in their own excrement outside slaughterhouses.

This litany of examples simply shows that in contemporary times animal suffering has been greatly increased. And even though social attitudes towards animals, as explained by Marcus, have improved in some areas – e.g., veganism is slowly becoming more mainstream, and the majority of Americans support legislation to protect farm animals from some cruel practices – the industries that enslave and sacrifice millions of animals every year continue to grow (63-65).

Given that every second, thousands of animals are made to suffer and die with complete impunity, the possibility of finding novel ways in which to support animal liberation cannot be overlooked. Hence, we must continue to challenge the status quo by constructing new arguments that are compelling in the face of recent experience. As Andrew Light argued, “it is...important at the moment to articulate as many possible reasons for the same ends...[i.e., animal liberation] which we think are...morally motivating to the public” (129).

The Internal Challenge

As discussed above, western culture traditionally has been a locus of anthropocentrism. Thinkers such as Peter Singer, Robert Garner and Lynn White have correctly emphasized this point. This observation has led them to the belief that little – if anything – can be rescued from traditional western scholarship that could support the goals of animal liberation with the exception of Bentham’s famous dictum,¹⁴ thinkers have been blindly callous toward non-human nature. Hence, the argument goes, ALTs must jettison the whole of western scholarship and rely on newly-constructed arguments grounded on secular ethics. In short, a “blank slate” is needed to rid ourselves of the deep-seated western views such as that “the natural world exists for the benefit of human beings, [that] [h]uman beings are the only morally important members of this world, [that] [n]ature itself is of no intrinsic value, and [that] the destruction of...animals cannot be sinful, unless by this destruction we harm human beings” (Singer, Practical Ethics 267-268).

To respond to the intellectual aridity of traditional moral theory, Singer proposed (following Bentham) the principle of equal consideration of interest based on sentience. Insofar as a being has the capacity for suffering and enjoyment, he/she has “an interest in not being tormented” (Singer, “All Animals” 171). Given that humans and many non-human animals share the capacity for sentience, Singer’s philosophy commits us to *equally* respecting these

beings' interest. Behaving otherwise would make us guilty of sexism, racism, ageism, ableism and/or speciecism.

While contemporary utilitarian arguments, such as Singer's, have proven to be very successful, they have found opposition among some sympathizers of animal liberation. Objections have been raised by those who come from a religious background, or who disagree with the analysis of the western tradition, or who prefer a deontological ethics.

Authors like Mathew Scully and Andrew Linzey fall into the first category involving a religious perspective. Their main charge against Singer is, to quote Scully, that "[h]e requires his readers...[to] accept an entirely new set of standards, and indeed a new and improved set of commandments produced *ex nihilo* from the mind of a modern intellectual" (327). And later Scully adds, "for professor Singer there is no good, no purpose, no *telos*...for any of us, on four legs or two...He simply takes it as a given that intelligent people do not believe in God or, if they do, know better than to bring it up in serious philosophical discussion" (328). Not only does Singer drive religious devotees away from animal liberation struggles, but, as Linzey has contended, he fails to give Christianity its due. Take, for example, the story of creation in Genesis I, which describes God commanding humans to practice vegetarianism. As Karl Barth noted, "Whether or not we find it practicable or desirable, the diet assigned to men and beasts by God the Creator is vegetarian" (cited in Linzey 36).¹⁵ Linzey also argues that further support for the liberation of non-human animals can be found among canonized saints, of whom two-thirds "have championed the cause of animals" (23). The problem, Linzey concludes, is not Christian anthropocentrism, but current attitudes that ignore the animal-friendly elements within the history of that religion.

While Christian thinkers have tried to show the contributions¹⁶ their tradition can make to animal liberation, a second category of authors has tried to rescue the writings of their intellectual predecessors with the hope of making them relevant to issues germane to animal emancipation. Consider the intellectual endeavors of Andrew Light, Jonathan Hughes, Ted Benton and Judith Barad. Light has applied American philosophical pragmatism to the elucidation of human-non-human relationships, while Hughes and Benton have explored Marx's naturalism and demonstrated its bearing on current animal welfare/ecological issues. Similarly, Barad has recently written on the subject of Aquinas and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). In short, all of these authors have challenged the idea that western thought is an intellectual wasteland, at least in so far as what it has to offer ALTs.

