

Dominators, cospecies or stewards

A biblically inspired perspective on the role of humans towards animals

Master Thesis of Applied Ethics

Lotte Bom

6069444

Rijswijk, 16-06-2024

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Franck L.B. Meijboom

Second Reader: Drs. Jurriën Hamer



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Abstract

The ecological crisis is attributed to the Western interpretation of Christianity, and their anthropocentric view on nature, including animals. With the Netherlands sharing the Judeo-Christian history of Europe, it is not surprising that the duality between and superiority of humans over animals can also be recognized as a common opinion within Dutch society. But this view on a strict duality between humans and animals is changing. Three perspectives on the role of humans towards animals can be recognised in Dutch society: the dominator-perspective, the cospecies-perspective and the steward-perspective. This thesis aims to investigate which of these perspectives on the role of humans towards animals fits with Biblically-inspired indications, and whether and if so, how this perspective is able to cope with ecological challenges that include animals. To achieve this aim, the three perspectives are first conceptualised by means of four characteristics, and then compared to Biblically-inspired indications that are based on an exploration of Biblical passages and verses. After concluding that only the steward-perspective fits with the Biblically-inspired indications, this thesis presents two cases to show that this perspective can offer new insights and arguments to cope with ecological challenges that include animals.

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Introduction

We are currently living in what is referred to as the 'Anthropocene' (Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen & McNeill, 2011). This epoch is said to have started around the 1950's (Ludwig & Steffen, 2018), and is characterised by the human influence on climate and biodiversity, resulting in ecological change or even ecological crisis. Due to human impact, the habitat loss pressures animals to move closer to urban areas, and challenges arise with the welfare of domesticated animals (White, 1967; Bovenkerk & Keulartz, 2021). Lynn White jr. (1967) attributes the ecological crisis to humanity's dedication to technology and science as a way to influence the world around us. That technology plays an important role in our society is well established and discussed in philosophy (Snijders & van der Duin, 2017; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Behrent, 2013). However, White makes a further step and claims that the Christian worldview, especially its Western interpretation, is at the root of this dedication to technology, and thus at the root of the ecological crisis. According to White, the Western interpretation of Christianity, which is mainly popular in Europe and in the USA, is the most anthropocentric religion in the world. It does not merely condones the exploitation of nature, including animals, but even promotes the superiority of humans over nature and asserts that the exploitation of nature by humans is part of God's will for his creation (White, 1967). In this view, humans are not only perceived as distinct from nature in a descriptive way, but also in a normative way. They are to be distinguished from nature, since they have the role to exert control over it. This view allows humanity to play this role, because this view starts from the assumption that nature, including animals, is made for humans (Harrison, 1999).

With the Netherlands sharing the Judeo-Christian history of Europe, it is not surprising that the duality between and superiority of humans over animals can also be recognized as a common opinion within Dutch society. For instance, in a recent survey on the evaluation of the relationship between humans and animals, a significant part of the Dutch public (40%) regarded humans as superior over animals. A slightly smaller group (36%) believes that humans are superior overall, but there are some borderline cases where the duality is not clear (RDA, 2019).

A Changing view?

The view on a strict duality between humans and animals is, however, changing, as is reflected when the Council on Animal Affairs (RDA) repeated the survey in 2022. In this research, the group that regarded human superiority over all animals had significantly¹ decreased (RDA, 2022).

This shift can also be recognised in research done by Feikema and Eefting (2022). In this research, visitors of a Dutch zoo (Burgers' Zoo) were asked to look at pictures that portray relationships between humans and (zoo) animals. Next, they were invited to respond to several statements regarding the portrayed relationships and were asked how they would describe their role and position towards animals. To structure this last question, the four basic attitudes towards nature by Kockelkoren (1993) were used. These four basic attitudes include humans as dominators, stewards, partners and participants. The results show that, with only 5% of the respondents identifying as such, the perspective of humans as

¹ In 2018, 40% of the respondents deemed humans superior over animals, whereas in 2022 only 36% agreed with this perspective.

dominators over the earth, which is the perspective most in line with what White regards as the Western interpretation of Christianity, is not as dominant as White seems to suggest. With 72% of the respondents identifying with this perspective, the most commonly shared perspective in this research is of humans as stewards, where a division between humans and non-human animals is still present, but the superiority of humans comes with responsibilities towards animals instead of being allowed to merely exploit them. Next to the two mentioned views, the respondents also had the option to describe their role towards animals in terms of partnership, which is chosen by 18% of the respondents, or as being participants, which is picked by 5% of the respondents. Within both perspectives, humans are not superior to animals, but they are both equal as cospecies. As such, humans have equal responsibilities towards non-human animals as they have towards other humans.

One could argue that this shift in perspective towards animals seems to contradict Whites statement, with the Netherlands being part of Western culture. Another response could be that these research results show the process of secularization of Dutch society (CBS, 2022). My claim is that both answers are too easy. On the one hand, although a majority of Dutch society is secular, a significant part is Christian and many cultural and societal beliefs and values are still embedded in notions that have roots in Christian tradition (Vollaard, 2013). On the other hand, White seems to start from a rather one-sided view on the Christian tradition that suggests to ignore different views and plurality within the Christian tradition. Therefore, the perceived shift in and the plurality of views with regard to the relationship between humans and animals question the bold statements by White on the univocal Christian view on human superiority.

Aim & hypotheses

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate which perspective on the role of humans towards animals fits with Biblically-inspired indications, and whether and if so, how this perspective is able to cope with ecological challenges that include animals. The hypotheses of this thesis are (a) that this change in the view on the relationship between humans and animals are not the mere result of the process of secularisation, but that Christianity can offer a broader view on the relationship with animals. (b) That the univocal view by White of the Christian perspective on the relationship between human beings, animals and nature does not do justice to the diversity of views to be found in the Christian tradition. And (c) that a revised view on the human-animal relationship is necessary to better deal with current challenges in the co-existence of humans and animals such as animal welfare and predatory migration (cf. Graafland, 2021; Van Krimpen & Rademaker, 2018).

To elaborate on this, I present and analyse the traditional views on the role of humans towards animals, and explore the Bible as the primary source of Christianity. The aim is to understand, but also search for and critically reflect on views that deviate from the mainstream view as portrayed by White. This will contribute to a better understanding of the roles humans can have towards animals according to Christianity, and accordingly whether and, if so, what responsibilities humans have towards animals.

For reasons of feasibility, this thesis will focus on the role and responsibility of humanity towards animals. This entails that the relationship with other parts of nature is not taken into account independently. Although in practice there are obvious connections, it also raises additional questions that need systematic analysis that would be beyond the scope of this thesis. For instance, the discussion regarding the moral status and intrinsic value of plants is a different debate than that regarding animals (Gremmen, 2005). Nonetheless, where possible and relevant, I will show how to extrapolate the results of this thesis to our relationship and responsibility to plants and other elements of nature.