The final category of authors is best represented by Tom Regan, who put forward the claim that both human and non-human animals possess a right to life. His deontological position is based on

the following argument: all individuals with inherent value are to be treated with full respect (i.e., these individuals have rights); all beings that are subjects-of-a-life possess inherent value; all mammalian yearlings and above are subjects-of-a-life; hence, all mammalian yearlings and older have rights. According to Reagan, the minimum threshold for holding rights is met by creatures that have (among other features) beliefs, desires, perceptions, memories, emotions, sentience, and preferences.

Reagan and Singer repudiate the current treatment of non-human animals by the meat and pharmaceutical industries, but differ on the reasons why such practices are morally objectionable. Singer focuses on sentience, while Reagan values the human-like capabilities of some non-human animals (Garner 26). In short, Reagan and Singer engage, like Kant and Hume, in the perennial debate of reason vs. pleasure. As Robert Wennberg explains, “they differ in the theoretical basis for their conviction and in their understanding of the adequacy of various moral frameworks” (158).

While this cornucopia of arguments is beneficial, for it fosters discussion and advances intellectual refinement, it is important to note that the disagreements among many ALTs are over issues that are tangential to the present and future wellbeing of nonhuman animals. Settling the question of whether deontology is a superior theory to consequentialism will not assuage the pain of veal calves, just as bickering over whether Christianity is inherently anthropocentric will not help secure a ban on LD-50 tests. The first question we must ask ourselves is what is the animal experience in the world of modern agriculture and research? And once we have settled this question, we must find theories that respond to that experience. Otherwise, we run the risk of confining our inquiry within the boundaries imposed by an *a priori* theoretical framework. Furthermore, by focusing on theory before analyzing (to the best of our ability) the animal experience, we easily fall prey to the anthropocentric argument, in which animals are welcomed into a theory only if we prove that they are *just like* humans.

In the following section, I will explore the physical and psychological treatment of animals in our contemporary world.

Being Animal

A recent article in the New York Times explained that our commonly-prejudiced assessment of the intelligence of avian species is mistaken. Neuroscientists have discovered that the bird brain is “as complex, flexible and inventive as any mammalian brain” (Blakeslee F1). While this conclusion should come as no surprise to anyone who has carefully observed birds’ behavior, it startled most in the scientific community. Scientists had assumed that since bird brains are physiologically different from mammalian brains, they could not

possibly be as intelligent as mammals. After studying the complex behavior of crows, parrots and magpies, scientists reached an enlightening conclusion: “[t]here is a bird way and a mammal way to create intelligence” (cited in Blakeslee F1).

This example is illustrative of how little we know about what it means to think, live and feel like an animal, and how our self-perception as the smartest species on earth can hinder our scientific pursuits. There are two key lessons to be learned from this report. First, it is not that we can know nothing about the inner life of non-human animals, but that we must always be cautious when drawing radical conclusions about their experiences. As Noske concludes, “we must remind ourselves that other meanings exist, even if we may be severely limited in our understanding of them” (160).

Second, a study like this gives us a hint of how it must be for avian species to be warehoused in windowless buildings from birth to death. The life of a laying-hen in a battery cage deprives the bird of all her natural activities: physical, emotional and intellectual. When farmed chickens are rescued, they immediately adopt their natural behavior: they roost, take dust baths and sun baths, go for runs, and they form personal bonds with other animals (Masson 88).

The same experience of deprivation holds for other farm and research animals, which are housed in filthy, restricted, uncomfortable and boring environments. Cows and pigs are prevented from experiencing motherhood, pigs are forced to live in their own excrement, and naturally playful goats cannot frolic. Consider the following description of young factory pigs: “The tedium of their existence soon became apparent: they were lethargic, exhibited ragged ears, had droopy tails, and rapidly acquired that dull-eyed glaze that swineherds associate with six- or seven-year-old breeding hogs” (Masson 20).

If to that miserable life we add the fact that these animals are made to grow painfully fast to satisfy the consumer palate (and the industry’s thirst for profit), and that painful procedures might be performed on them, the fact that their lifespan in confinement is a fraction of their life expectancy in the wild comes as a relief to those who care for animals’ wellbeing.

In short, production and research animals are deprived of everything that would allow them to be *who* they are. Naturally, as Masson simply puts it, “[t]o the extent that you prevent an animal from living the way he or she evolved to live, you are creating unhappiness for the animal” (2). In the next section, I will discuss how some of Aquinas’ ideas can shed light on the animal experiences just described.

Aquinas: Let Them Be

Saint Thomas Aquinas’ name is found in most indices of books on animal rights/animal liberation. His philosophy is used as

an example of the official anthropocentric position: nonhuman animals are inferior to humans; hence, we have no duties towards them. Aquinas' attitude is very similar to Aristotle's, and an antecedent for Kant's idea that duties are only owed to persons (i.e., rational, moral beings). Authors arguing against animal cruelty and oppression generally devote a few lines to showing that Aquinas' ethical position regarding nonhuman animals is highly problematic, since it leads to bothersome conclusions with respect to marginal humans. Of course, no one is comfortable accepting the possibility of "more perfect" (i.e., more intelligent humans) harvesting the organs of "less perfect" (i.e., mentally retarded) humans. Since this picture makes us queasy, the conclusion is that Aquinas must be wrong and should be forgotten, and that nonhuman animals should be included in our moral universe (Wennberg 128).

Although under this line of argument we have given moral status to animals, the contorted process by which we reached this conclusion does not seem to give animals their due. Some pigeons can recognize more than 700 visual patterns, while some marginal humans cannot independently perform simple bodily functions (Blakeslee F1). Yet, our granting the pigeon moral status is only a (perhaps unwanted) byproduct of protecting the moral status of some humans. The problem with this procedure is that it clings to the hierarchical paradigm it attempts to dethrone. How effective (or satisfying) would it have been to recognize the rights of women, based on the fact that some women are smarter than retarded males? If we want to extend respect to the natural world, we must consider it in its own right first, and resist the temptation to value it when it mimics what we find familiar, rational, and human.

Despite its bad reputation, Aquinas' theology helps us consider a non-anthropocentric perspective, because it puts God¹⁷ in a privileged place. God is not only eternal, perfect and infinite, but also a mystery. Since God's attributes are so far beyond human cognition, and his essence is so immensurable, we must accept that our limited "intellect is unable to grasp His essence as it is in itself, [and that] we rise to a knowledge of that essence from the things that surround us" (Aquinas 26; ch. 24). Thus, the whole of nature is a collection of clues that can aid us in the understanding of divine greatness.

Being the product of the divine creative power, creatures partake in divine perfection: "every created thing has, in keeping with its form, some participated likeness to the divine goodness... Therefore, too, all actions and movements of every creature are directed to the divine goodness as their end" (Aquinas 113; ch. 103). In short, a being's *telos* is divine goodness, or the imitation of The Supreme Good.

Given that God has manifested himself diversely throughout creation, each creature's *telos* will focus on some particular aspect(s)

of God's being. As Aquinas notes, "[c]reated things attain to the divine likeness by their operations in different ways, as they also represent it in different ways conformably to their being" (114; ch. 103). Despite the uniqueness of each individual's *telos*, creatures follow two basic principles in their attempt to mimic God: they protect their bodily integrity and they reproduce. In Aquinas' words,

For every creature endeavors, by its activity, first of all to keep itself in perfect being, so far as this is possible. In such endeavor it tends, in its own way, to an imitation of the divine permanence. Second, every creature strives, by its activity, to communicate its own perfect being, in its own fashion, to another; and in this it tends to an imitation of the divine causality (114; ch. 103).

As every creature in the world lives, breathes, reproduces and dies, he/she partakes in God's being in his/her own unique way. Rabbits mimic God in their *rabbithood*, pigs in their *pighood* and beetles in their *beetlehood*. Humans are no exception, for we strive to reach God through, among other ways, the exercise of *human* reason. Yet, the fact that we possess our own form of reason, does not give us the acumen to completely comprehend the *telos* of other beings. Recall that Aquinas affirmed that the whole of creation is merely a collection of pointers that can help us partially understand the nature of God's infinite goodness. So, just as God is an enigma, each creature is also one, insofar as he/she partakes of the divine mystery. Not only is each creature unique, but he/she is also valuable as a representation of an aspect of God's perfection.¹⁸

As discussed in the earlier section, the most common human attitude towards nonhuman animals has been characterized by ignorance and cruel deprivation; and too often, the former has led to the latter. We have hastily decided that birds, insects, nonhuman mammals, and so on are "just animals;" hence, we can (ab)use them. The problem with this attitude, based on Aquinas' theology, is threefold. First, branding nonhumans as mere animals ignores the fact that nonhuman creation, just like us, is a modest participant in divine perfection and infinite goodness, and thus is intrinsically valuable.