Outline

In this thesis, the fundamental perspectives as introduced by Feikema & Eefting (2022, in line with Kockelkoren, 1993 and Schouten, 2013) on the human-animal relationship are used to structure the line of argument. However, these are not merely taken as a given fact, but are critically evaluated from (a) their fit with Christian tradition – understood as a fit with Biblically-inspired arguments and (b) the ability of the perspective with the most promising fit with the Biblically-inspired arguments to deal with current challenges in our human dealings with animals (e.g., the ability to provide animals an independent position). In the first chapter, three views on the human-animal relationship as have been introduced in literature (Feikema & Eefting, 2022; Kockelkoren, 1993; Schouten, 2013) are presented and analysed. The second chapter deals with the question which of these perspectives fits with Christian tradition understood as a fit with Biblically-inspired arguments and reflections. In the third chapter, the perspectives that fit with this Christian tradition is applied to two cases that concern ecological challenges to show that they are able to cope with such challenges.

1. The perspectives

This chapter explores three perspectives that can be recognized in Dutch society and has been presented in literature. The chapter is concluded by a comparison between these three perspectives, based on four characteristics leading to a matrix that identifies the areas of divergence and the specific ways in which these perspectives differ. The aim of this chapter is to develop comparable conceptions on the basis of existing literature.

In Dutch society, three perspectives on the role of humans towards animals (and nature) are dominantly present. These perspectives are 1) the dominator-perspective, 2) the cospecies-perspective and 3) the steward-perspective. The foundation for these perspectives are Kockelkoren's attitudes (1993). The dominator-perspective corresponds with Kockelkoren's 'dominator'. The steward-perspective corresponds with Kockelkoren's 'steward'. The cospecies-perspective is a combination of Kockelkoren's 'partner' and his 'participant'². Whereas Kockelkoren uses 'attitude', I will refer to them as perspectives, since these frameworks are views on the human-animal relationship.

To facilitate the discussion and the subsequent comparison of the perspectives four characteristics will be used. These will also function in chapter 2 for the question with regard to the fit with the Christian tradition.

1.1. Four characteristics

To structure and analyse the fundamental perspectives based on the human-animal and human-nature relation as has been presented by Kockelkoren (1993), Schouten (2013) and White (1967) I distinguished four characteristics that enable to show the similarities and distinctions between the three perspectives. These characteristics are 1) to what or whom the perspective is centred, defined as "centrism", 2) the question whether the perspective provide room to grant animals intrinsic value, defined as "intrinsic value", 3) how the position of animals is perceived in relation to humans, defined as "human moral superiority" and 4) the role and responsibility of humans, defined as "human authority". Before applying these characteristics in the analysis, they are explained and discussed in a bit more detail to create a better understanding of what these characteristics involve.

Centrism

The first characteristic encompasses (environmental) centrism. This determines the main focus of the perspective: to what or whom the perspective is centred. Looking at the context of this thesis, the centrism of the perspective determines the focus of humans regarding non-human animals and nature. Hoffman & Sandelands (2005) mentions three types of centrism. The first is anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism determines that the world revolves around humanity; humanity is the most significant entity that exist in the universe (Grasse, 2016). Thus, there is a natural hierarchal order, in which

² The partner attitude and the participant attitude will be combined, since these attitudes do not significantly differ from each other on the basis of the four characteristics. The main difference between these attitudes lie in the idea that a partner sees animals and nature as distinct, whereas the participant sees humans as participant of nature.

humanity comes on top (Kortetmäki, 2013). The second centrism is ecocentrism (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2005). Ecocentrism places nature at the centre of focus. Nature, which includes animals, is regarded by this worldview as the most significant entity that exists. Humans are secondary (Gray, Whyte and Curry, 2018). The third centrism, which is presented as an alternative for the anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, is theocentrism (Hoffman & Sandelands, 2005; Simkins, 2014). This worldview positions (the Judeo-Christian) God at the centre of focus. Neither humanity nor nature is the most important entity in the universe, God is.

Intrinsic value of animals

The second characteristic entails the question whether the perspective provides room to acknowledge that animals (and nature) have intrinsic value. To have intrinsic value means to be valuable 'in itself', 'for its own sake' or 'as an end' (Kagan, 1998; Sandler, 2012). Opposite to intrinsic value is instrumental (or extrinsic) value. To have instrumental value means that the value is dependable on the ability to be utilized. For instance, a shovel is valuable as long as it can be used. When a shovel is broken, and therefore became useless, it has lost its value. However, something with intrinsic value remains valuable, regardless of its utility. To have intrinsic value means to have a moral status (Bradley, 2006). Entities with moral status are entities to which moral agents (can) have moral obligations to (Warren, 2000). When looking at a moral dilemma as a old-fashion scale, to have intrinsic value means that you matter and thus, that you as a weight needs to be put on the scale as well.

Human superiority

The third characteristic starts in the moral hierarchy between humans and animals. This includes the idea of human superiority over animals and the rest of creation. In this context, superiority does not mean that humans are better and stronger than animals in a descriptive way, but rather have a moral superiority (Dwyer, 2010). To have moral superiority means that one's needs, interests, desires and integrity should receive more moral consideration. In other words, the needs and wants of the moral superior entity supersedes those of entities with a lesser degree of moral importance. Dwyer links moral superiority to moral status (Dwyer, 2010), conducting that to be moral superior is linked to having a higher moral status. This suggests that entities may have different degrees of moral status, with the highest level of moral status being known as 'Full Moral Status' (FMS) (Jaworska & Tannenbaum, 2023). To have FMS means that one is morally superior over all entities with a lesser degree of moral status. That humans have moral superiority thus means that they have higher degree of moral status compared to animals. Many philosophers ascribe humans to have FMS (Jaworska & Tannenbaum, 2023), while animals are usually presented with a lesser degree (Dwyer, 2010). To translate this to the example of the old-fashion scale, to have intrinsic value means that your weight belongs somewhere on the scale. Your moral standing determines the size of your weight.

Human authority

Finally, the perspectives have each their own understanding of human authority over animals (and nature). According to Hobbes, authority is to be understood as someone's right to do something (Hobbes 1962). Whereas superiority is linked to one's own moral status, authority relates to action. To have authority means to have the right to an action (Peters, Winch & Duncan-Jones, 1958). Note that this right to an action does not necessarily include any reciprocal duty. In other words, for humans to have authority over animals does not necessarily include any duties towards animals. Simultaneously, it also does not exclude all duties.

Now the four characteristics have been mapped, it is possible to apply them in the presentation and discussion of the three perspectives. The chapter concludes with a matrix that summarises the findings and provide an overview of the three perspectives seen through the lens of the four characteristics.

1.2. Dominator-perspective

This thesis started with the observation by White (1967) that the anthropocentric interpretation of Christianity is (or at least was) dominant in Western culture. Curiously, White does not elaborate on what fundamental perspective on the human-nature relationship he had in mind. His interpretation of the anthropocentric interpretation of Christianity remains rather implicit. Nonetheless, it can be deduced that he supposes a clear distinction between man and nature, with the first being superior over the latter, which according to White comes with the justification to exploit the nature including animals. This hierarchal view of nature is, although firstly mentioned by ancient philosophers like Aristoteles, a perspective that Christianity became known for adopting, approving this worldview by using the Bible as foundation (Schouten, 2013). And it is just this perspective that Schouten (2013) connects to Kockelkoren's 'dominator'.

Kockelkoren (1993, p. 25) introduced the 'dominator'-attitude as having the most anthropocentric view on nature compared to the other attitudes. He describes dominators as those holding the belief that the utilization of nature is permitted for the sake of human continuation. In other words, nature is seen as a supply for humans ends. In his pursuit of optimizing the utilization of natural resources, the dominator is continuously looking for new ground-breaking ways to appropriate and improve nature. Due to its unpredictability, nature is seen as something that needs to be conquered, controlled and domesticated.

Kockelkoren's 'dominator' is thus characterised as an anthropocentric worldview in which humans are superior to nature, and are permitted to utilize nature for human survival. This definition, however, does not directly show that this also the dominant view from a Christian perspective. To explore this relation I will discuss literature that seems to start in this view on nature and that is inspired by Christianity.

As a first observation, it turns out that quite a few examples exist of authors who present a view that has resemblance with what Kockelkoren defines as the 'dominator' view. Nonetheless, there are examples such as Grasse (2016), who as an abider of the Christian faith, argues that throughout history,

the general consensus of Christianity is that humans have '*the right to use nature to meet their needs, and that this is part of nature's intended purpose*' (p. 3). She claims that humans are not merely permitted to use nature, but that nature is even designed for human utility. Like Kockelkoren, Grasse connects this idea with anthropocentrism.

This anthropocentric element within the dominator-perspective is also acknowledged by Lynn White Jr. (1967), who have already been introduced in this thesis. Being a Christian himself, he argues that (the Western form of) Christianity is at the foundation of the ecological crisis due to its anthropocentric character. The focus of Western cultures on technology and progress at the cost of the environment shows that Western cultures believe that '[m]an and nature are two things, and man is master'. White reaches the same conclusion as Grasse: the purpose of creation is to serve man.

Around the same time as White, the Roman Catholic Church (Roberti, 1962) published the Dictionary of Moral Theology. In this dictionary, the Roman Catholic Church also seems to start in the superiority of humans over animals. Although mistreatment of animals is disapproved, the authority of humans over animals should not be disregarded. Animals are described as dumb, irrational and helpless creatures and are presented to be created by God for the service of and use by man. This means that animals have no rights nor do humans have any duties towards them. Nevertheless, humans should still treat animals well, since they are part of God's creation. In short, this document of the Roman Catholic Church reflects the 'dominator' perspective in which humans are superior to animals, meaning that humans have authority over them.

Both the publications by White and the Roman Catholic Church confirm the statement by Grasse that, at least in the 20th Century, the mainstream view was that according to Christianity tradition humans are permitted to use the creation as they like. In addition, it shows the view of human superiority over animals.

Based on the above presentation and discussion, it is possible to conclude that the dominator-perspective has a predominantly anthropocentric outlook on the human-animal relationship. The dominator regards humanity as the most *important* entity in the universe, meaning that all other entities ought to contribute to the preservation and flourish of mankind.

This anthropocentric character of the dominator-perspective is caused by the idea that only humans have intrinsic value, rejecting the notion of intrinsic value of animals (and nature). The dominator regards the world to be completely designed to support the only intrinsic valuable entity of creation: humans. This means that when an animal can no longer contribute to human needs nor wants, there is no reason for this animal to exist.

Both the anthropocentric outlook and the rejection of animal intrinsic value are the result of the dominator's belief in human exceptionalism, which assumes that humans have distinct capacities that differentiate them from animals (and nature). This distinction between humans and animals, combined with the rejection of animal intrinsic value and the acknowledgement of human intrinsic value, makes that are morally superior over animals. This means that the needs and wants of humans overrule the needs of non-human animals and nature.

Their belief on human superiority also influences the dominator's perception on human authority. Humans have complete authority over non-human life, which grants humanity the right to utilize nature to satisfy their needs and wants. It is important to note that the dominator does not believe that this right is accompanied by any duties, responsibilities nor that it requires any form of reciprocity. Humanity can utilize nature, irrespective of the consequences of this utilization for nature itself.

1.3. *Cospecies-perspective*

On the continuum where we find the anthropocentric dominator-perspective on one side, ecocentric views can be recognized at the other end of the continuum. The cospecies-perspective is such an ecocentric view. The cospecies-perspective is based on the assumption that all animals are equals, including humans. Contrary to the dominator-perspective, the cospecies-perspective does not share its (moral) distinction between humans and non-human animals (Kockelkoren, 1993; Schouten, 2013).

Kockelkoren's most ecocentric attitude is the 'participant' (Kockelkoren, 1993; Schouten, 2013). The participant regards nature holistically, i.e., as a whole of interdependent and interrelated entities. Humans are part of nature and can therefore not be seen separately from it, since they are equally dependent on and interrelated to nature as a whole. There is no morally relevant distinction between humans and nature, because humans and nature are indistinguishable (Kockelkoren, 1993).

Not only the participant can be viewed as an ecocentric attitude. Kockelkoren's 'partner'-attitude shares the ecocentric character of the participant, but with the main difference that the partner regards humans and nature as distinguishable. Humans and animals are not part of a whole, but are rather possible partners (Kockelkoren, 1993; Schouten, 2013). This allows to differentiate between humans and animals but without strong hierarchy of moral standing.

The rejection of moral distinction between humans and animals can also be recognized in the work by Peter Singer. In *Animal Liberation* (2015, see also Singer, 2023), he denies any moral distinction, arguing that all sentient beings should have equal moral consideration, whether they are a human, a cat, a chicken or a fish. As long as they are sentient, meaning they can experience pleasure and pain, they should be treated as independent beings with preferences, instead of instruments for human ends. Singer claims that denying equal consideration to non-human animals solely on the notion that they are not human is as morally problematic as denying equal consideration because of different sexes or races.

To deny equal consideration to non-human animals is rebutted based on the lack of morally relevant differences between humans and animals. In an attempt to prove human exceptionalism, Gruen (2011) tries to discover on what basis humans are different from animals. After examining topics including tool use, language and Theory of Mind, she concludes that these capabilities are not both shared by all humans and exclusive to them. Human exceptionalism is challenged by what are known as marginal cases (Norcross, 2004). For example, when accepting language as the fundamental capability for human exceptionalism, the first question that comes to mind is what is accepted as language. If all forms of language would be accepted, body language, which is used by many animals, should be included as well. Only accepting spoken language, would mean that infants, those in a comatose and deaf people

who do not have the ability to speak would be excluded as well. Including sign language, would only offer the solution for deaf people, not for other mutes, and besides, there are known examples of primates using sign language as well (c.f. Patterson & Cohn, 1990). Hence, there is no capability on which human exceptionalism can be based.

Human exceptionalism is also opposed by Tom Regan. In *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), Regan claims that, besides humans, animals should have moral rights as well, since humans and animals are both 'experiencing subjects of life'. With an experiencing subject of life, Regan refers to '*a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others*' (Regan, 2000 p. 185). As long as an animal can share in experiencing their quality of life, they should also share the accompanied rights.

With these conceptions, it is possible to formulate the cospecies-perspective as will be understood in this thesis. This formulation will, like the formulation of the dominator-perspective also be structured along the lines of the previously mentioned four characteristics.

Firstly, the cospecies-perspective is an ecocentric perspective, meaning that nature is its main focus. The ecocentric view centres on nature's needs, and humans are secondary to those needs.

The ecocentric position of the cospecies-perspective stems from the acknowledgement of animal intrinsic value. The intrinsic value of animals makes that animals cannot be reduced to mere objects of utility, but need to be seen as valuable regardless of their contribution to meet human ends. In other words, the cospecies-perspective believes that an animal is valuable regardless of their benefit for humans.