Second, our self-aggrandizing attitude that supports the denigration of nonhuman creation runs counter to the idea that, although powerful, our intellects will never plumb the mysteries of the universe. In fact, most of what there is to know will remain in a penumbra, for, again, God's perfect essence cannot be grasped by an ephemeral human being. Therefore, a better approach to creation is one that cultivates observation, humility, and respect.

Third, the abuse of nonhuman animals prevents a large part of God's creation from fulfilling its *telos*. As Masson pointed out, the

raising and harvesting of animals prevents them from doing what they were born to do: live, interact with their kind, enjoy their surroundings, and breed. By discarding male chicks, which our society has deemed economically worthless, we are diminishing the quantity of good in the world; we are depriving those birds of their life and their opportunity to transmit their perfect being to others; we are breaching our duty to promote good and avoid evil; we are disfiguring God's creation on earth.

In short, the analysis of Aquinas shows that insofar as all humans and non-humans are ontologically similar in their natural desire to keep themselves alive, staying in being is a good. Then, preventing animals from following their *telos* is problematic: it not only hurts the animal, but it makes the world less perfect and it constitutes an act of irreverence. This assessment of a portion of Aquinas' theology echoes the plight of non-human animals: deprivation from fulfilling their natural inclinations.

Having discussed the potential contributions of Thomistic philosophy to the animal liberation literature, in the next section I will address Marx's intellectual input to animal liberation theories.

Marx: Return them to Their Species-being

Marx's critique of labor under capitalism hinges on the problem of alienation. As described in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, modern workers find themselves cut off from the product of their labor, from the production process, from their species-being, and from other workers.

We need not dig into dusty employment records of the early industrial era to imagine this type of life. As mentioned earlier, Marx's critique of exploitation is sadly current. Take, for example, the case of abused workers in China, who work 96-hour weeks for the meager salary of \$13, producing high-priced items for American consumers ("New International"). Individual workers are clearly alienated from their labor, which has been transformed into expensive pieces of clothing they themselves will never be able to afford. The process of production is also *alien*: deplorable working conditions weaken their bodies, "[t]he greater... [their] activity, the less... [they] possess" (Marx, "Manuscripts" 306). What should be a creative and fulfilling process is now repugnant to them. Thus, the "worker feels himself freely active only in his animal functions—eating, drinking and procreating" (Marx, "Manuscripts" 308). As workers continue to live in this sordid existence, their interaction with other workers is alienated and hostile. Instead of seeking each other's company, workers avoid each other, seeking refuge in private places and self-destructive activities.

This forlorn way of life is meticulously described in Capital. Noting the impact of industrial machinery and the division of labor

in modern manufacturing, Marx recounts the human consequences that derive from increased production:

They [men, women and children] are to be found in a range of unhealthy jobs: in brass-foundries, button factories, and enameling, galvanizing and lacquering work. Owing to the excessive labor performed by their workers, both adult and non-adult, certain London firms where newspapers and books are printed have gained for themselves the honorable name of ‘slaughter-houses..’ (*Capital* 592)

The comparison between the status of human labor and the production of meat was not pushed beyond the observation that, in modern times, workers are treated like animals. There was no room in Marx’s writing for the treatment and slaughtering of non-human creatures. The situation of human workers was repugnant enough to warrant his full attention:

One of the most shameful, dirty, and worst paid jobs...is the sorting of rags...The rag-sorters are carriers for the spread of small-pox and other infectious diseases, and they themselves are the first victims...A frightful source of demoralization is the mode of living...men, boys and girls all sleep in the cottage, which contains two, exceptionally three rooms, all on the ground floor and badly ventilated...These cottages are the models of untidiness, dirt and dust...The life of myriads of workmen and workwomen is now uselessly tortured and shortened by never-ending physical suffering that their mere occupation begets. (Marx, *Capital* 593-94)

Since Marx focused on the human side of alienation, he dedicated a portion of his writing to explaining what it is that makes us human. And to achieve this goal, he emphasized the differences between human and non-human beings – especially concerning the process of creation:

Of course, animals also produce. They construct nests and dwellings, as in the case of bees, beavers, ants, and so on. But they only produce what is strictly necessary for themselves or their young...They produce only under the compulsion of direct physical need, while man produces when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom from such need. (Marx, “Manuscripts” 309)