Furthermore, this perspective regards humans and animals (and nature) as equals, resulting in the denial of any superiority or exceptionalism. Regardless of whether a distinction between humans and animals is recognised, any moral distinction is rejected. Humans and animals are morally equals, since no ability is shared by all humans and purely by humans. As long as an animal can experience life, their needs, wants and desires carry moral weight, equal to other sentient entities. When translating this idea in terms of wants and needs, the wants and needs of animals are *equal* to those of humans.

With the declination of human superiority, the idea of human authority over animals is also rejected. Humans do not have any right to use animals as a mere means to their end, just as humans do not have the right to use humans as mere means; animals (and nature) should always be seen as an end in itself. This, however, does not mean that humans are completely prohibited to utilize animals, but that this utilization must always include considerations for the animals themselves.

1.4. *Steward-perspective*

The steward-perspective is based on Kockelkoren's 'steward'-attitude. Kockelkoren defines the steward as anthropocentric, similar to the dominator-perspective. But contrary to that perspective, the steward-perspective comes with limitation with regard to the use of natural resources. Instead of claiming that its allowed or even demanded to utilize natural resources for man's needs, stewards frame the relationship with nature and natural resources as one in which the steward is allowed to benefit from

them without squandering it. With this allowance a duty is included to care for that which has been given to them. This duty applies to all parts of nature regardless of their capacity to suffer (1993, p. 26).

Contrary to Kockelkoren, Gnanakan (2015) argues that stewardship is rather a theocentric concept. Where both Kockelkoren and Gnanakan describe the steward-perspective based on a relationship, Kockelkoren focuses on the human-human relationship, whereas Gnanakan bases stewardship on the human-God relationship. It is due to this human-God relationship that a human-animal relationship exists as well. The combination of the human-God and the human-animal relationship leads to human responsibility for animals and human accountability to God.

The relationship-based stewardship that includes human responsibility for animals and human accountability to God can also be recognised in Van der Stoep's (2022) revisitation of the stewardship-concept. Van der Stoep defines stewardship as '(1) the sustainable management of goods, (2) embedded in relationships of care, taking into account that (3) humans are dependent on the soil and on other living beings, while they are also (4) responsible for their actions' (p. 6). The interpretation of stewardship of Van der Stoep links stewardship to sustainability and management. Here, stewards believe that every materialised property is given as a loan that will be passed on to others, since nothing material can be carried into the grave. Because the land is a loan, humans need to sustainably manage all the natural goods, meaning that they are required to leave the world in the same or in a better state as they found it. Humans are still allowed to enjoy nature's resources, as long as future generations are able to enjoy them similarly.

This sustainable management of natural resources should be embedded in relationships of care. This part of the definition can be summarised as '[h]umans are servants of creation, not masters' (p. 8), meaning that humans have only the duties of an owner, but not the rights that are linked to ownership. This notion of care distinguishes this perspective from the dominator-perspective. Instead of being superior to creation, humans are considered to be an integral part of it. The notion of care suggests that animals are not an object for human utilization, but rather subjects of our servility.

That humans should incorporate relationships of care into the sustainable managing of resources is based on a) the notion that humans are dependent on these resources and on other living beings, and b) on the fact that humans carry responsibility for their actions. The dependency of humans on the earth means that one cannot disconnect human life from the earth, making that humans are also part of nature. Human responsibility means that humans can be held accountable for their actions. Stewards care for goods on behalf of the owner, meaning that they are not owner themselves. Therefore, they can be held accountable by the owner of the goods. The accountability distinguishes mankind from the rest of creation, giving them a specific role to fulfil.

The link between stewardship, and human responsibility and accountability is connected by Graafland (2015) to the intrinsic value of animals, which should be acknowledged by stewards. The intrinsic value

of animals is embedded in the delight of God over His creation. Graafland concludes that, because God expressed His delight of His creation after He created animals, animals have intrinsic value, and not only instrumental value. By connecting animal intrinsic value to Nussbaum's (2023) capabilities approach, Graafland concludes that the care with which God created animals in a multitude of different natures, and prepared for all a place to live indicates that animals have intrinsic value that supersedes a mere instrumental outlook on animals. And it is this intrinsic value that humans were given the responsibility over to preserve in the accountability to God.

The previously discussed and explored literature serves as the foundation for conceptualising the steward-perspective for this thesis based on the four characteristics, similar to the formulation of both the dominator-perspective and the cospecies-perspective.

The steward-perspective is an theological view that can be characterised as a relational perspective, where the dependency of humans on God becomes evident. With humans as stewards and God as 'owner', the steward-perspective believes that humans should not focus on their own understanding, but rather on Gods plan for the world. Instead of focussing on their own insights, humans should prioritise executing Gods will.

The theocentric character of this perspective makes that the valuation of animals is not based on human insight, but is determined by God. As a creation of God, animals are intrinsically valuable, since God created them in a multitude of different natures, and prepared a place to live in for all. The intentionality of God's creation and His approval over His creation shows that God values His creation as a whole, which includes animals as well.

Seeing as the steward-perspective is neither anthropocentric nor ecocentric not only results in a different idea of intrinsic value, but also makes that this perspective does not have a clear-cut notion of human superiority. Humans are not completely distinct from animals, nor are humans and animals equals. Instead, humans are part of creation, and, as a part of creation, are given a specific role. It is due to this special vocation that humans have some moral superiority. This is no different than, for example, the slightly morally superior position of the leader of a group. The leader of the group is still part of the group, but, due to the special role within the group, does carry a slightly higher degree of moral superiority. This is because leaders have additional responsibilities, including the responsibility to care for the group. Their responsibilities that are connected to their role makes that the needs of the leader are more important, because their position makes them more important for and, therefore, within the group. Nevertheless, the moral superiority does not reflect on the moral standing of others. That humans are morally superior does not inevitably mean that animals nor the rest of nature do not have any moral standing. When translating this into terms of wants and needs, the needs of humans supersedes the needs of animals. However, the wants of humans are subordinate to the needs of animals.

The steward-perspective also has a specific view on 'human authority'. This perspective does not isolate authority from responsibility, like the dominator-perspective, but acknowledges that authority is accompanied by responsibility. However, the responsibility does not originate from authority; instead

the authority is embedded in responsibility. Put differently, responsibility is not caused by authority, but rather, authority is caused by responsibility. This responsibility is rooted in the fact that humans are given the task to preserve creation due to its intrinsic value. As a steward, humans are given the specific vocation to sustainably manage natural goods on behalf of the creator: God. This makes that the steward can be held accountable for their actions. The responsibility of humans to manage nature in a sustainable way results in the obligation to leave the world in the same or better state as they found it. However, in order to accomplish this, some level of authority is needed. If humans are ought to serve and care for creation, they need to be able to do so. Without the authority to act, humans cannot improve the world, nor can they prevent any possible declination of the world state. Humans would be devolved to just mere bystanders.

1.5. A summarizing matrix

The three discussed perspectives each have their own centre of focus, their own understanding on the question whether animals have intrinsic value and on the topics of human moral superiority, and human authority. Due to the differences on all four characteristics, these perspectives can be compared to each other. In order to create an overview of these differences, the three perspectives can be combined with the four characteristics into a matrix, like the one showing below. The first column covers the topic on centrism: who/what lies at the centre of the perspective? The second column answers the question whether animals have intrinsic value. The third column addresses the issue of whether humans are morally superior and the last column delves into the questions of whether humans have authority over animals (and nature). As a simplification, the last three questions are answered with either a 'yes' or a 'no'. The specific differences and causations will then be further elucidated.

	Centrism	Intrinsic value	Moral superiority	Authority
Dominator	Anthropocentric	No	Yes	Yes
Cospecies	Ecocentric	Yes	No	No
Steward	Theocentric	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 1: Matrix comparison of the three perspectives

The matrix makes the differences between the perspectives clear, showing that no perspective has the same yes-no combination on the latter three subjects. The dominator-perspective and cospecies-perspective are even contradicting on all characteristics. Yet, on each of the latter three characteristics, at least two perspectives share the same answer. For instance, on the topic of intrinsic value, both the cospecies and the stewards share the notion of intrinsic value of animal. Nevertheless, the reasoning behind and the specifics of the 'yes's' are different. These differences shall now be made explicit.

The first similar answer is simultaneously the only similarity between the cospecies-perspective and the steward-perspective. In both the cospecies-perspective and the steward-perspective, there is a common recognition of the intrinsic value of animals. In other words, both perspectives regard animals

as intrinsically valuable. Yet, the foundation for this differs per perspective. The cospecies-perspective bases intrinsic value on the denial of morally significant differences between humans and animals. The steward-perspective, on the other hand, believes that there are still morally significant differences between humans and animals, but that these differences does not mean that animals solely have instrumental value. Both animals and humans have intrinsic value, because they are regarded as valuable by their Creator.

The steward-perspective and the dominator-perspective both regard humans as moral superior and believe that humans have authority over animals (and nature). Although they appear to be similar on first glance, significant differences can be seen after close inspection. The dominator-perspective regards humans as morally superior, since only humans have intrinsic value. When returning to the example of the old-fashion scale, in comparison with the 'weight' of animal, the weight of humans is more significant on the scale since the initial one is not included. Alternatively, the steward-perspective does acknowledge the intrinsic value of animals, while at the same time regards humans as morally superior. This means that the steward does place the weight of animals on the scale as well, but the weight of humans is still more significant.

The difference on the understanding of moral superiority between the dominator-perspective and the steward-perspective makes that the dominator can profit from animals (and nature) in any way they seem fit, whereas the steward cannot. Instead of believing in the authority of mankind to utilize nature for their own good without any accountability, the steward-perspective understands authority in terms of responsibility. Contrary to the dominator-perspective, the steward believes that humans have given responsibility over creation, which is accompanied by authority, instead of the other way around.

The matrix shows that each perspective is unique when compared to the other two perspectives, based on all four characteristics. The dominator-perspective is an anthropocentric perspective that denies animals (and nature) intrinsic value, which makes that humans are morally superior over animals and have therefore complete authority over them, without any responsibility. As an ecocentric perspective, the cospecies-perspective, on the other hand, regards humans and animals as moral equals, with both having intrinsic value, excluding any human authority over animals. Finally, the theocentric character of the steward-perspective makes that this perspective regards humans as managers over creation who need to take the intrinsic value of animals into account, even though humans have a slightly morally superior position due to the special vocation that prescribe responsibility to humans, which is accompanied by authority.

2. The fit to Christian tradition

In this chapter, two steps are made. First the four characteristics (centrism, human superiority, human authority and animal intrinsic value) are discussed from a Christian perspective: what view(-s) on each of the characteristics could be in line with Christian tradition. Given the scope of this thesis, this discussion is a mere exploration that aim to map the possibilities. For this exploration passages and verses of the Bible as the main source of Christianity will be used. A second step, is to identify which of the three discussed perspectives on the human-animal relationship has a fit with Christian tradition. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the perspectives of chapter 1 on the basis of Biblically-inspired arguments to determine which perspective can be regarded as a Christian perspective.

2.1. Centrism

The characteristic of 'centrism' is about the main focus of a perspective: to what or whom is the human-animal relationship directed. Seeing as the Bible is the main source for the Christian traditions, the question is what can be defined as the main focus of the Bible. For this thesis, this question is not meant as an answer to the overall core of Christian theology, but to how the human-animal relations are centred in the Bible.

Relationships play a central role: a central theme of the Bible is Gods relationship with humanity. It tells about Gods plan for humanity and the salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ (Mears, 2016, p. 9). From the first chapter of Genesis until the last chapter of the last book 'Revelations', the Bible describes the story of God with humanity. This double focus on both humans and on God suggests that the Bible can either be anthropocentric or theocentric.

To support the claim that the Bible can be considered as anthropocentric, the book of Esther serves as a good starting point, since it is the only book in the Bible in which the word "God" does not appear. Nonetheless, it would be a too easy conclusion that this absence of the word "God" shows that this part of the Bible is mainly or even only anthropocentric. Newman explains that the actions of Esther and her uncle need to be viewed through a stereoscopic lens (2021, p. 47). With this, Newman implies that the faithful human action cannot be viewed separately from divine action. Both are part of one reality, a reality in which human action and divine action come together. Thus, even when God may appear to be 'hidden', there is no 'anthropocentric-only' view.

In line with this outlook, the story of king Omri (cf. 1 Kings 16:21-28) also shows that a Biblical inspired tradition cannot be anthropocentric (only). Omri was the founder of the Omride dynasty, which became a well-celebrated dynasty of Israel. Although his house ruled for over 100 years, he is still barely mentioned in the Bible. His rule is summarised in six verses, with only one verse truly informative (Finkelstein, 2013, p. 4). The other verses describe that he did 'evil in Gods eyes' and that he was therefore a bad king. This shows that the Bible is portraying human history mainly from the perspective of its relationship to God. The stories that are included in the Scripture tell about Gods relationships and actions rather than about human accomplishments. This shows that the Bible is rather theocentric than anthropocentric.

The theocentric character of the Bible is further supported by the denial of the self. Every follower of Jesus is told to deny themselves and even to (spiritually) die to themselves (Luke 9:23-24). Their lives should no longer revolve around their own desires and wishes, but should be centred around Gods will. A similar message can be found in the epistles, used as guiding letters to the newly established Christian communities in the first Century, these tell that humans should no longer live for themselves, but for God as His servants (Hebrews 9:14). This shows that even the lives of humans should be theocentric, rather than anthropocentric.

That one of the central themes of the Bible is about Gods relationship with humans does not entail that there is no room for a relationship between God and animals. The number of stories is much smaller, but there are examples that show indications of a God-animal relationship. Examples include Numbers 22, where a story can be found of a prophet and his donkey. Here, the donkey was able to see one of Gods angels, whereas, on first instance, her owner could not. This shows that the ability to perceive the divine world is not exclusively restricted to humans. Other examples show that animals can act in line with Gods will. A first example for this can be found in 1 Kings 17 that tells the story of how ravens support the prophet Elijah, bringing him bread and meat. Like humans also animals can be sent to aid by God. But not only ravens (can) obey Gods instructions. In the story of Jonah (1:17), Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish that was provided by God. This fish not only saved Jonah's life, but also obeyed when God demanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land (Jonah 2:10). This shows that God has some power and authority over animals as well as over humans, thus further showing that God also has a relationship with animals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Bible presents a theocentric outlook. From the explorative analysis of some core texts, there is a strong indication that relationships start in and direct towards God as he is believed to be the Creator of the world. In addition, humanity plays an important role, but always in relation to God. Finally, although the relationship between God and humanity is prominent in the Bible, the relationship with animals is not left out entirely.