While Marx’s assessment of the motivations for creation and production are questionable, he is *prima facie* right about the fact that humans and non-humans differ in the ways of production. Despite

this difference, alienation is also a possibility for non-human creatures, which experience alienation in their *own*, albeit not human, ways. That is, alienation does not necessarily depend on rationality, but on the possession of needs that must necessarily be satisfied in order to reach self-realization. For example, Marx's and Engels' discussion of alienation in The Holy Family uses the language of needs:

The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in its self-alienation; it sees in its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence...[T]he proletariat [experiences]...an *indignation* to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human *nature* and its condition of life, which is the outright, decisive and comprehensive negation of that nature. (51)

Then, Marx's account of exploited labor not only accurately describes modern sweatshop working conditions, but closely resembles the experience of animals in modern agriculture. Cattle, pigs and fish are subject to bacterial infections, in the same way that workers during the 19th century were exposed to insalubrious working conditions. Not even the massive quantities of antibiotics fed to mass-produced animals can stave off the consequences of filthy, overcrowded living conditions.

The subjection of non-human beings to such a life also leads, naturally, to an alienated existence: a life that does not satisfy the basic needs of self-realization, for it is essentially at odds with animals' nature. Take the case of dairy cows, whose bodily fluids are no longer produced for the growth of their calves, but for the sake of human consumers. For the cows, milk is now an alien product and the reason for their torturous existence. Or, consider the situation of hens, who are routinely debeaked to stop them from hurting each other: the cramped conditions of battery cages are so extreme that hens have become alienated from their own kind. Finally, just like humans, farmed animals are alienated from their species-being: they cannot raise their young, roost on trees, take dust baths, or make straw-beds for themselves. The only difference between exploited humans and non-humans is that the latter seldom find any relief, for, as Noske has noted, “[t]he modern animal industry does not allow them to ‘go home’– they are exploited 24 hours a day” (17). While human workers find relief in their animalistic side, non-human animals are reduced to a nearly inanimate existence, because their animalistic element has also been taken away from them.

Marx's observation about the uniqueness of humans should not deter us from turning to his writings with regard to the issues faced by non-human animals. The fact that he referred to non-humans in a simplistic manner is not an indication that non-human animals have no room in a Marxist-inspired critique of animal welfare

in capitalism, but a sign that he was more concerned about the suffering in human society than with the moral standing of non-human animals. Rather than describing the abilities of non-human animals, Marx focused on the deficiencies in the realization of human capacities in capitalist production systems. Thus, Marx's overlooked discussion of non-human alienation should be adopted by ALTs, for it provides an accurate framework for understanding the experience of animals in modern agriculture and research.

An added benefit of espousing Marx's critique of alienation is that Marx himself discussed how an unalienated society might be organized. In the simple socialist formula, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,"¹⁹ Marx summarized the requirements for human flourishing. Note that Marx's principle does not seek simply to guarantee human existence, but rather the actual development of human capacities – in the same way that Aquinas commits us to the advancement of (and not mere non-interference with) a being's good by helping that being obtain the necessary goods to fulfill its *telos*. To quote Hughes, "[h]uman needs for Marx are...the conditions for their existence *as* human beings; the conditions for a recognizable human way of life" (181). Then, in the case of non-human animals, eliminating their human-induced alienation would involve, as Ted Benton suggests, "...refrain[ing] from destroying those conditions under which...animals are able to autonomously meet their needs" (213). However, most farm and research animals lack the ability to autonomously meet their needs, because they are domesticated, and/or are disabled due to abuse, neglect or disease. Then, a more robust understanding of respect for non-human life would involve fostering the conditions under which animals can fulfill (with human aid) their *animal* needs.

Having discussed Marx's concept of alienation in relation to non-human animals, I will consider Aquinas' concept of *telos* in relation to Marx's ideas of species-being.

Common Ground and Beyond

In the classic article "The Roots of our Ecological Crisis," Lynn White contended (perhaps too strongly²⁰) that Christianity's teachings about the human relationship with nature in terms of domination have been so influential in the western world that they infused most intellectual works with the spirits of progress and dominion over nature. A good example of such influence is the case of Marx's philosophy. With its resolute belief in humanity's progress towards the perfection of communism, White concluded, Marxism is nothing more than a "Judeo-Christian heresy." (346).