2.2. Intrinsic value

In line with the theocentric outlook, the Bible seems to support the idea that animals (and nature) only have instrumental value. Multiple authors start their argument in God as the creator (Grasse, 2016; White, 1967) and claim that the Biblical doctrine perceives animals (and nature) as to be created for the benefit of humans. Since humans are created last, they are described as the crown of creation for which animals and nature are created (Bird, 2017). From this perspective, the only purpose of creation is to serve man. Therefore, animals as parts of creation are mainly considered in instrumental terms.

Although this seems to be a widely shared view on Christian tradition, there are indications that this view on the human relation to creation is rather one-sided. For instance, Attfield (1991) denies that the Bible disregards the idea of animals as intrinsic valuable beings. The idea of God as creator also can be

used to stress that God has designed creation meticulously, and preserved a place for each tree, plant, animal and human (Graafland, 2015). His thorough design prohibits humans to think of creation as expendable, since this judgement is God's to make (Linzey, 1998). Furthermore, the idea that animals are solely created to serve man is conflicting with examples from Psalm 104 and Job 39. Psalm 104 and Job 39 show that the earth is filled with animals that have no direct use for mankind. Nevertheless, God takes care of all animals, including those with little to no instrumental value to humans. This shows a view on animals as being valuable to God as part of the creation that goes beyond their instrumental value to humans.

The notion that animals have a value beyond a mere instrumental value can also be recognized in the Gospels. For instance, when Jesus preaches about human worth (see Matthew 6:26; 10:31; 12:12; Lucas 12:7, 24), he compares the value of humans with the value of animals, including sparrows, ravens and sheep. This does not only show a view on human value, but also (implicitly) that animals are valuable. Nonetheless, these texts show a hierarchy as well: despite that God cares for these animals, humans have more value. Comparing human value to the value of sparrows, Jesus stresses that the value of humans supersedes the value of these birds about which God is mindful.

Conclusion

Traditionally the view is that a Christian perspective consider animals only to be instrumentally relevant. The short exploration of the Bible, however, shows that both humans and animals are valuable as being jointly part of the creation and part of the same care by God. Nonetheless, despite describing animals as valuable, the Bible seems to remain inconclusive whether this value can be seen as intrinsic value or solely instrumental value.

2.3. Human superiority

As mentioned, human moral superiority is embedded in the idea that humans and animals are to be distinguished in moral terms in a way that describe humans as morally superior. Therefore, this section explores some Biblical evidence for the presence or absence of human moral superiority over animals.

Searching for this topic, the Bible seems to be ambiguous on human moral superiority over animals. On one hand, there is Biblical evidence that stresses similarities between humans and animals, such as in Genesis 1. This part of the Bible presents that humans and animals share their origin, since both are created by God. Furthermore, this chapter shows humans and animals living on land share a creation-day; humans and animals living on land are both created on the sixth day. Additionally, the creation of humans and animals are similar as well, since they are both created out of dust (Genesis 2:7, 19) and both received the breath of Life (Genesis 7:15). Finally, both animals and humans are then tasked to be fruitful, increase in number and to fill the waters, the sky and the earth (Graafland, 2015).

A further example that stresses the similarity between humans and animals can be found in Ecclesiastes (3:18-21), where the teacher that is cited in this book claimed that humans are like animals. This teacher questions whether there is a difference between humans and animals after death, finding

similarities between the fate of humans and the fate of animals. The teacher explicitly states that humans have no advantage over animals in this sense (Graafland, 2015).

The similarities between humans and animals are not limited to their origin and their fate after death, they also share the worship of the same God. The encouragement of psalm 148 for all creation, including humans and animals, to worship God shows that the similarities between humans and animals is not limited to their creation and death.

On the other hands, the Bible also provides evidence that points to a distinction between humans and animals. The first example of human exceptionalism can even be found in Genesis 1 as well, showing the ambiguous standpoint of the Bible on human exceptionalism. This chapter describes solely humans to be created in the image of God, also known as *image dei* (Grasse, 2016). That only humans are created in the likeness of God means that humans resemble God in a way that animals do not. This special status of mankind sets humans apart from the rest of creation (Grasse, 2016; Oscarson, 2019). The special position of humans is accompanied by a special vocation in terms of an additional task. Humans are not only tasked to be fruitful and to inhabit the earth, humans are also tasked to subdue creation and rule over it. This division between humans and animals is reaffirmed after the flood, when God said to Noah that all the animals will fear humans from that moment on (Grasse, 2016; Glacken, 1970).

Human exceptionalism seems to be corroborated throughout the entire Bible. For instance, God has consecrated every firstborn male (see Exodus 13:11-16), requiring them as a sacrifice as they belong to him, but excludes donkeys and humans. Donkeys were ought to be redeemed with a lamb, whereas humans were ought to be redeemed by money (Olson, 2016).

In various instances within the Bible, the notion of human exceptionalism is accompanied by the idea of human moral superiority. A first example of evidence pointing to a morally superior position of humans can be found in the different consequences of killing: the loss of animal-life is approved, whereas killing a human is condemned. For instance, Cain is cursed after he killed his brother, but the slaughter and sacrifice of a lamb by his brother was rewarded (Genesis 4). Another example that shows a moral difference between humans and animals can be found after the Flood in Genesis 9, where God gave all living creatures as nutrition for Noah and his family, while at the same time demanding reckoning for the loss of human life. This condemnation of taking human life is repeated throughout the Torah, and even made especially explicit in the Ten Commandments, while the same books contain commandments demanding animal sacrifices.

The superior moral position of humans as established in the Old Testament is backend throughout the New Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus also seems to have endorsed the superior moral position of humanity. This is illustrated by the story of the demons and the pigs. In this story, Jesus casted a 'legion' of demons out of a man, and allowed them to enter into a herd of a couple of thousand pigs. Subsequently, these pigs ran themselves of a cliff to their death. Jesus freed one man of being possessed, but allowed in return a couple of thousand pigs to die.

Nevertheless, the moral superior status of humans does not deny animals any moral status. The Bible shows that the needs of animals matter too. For instance, at the end of Jonah (4:11), God's decision to save the city Nineveh was based on the moral weight of both humans and animals. God's concern with animals is also implied in the (rhetorical) questionnaire he asked Job (Job 38:39-39:30). This questionnaire implies that God is concerned with the lives of the animals as well.

Conclusion

To conclude, this exploration of some Biblical passages and verses shows indications that humans and animals are both an integral part of the same creation, sharing their origin, their ends and their God. Yet, it also indicates that humans are set apart from creation by receiving a special status and a special vocation. Furthermore, the exploration shows that humans have some level of moral superiority over animals. At the same time, the Bible does not seem to preclude animals from having any moral significance.

2.4. Human authority

Looking at human authority from a Biblically-inspired viewpoint, the perspectives differ both on the existence of human authority, and on its implementation. Therefore, it is important to first discover whether humans have authority over creation, and, if so, what this authority entails.

The idea of human authority over creation stems from Genesis 1, where humans are designated to rule (*radâ*) over creation. "*Radâ*" is closely linked to having authority, since it is customarily used in relation to kings (Preece & Fraser, 2000). Therefore, God chose in Genesis 1 to give humans (some) authority, when humans are assigned as rulers over creation (Glacken, 1970). At the same time does the Bible indicate that only God has absolute authority, and that human authority has limitations. Job (2:13-16; 9:5) seems to establish God's absolute authority through Job's accusation that God misuses his authority. At the same time does Job point out the limitations of human authority over creation, by showing that humans have no control over the cosmic realm, and neither over wild animals (cf. Job 39) (Habel, 2004).

The limitations of human authority become more evident when taking into account that the Bible presents some guidelines in our treatment of animals. For instance, it seems to prohibit physical and mental suffering of animals, seeing as the Bible requires a distressed animal to be helped regardless of the owner, and prohibits the slaughter of both a mother and her young on the same day, in order to prevent the mother any pain of witnessing the slaying of her child. Furthermore, the Bible, although permitting, restricts the use of animals as well, in order to avoid exploitation and abuse of the animal. Moreover, the Bible prescribes obligations to care for animals, including to feed them, and to let them rest. Finally, the Bible seems to be concerned with the preservations of species, since it prohibits picking both the mother and her eggs or fledgelings (Pozzi & Gardella Tedeschi, 2023).

This exploration of the Bible provides strong indications that humans have received (some level of) authority. However, as Preece & Fraser (2000) showed, Christian ruling, including authority, can have two possible interpretations. The first interpretation involves to enslave the other, meaning that the other can be treated as mere means to an end. Toynbee (1972) interprets this authority as God, after creating the earth, licensing Adam and Eve to do whatever they would please. Linzey (1998) describes this way of ruling to be similar to a tyrant, someone who uses his power to serve himself. The other possible interpretation is to describe this authority as a serving authority, which involves being concerned with those under your rule (Preece & Fraser, 2000). This ruler uses his power to serve others.

Biblical passages evidently show that humans should be seen as serving rulers with a serving authority. To start, human authority is closely linked to humans being created in the image of God (Linzey, 1998), and as images of God, humans are tasked to rule as God does. When looking at Jesus Christ, it becomes evident that his way of ruling is expressed in humility, servitude and self-sacrifice. Jesus, who is King of Kings (Revelations 17:14), has humbled Himself to be 'nothing by taking the very nature of a slave' (Philippians 2:7). In other words, Jesus redefined the power to rule as a 'practical costly service extending to those who are beyond the normal boundaries of human concern: the diseased, the poor, the oppressed, the outcast' (Linzey 1998, p. 39). Jesus' example of authority shows that human ruling should be rooted in service: on the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, which was commonly seen as the chore of a servant (John 13:1-10). The Bible also states that Jesus, who knew that He had received all authority (Matthew 28:18), decided to take the place of a servant and acted as one, and Jesus commanded His followers to do the same (John 13:12-15).

The servant ruler can also be recognised in Genesis 2, which is a retelling of the creation-story. Here, humans are tasked to work the land and to take care of it. More precisely, humans are tasked to serve the earth and watch over it, which means that humans are tasked to serve animals to flourish. In other words, to have authority means that humans have a responsibility as well. The authority is not delegated to humanity to exploit creation, but is given to support the serving ruler.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the explorative analysis points to strong Biblical indications of a human authority that is recognizable by a serving attitude. The authority of humans does not entail that humans can act however they would please, but should be a resemblance of God's authority. Furthermore, humans have a responsibility to ensure the flourishing of creation.

2.5. Biblical fit perspective

With a better understanding of the possible views on the four characteristics that could be in line with Christian traditions, it is possible to look for similarities with the three perspectives from chapter 1 on the Biblical indications of the characteristics. This can be done by including these indications on the four characteristics to the matrix in 1.5. 'A summarizing matrix'. With this addition, the new matrix (figure 2) helps identifying which of the perspectives in chapter 1 is (or are) in line with the Christian tradition.

	Centrism	Intrinsic value	Moral superiority	Authority
Dominator	Anthropocentric	No	Yes	Yes
Cospecies	Ecocentric	Yes	No	No
Steward	Theocentric	Yes	Yes	Yes
BI	Theocentric	Inconclusive	Yes	Yes

Figure 2: the summarizing matrix, including the Biblical Indications (BI) on the four characteristics.

Strong indications show that Christianity has a theocentric outlook, that is centralised around God’s relation with the world. The role of humans is significant, but at the same time always related to God. Furthermore, a biblically-inspired perspective should include the possibility that animals can have a relationship with God as well. This theocentric character of the Christian outlook is shared by only the steward-perspective.

On the subject of animal intrinsic value, the exploration of the Bible does not seem to provide a clear view. It presents both humans and animals as valuable, with the notation that humans are more valuable. Nevertheless, the Bible does explicitly describe this value as intrinsic, nor as solely instrumental. It is due to the lack of explicitly that enables the possibility that both the affirmation and the refusal of animal intrinsic value can be fitting with the Christian outlook, which means that all perspectives can be in line with the Christian tradition.

Biblical indications point to a superior moral position of humans, without the rejection of animal moral relevancy. The superior moral position of humans does not exclude animals from having a moral position, whereas, simultaneously, the presence of a moral position of animals does not prohibit human moral superiority. The presence of human moral superiority is shared by both the dominator-perspective and the steward-perspective. Yet, only the steward-perspective shares the moral relevancy of animals.

The Biblical exploration of human authority points to an authority that encompasses a serving attitude. It affirms that humans have a certain level of authority, and characterises this authority as one of a servant. As servants, humans have the responsibility to support and care for animals. While both the dominator-perspective and the steward-perspective recognises human authority, only the steward-perspective has embedded the notion of authority in responsibility.

Conclusion

On basis of the matrix shown in figure 2, three conclusions can be made.

Firstly, the perspective that is most befitting the Christian outlook is the steward-perspective. The steward-perspective corresponds with the Christian viewpoint on all four characteristics. The steward-perspective shares the theocentric character, acknowledges the intrinsic value of animals, regards humans as moral superior while simultaneously recognise that animals have a moral position as well, and shares the idea that the authority of humans is embedded in responsibility.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that the dominator-perspective is, on first sight, almost as befitting with the Biblical Indications as the steward-perspective. Only on regard of centrism does the dominator-perspective differ from the Christian outlook. However, a closer look exposes the differences between the dominator-perspective and the Christian outlook. For example, the dominator-perspective acknowledges human authority, just as the Christian outlook, but they differ on the implementation-aspect of human authority. Where the dominator-perspective regards human authority as a complete authority, the Christian view stresses the serving attitude that is connected to authority, thus limiting the human authority. In conclusion, the dominator-perspective is, although being close, not entirely a fit with the Christian view, and should therefore not be seen as a Christian perspective.

Finally, the matrix shows that the cospecies-perspective does not fit with the Biblical indications on any characteristic. Therefore, it can be concluded that also the cospecies-perspective is not in line with Christian tradition, and is therefore not a Christian perspective.

3. New perspective, new solutions?

In this chapter, the steward-perspective is used to explore two exemplary cases: 1) humane livestock farming, and 2) wolves in the Netherlands. The aim of this chapter is to show that, and how the steward-perspective is able to cope with ecological challenges.