Although White showed a point of convergence between Marxism and Christian doctrine, this commonality is far from useful to ALTs, for it merely perpetuates the myth that both Christian and Marxist ideas are inherently hostile to non-human emancipation.

There is, however, a more fruitful interpretation of Christian ideas and Marxist doctrine that can offer theoretical support for animal liberation goals. The key to such agreement is the idea of *telos* (as discussed by Aquinas) and unalienated existence (as expressed by Marx).

Aquinas' argued that every living being partook of the divine essence through its *telos*. All creatures seek to fulfill their own version of divine goodness in their daily lives by acting in accordance with their being. Then, the divine goodness that permeates our world depends on all beings' ability to fulfill their *telos* in the ways that come naturally to them. For humans and non-humans, the satisfaction of their *telos* requires the exercise of a wide range of capabilities from emotional and physical abilities to intellectual capacities. In short, the world is a better place when creatures are able to satisfy (in their own particular way) their needs for food, water, love, play, and aesthetic and intellectual appreciation.

Now, consider Marx's critique of alienated existence under capitalism. Workers live a life that is undesirable, for they are unable to perform the activities that define their humanity (i.e., labor) in a natural, human form. As Marx mentions in *Grundrisse*, labor under oppressive economic and social relations is taken as "repulsive," a sacrifice. On the other hand, free-labor, albeit demanding, is an act of self-fulfillment, such as the composition of a piece of music (*Grundrisse* 145-146). In short, capitalism fails to acknowledge the workers' needs and thus reduces the individual to something he/she is not: "[P]olitical economy knows the worker only as a working animal – as a beast reduced to the strictest bodily needs" (Marx cited in Hughes 25). A similar analysis could be applied to non-human animals in industrial societies. Take the case of dairy cows, which undergo systematic insemination and give birth to numerous calves in their lifetime. To them, becoming mothers is no longer an act of self-realization: their calves will be removed from their side quickly, creating (for both mothers and offspring) immense emotional distress:²¹ they will be milked continuously (even after their udders develop mastitis), and impregnated once again. For the dairy cow, motherhood is not a blessing, but a curse. She, like the worker, is reduced to something she is not: a contraption.

Clearly, both Marx and Aquinas perceive that there is something wrong occurring when beings are not allowed to do what they were born to do. Aquinas recognized that the balance and well-being of the universe depended on the fulfillment of all beings' *telos*. Marx criticized the perversity of an economic system that systematically deprived workers of a decent existence by forcing them to relinquish everything that made them human. And, although not directly observed by him, the same system reduces non-human animals to a machine-like existence. In short, Aquinas' and Marx's thought converge on one point that holds true for both humans and

non-humans: it is better to let beings fulfill their *telos*, or to allow them to live unalienated existences.

Not only is there an agreement among some of Aquinas' and Marx's philosophies, but their ideas combine synergistically, complementing and extending each other. Marx contributes to this ideological partnership by implying that the liberation of non-humans depends on radical, foundational change. Although non-human animals cannot create a social revolution – in the same way that child workers cannot exert political pressure against their oppressors – humans can and should act on their behalf.

On the other hand, Aquinas' religious perspective on life and nature can foster a non-materialistic perspective within animal liberation theories. Remember Rolston's complaint about the overly scientific, cold approach to life many individuals have. Unless we remind ourselves that non-human nature is, at its essence, a mysterious, magnificent creation, we run the risk of claiming that we *know exactly* what animals desire and need. Furthermore, as a consequence of this alleged knowledge, we might begin to see ourselves as distant and detached from those we are trying to defend. This is not to say that we cannot sometimes hazard a guess at what might be best for non-human animals. However, our knowledge of their *telos* is so limited, that we should always remind ourselves to be observant and to respect their uniqueness.

The problem with the idea that beings should be left to fulfill their natures is that we do not want to have to accept the oppression of animals, if that were to come naturally to some humans. Furthermore, neither Marx nor Aquinas addresses the question of how to go about guaranteeing animals' basic entitlements in society. A possible solution to this issue is to frame Aquinas' and Marx's call for a fulfilled existence in terms of Nussbaum's capabilities approach. This theory of basic justice acknowledges that "there is a waste and tragedy when a living creature has the innate, or "basic" capability for some functions that are evaluated as important and good, but never gets the opportunity to perform those functions" (Nussbaum 305).

Thus, the capabilities approach can overcome the pitfalls of the Marxist-Thomistic perspective in two ways. First, it takes seriously only those capabilities that are *necessary* for an individual's flourishing and not any human whim or inclination (such as the enjoyment of blood sports). Second, by being framed in terms of justice (and not mere duties and/or rights to an unalienated existence), it makes Marx's and Aquinas' position more robust and effective. To wit, subjecting veal calves to confinement and malnourishment is not merely wrong of us, but it is an unfairness done to them, for animals are morally entitled "...not to be treated that way" (Nussbaum 302). Then, recognizing these animals' minimum entitlements makes animals agents whose well-being must be the subject of law and public policy (Nussbaum 313). Simply put,

the capabilities approach allows us to frame the plight of non-human animals as an issue of global justice.

Drawing from Aristotle and Marx, Nussbaum proposes a model of political justice that embraces a different conception of the good life, and guarantees all the necessary capabilities for the pursuit of The Good (whatever this may be). As Michel Skereker explains, Nussbaum bases her capabilities theory on two intuitions. First, she argues that “there are certain functions that are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life.” Second, she claims that “there is a quality to the performance of these actions when performed by humans that sets them apart from functionally similar actions of nonhuman animals” (383). In short, most creatures have a need for love, nourishment and play; however, the ways to go about acquiring them will vary from species to species, and from being to being.

Being a pluralistic theory of justice, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach can be logically extended to non-human animals. Nussbaum suggests that insofar as we feel wonder (and perhaps reverence) when “looking at complex organisms, that wonder at least suggests the idea that it is good for that being to flourish as the kind of thing it is” (306). Concomitantly, when such flourishing is thwarted, a wrong is committed. While the standard capabilities theory had at its heart mutual human cooperation to promote human flourishing, the expanded capabilities view focuses on promoting harmony and flourishing among human and non-human animals. This entails that non-human animals should not “be cut off from the chance of a flourishing life and that all animals should enjoy certain positive opportunities to flourish” (Nussbaum 307).

While it is open to question what minimum requirements an organism must meet to be entitled to basic justice, this issue should not stop us from embracing the capabilities view. Given the fact that sentience is the most common minimum threshold for moral considerability, and that pain, suffering and frustration are the essence of the animal predicament under human exploitation, it seems unproblematic to adopt Nussbaum’s requirement of sentience.

An obstacle is posed by the fact that we are limited by epistemological barriers from fully knowing and evaluating non-human capacities. As Nussbaum recognizes, we might be inclined to depict nature in terms of a Virgilian Golden Age. Nevertheless, the awareness of such a bias can help us sharpen our focus and achieve a more accurate representation of non-human nature. Careful and unbiased observation can lead us to a greater understanding of what it means to flourish as a crow, a pig, or a rabbit. Recall the “startling” announcement made by scientists regarding the discovery of bird intelligence: what came as a surprise to them was far from a revelation to your average amateur bird-watcher.

Based on what we know about most sentient beings, the capabilities theory calls on humans to respect and/or foster the following capacities necessary for non-human animal development: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, sense, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, play, and control over one's environment (Nussbaum 314-317). This means that, given that the destruction of animal life is not a necessary capability for the flourishing of human beings, we should refrain from killing, trapping, and wounding animals, while working to better (and eventually abolish) the conditions under which animals continue to suffer. Furthermore, respect for animal life requires us to support the creation and maintenance of animal sanctuaries, where rescued animals have an opportunity to live to the fullest extent of their nature.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I have shown how Aquinas' teleological view of nature and Marx's critique of alienation can provide a unified response to the problem of alienation faced by non-human animals in our contemporary world. When understood through the theoretical framework of the capabilities approach, Thomistic theology and Marxist philosophy provide us with a pluralistic theoretical framework in which to couch claims about animals' basic entitlement to social justice. The greatest advantage of this ideological partnership is that by putting animal experience *first*, it transcends politics, ideology and religion, thus surmounting basic metaphysical disagreements that haunt classical animal liberation literature.²²

¹ I consider the animal liberation movement to include individuals and organizations that, through a variety means, strive for the emancipation of non-human animals. That is, animal liberationists can have a multi-pronged approach to animal emancipation that includes both the engagement in direct, violent, and/or unlawful actions, and the commitment to legislative and/or societal change. Note, however, that animal liberationists do not merely seek an improvement in non-human animals' living condition, but endeavor to radically change the *status quo*.

² By animal liberation theorists (ALTs) I refer to the authors of a body of literature that addresses the predicaments faced by non-human animals in our society and seek, ultimately, the emancipation of non-human animals from human bondage.

³ E.g., in feed lots, slaughter houses, laboratories, and science classes, and so forth.

⁴ Nussbaum's capabilities approach is a theory of justice that defends a set of basic capabilities, all of which are necessary for the pursuit of The Good Life (whatever this may be). The list of capabilities includes life, health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliations, relationship to the world of nature, and control over one's environment.

⁵ I will, for the most part, make use of the term "non-human animal." However, for the sake of convenience (and to avoid repetition) will sometimes refer to non-human animals by the term "animals."

⁶ A recent Gallup poll showed that "[a]lmost half of Americans believe God created humans 10,000 years ago" (Newport). This means that the incorporation of a religious authority into the body of animal liberation theories might also be strategically sound. Given that religion is an important concern for most Americans, taking a religious perspective seriously might help attract support from those who were formerly repelled by evolution-based arguments.

⁷ By "Darwinist" I refer to a view of the natural world that reduces inter- and intra-species relations to strife for survival.

⁸ Noske makes this point in greater detail in her book Beyond Boundaries.

⁹ Some authors within the tradition of liberation theology are Gustavo Gutiérrez (A Theology of Liberation), Rubén Dri (La Utopía de Jesús, El Movimiento Antiimperialista de Jesús), Robert McAfee Brown (Unexpected News: Reading the Bible With Third World Eyes), and José Míguez Bonino (Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution).

¹⁰ Although Lynn White mistakenly overemphasizes the role of Christianity in our ecological crisis, he is correct in the fact that most people see the world (and their place in it) through the prism of Genesis' "dominion."

¹¹ It might be argued that Singer misses the point that God's original creation was a fiasco, thus justifying his destruction of it. Yet, Singer's point still holds: by trashing his "imperfect" *oeuvre*, God set the example for the irresponsible management of natural resources.

¹² When proper stunning fails or when exsanguination is not allowed to progress far enough, animals are sent down the production lines to be butchered while fully conscious.

¹³ According to RDS (Understanding Animal Research in Medicine), a UK group that supports the use of animals in medical research, “[i]t is estimated that world-wide up to 50 million animals are used in research every year” (“Frequently Asked”).

¹⁴ “[T]he question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, "Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" (Bentham 311).

¹⁵ Of course, this dietary guideline was given to humankind before the Fall. However, it could be argued that humans should strive to emulate, as closely as possible, the ideal, purest form of humanity of the Garden of Eden.

¹⁶ Andrew Linzey has emphasized that a careful textual exegesis reveals that a position of respect for animal life has been present throughout Christian history, thus showing that the goals and views of ALTs are more common than previously thought (cited in Berry 282). Both Wennberg and Linzey have argued that a concern for animal wellbeing can be better understood in terms of “the problem of evil,” thus indicating that animal oppression is just another obstacle in the goal of eternal peace (Linzey cited in Berry 282; Wennberg 337). Finally, Linzey has contended that, unlike secular moral theories that either require intellectual sophistication or the commitment to an anthropocentric ethics, Christianity can support animal rights (or “theos-rights” in Linzey’s words) based on the following simple precept: “...animals have been created by God and are valued by God. Therefore, animals are appropriate objects of respect and concern” (cited in Wennberg 163).

¹⁷ In keeping with Aquinas’ theology, I will refer to the Christian God with the male pronoun.

¹⁸ Although I will not pursue this line of argument in this paper, it must be noted that the conception of a unique and infinitely good creation naturally leads to a more holistic environmental ethics that extends to plants and ecosystems.

¹⁹ Critique of the Gotha Program, 1874.

²⁰ See footnote 10, above.

²¹ “If you think a cow never gives a second thought to her missing calf, ask any farmer how long a newborn calf and her mother call for each other. One farmer told me that as long as they can see each other, they will call until they are hoarse, indefinitely” (Masson 3).

²² I am indebted to Professor Randy Larsen, Dr. Joel Zimbelman, David R. Boxall, Dr. Steve Best, and the anonymous reviewers at *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal*, Volume III, Issue 1, 2005, pp. 1-23. © Susanna Flavia Boxall.

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