In chapter 1, we have conceptualised three perspectives (dominator-perspective, cospecies-perspective, and steward-perspective) based on four characteristics (centrism, intrinsic value, moral superiority, and human authority). In the previous chapter, a short exploration of Biblical texts and stories is used to indicate which of these perspectives fit with the Christian outlook. Here, we concluded that the steward-perspective is the most fitting perspective with the Christian tradition.

To show that the steward-perspective, as a perspective that is fitting with the Christian outlook, can indeed provide new insights in modern ethical challenges, this chapter will present two exemplary cases. These exemplary cases are 1) humane livestock farming, and 2) wolves in the Netherlands.

Humane livestock farming

In 2021, the Council on Animal Affairs published the advisory report 'humane livestock farming', in which they developed the six guiding principles for a livestock farming in which the animals experience positive welfare. These six guiding principles concern animal welfare, and intrinsic value and integrity of animals.

While the advisory report presents some reasoning for humane livestock farming, the argumentation is lacking in some areas. For instance, it starts with the premise that humans ought to preserve animal welfare, without presenting any support for this premise. Furthermore, the six guiding principles has incorporated intrinsic value as one of its principles, solely basing this inclusion of legislation. The steward-perspective can offer better argumentation to support humane livestock farming.

This advisory report starts with the assumption that humans ought to establish a positive state of welfare, without presenting any moral support for ensuring animal welfare. It remains unclear why humans ought to ensure the welfare of livestock. The steward-perspective is able to present the reasoning for the assumption, since it can offer 'responsibility' and 'accountability' as foundation. Humans have a responsibility towards animals to care for them, meaning to ensure their welfare. If failing to do so, humans can be held accountable, since they are tasked with the care of animals. Humans do not have complete authority, but have received some authority which is embedded in responsibility. In this case, the responsibility concerns to establish and support animal welfare. In livestock farming, this is further stressed due to the fact that the livestock is completely dependent on humans for meeting their needs.

The characteristic of the steward-perspective that states that animals have intrinsic value can be used to support the incorporation of the intrinsic value of animals in the six guiding principles. Humane livestock farming starts with the principle that the intrinsic value of the animal needs to be recognised. The advisory report falls short by not presenting the reasoning for including the intrinsic value of the animals. The only argument that is presented is that the intrinsic value of animals is included in Dutch

legislation. However, the inclusion or exclusion of certain topics in legislations should not dictate moral reasoning. Rather, moral reasoning should influence the inclusion and exclusion of certain topics in legislation. Here, the steward can present a stronger foundation for including the intrinsic value of the animal as the first guiding principle. According to the steward-perspective, animals have intrinsic value (see chapter 1.4. 'Steward'). The intrinsic value of animals means that the animals cannot be disregarded, but needs to be recognised.

The advisory report is based on the assumption that humane livestock farming is feasible. However, this is up for debate (cf. Reese, 2018). Concerns about the ability to ensure animal welfare in livestock rearing are cause for moral discussions. These concerns are met with opposition. This opposition basis the arguments on human moral superiority. For instance, one argument for the support of eating meat is that the interests of humans supersedes the interest of non-human animals, due to the supposed lack of animal moral status, due to their inability to pursuit a good life (Hsiao, 2015). In other words, humans are permitted to consume meat due to their superior moral position. Others argue against consuming animal products, due to the ascription of animal moral standing (DeGrazia, 2009). In this discussion, the steward-perspective might be able to present a new view on this topic. The steward-perspective acknowledges the (slightly) superior position of humans, while acknowledging the moral position of animals. The admission of animal moral standing prevents the steward to think lightly about the utilization of animals for human consumption, and the admission of the (slightly) superior moral position of humans ensures that their needs are still taken into account. Both promoting and condemning the consumption of animal products does not do the steward-perspective justice. Instead, looking at this challenge, the steward-perspective can offer a framework from which the interest of both humans and animals are considered.

Wolves in the Netherlands

In 2019, the first pack of wolves re-inhabited in the Netherlands (Jansman et al, 2021), after an absence of 150 years. Since the first sighting of the wolf in 2013, the wolf became subject of discussion in the Netherlands. The return of the wolf caused a variety of responses, which gave rise to a heated public debate (RDA, 2024). Drenthen (2016) attributed the discussion to different views on the wolf. Some view the wolf as intruder, and others as a friend. Opponents of the wolf worry about the safety of humans and livestock, in particular sheep. Proponents of the wolf are rather in awe of the animal, and are welcoming it.

Besides that the discussion is emotionally charged, the return of the wolf in the Netherlands is connected to ecological issues, like the possible biodiversity changes that might occur (cf. Herzog, 2018). In this multi-facet debate, the steward-perspective might be able to present new insights on the directions to navigate in this challenging discussion, and can, in some cases, present better ethical foundation for decision-making.

The debate concerning the wolf's return in the Netherlands starts with the question whether wolf and sheep have intrinsic value. Without intrinsic value, it is redundant to take the wolf and sheep into

account, meaning that only the citizens and farmers should be included as stakeholders of the debate. The steward-perspective can provide an ethical foundation for acknowledging the intrinsic value of the wolf, sheep, wild animals and humans. This means that possible solutions must include considerations on behalf of the wolves, the sheep (and other animals), and the citizens and farmers. The steward-perspective also means that the impact of the wolf's re-inhabitation on nature should not be overlooked, since its inhabitants (including deer and boars) are known to be preyed upon by the wolf.

One of the challenges in the discussion concerning the wolf is the emotional side that the debate causes, especially the rise of fear of the wolf, even though the risk of wolf attacks in Europe, including the Netherlands, is very low; wolf attacks occur incidentally and episodic (Linnell et al, 2002). Nevertheless, in 2023 a Dutch farmer was attacked by a wolf when the farmer tried to protect his sheep (Redactie Drenthe, 2023). The wolf has been shot. In cases of human-wolf conflicts, the steward-perspective can provide new insights to determine the best course of action. In the rare occasions where a wolf threatens human life, the moral superiority of humans can provide foundations to secure human life at the cost of the life of the wolf. At the same time, the steward-perspective prevents the culling of the entire species, since the wolf still has moral standing.

The discussion concerning the wolf also give rise to the question whether humans should intervene. Drenthen (2021) argues that humans do not and should not have any authority over and responsibility for nature. Drenthen even goes as far as stating that stewardship is one of the causes of the conflict, since stewardship undermines the agency of the animals. However, the steward-perspective as conceptualised in this thesis, does not necessarily undermined the agency of the animals. As servants with authority, humans are permitted to make decisions, as long as they take both the wolf and the sheep into account, but only if this is necessary. The limitations that accompanies the human-authority-characteristic of the steward-perspective prevents humans from regarding animals as helpless beings. Instead, the responsibility of humans that is connected to the steward-perspective can, rather, create an ethical foundation for humans to protect animal agency.

Conclusion

This conclusion contains a short summary of the findings of the thesis, with which I will evaluate whether the main aim of the thesis is achieved. This chapter is concluded with a reflection of the approach, and suggestions for further research.

The main aim of the thesis is to investigate which perspective on the role of humans towards animals fits with Biblically-inspired indications, and whether and if so, how this perspective is able to cope with ecological challenges that include animals. In order to achieve this aim, the thesis started with a conceptualisation of the three perspectives that are currently present in Dutch society (1) dominator-perspective, 2) cospecies-perspective, and 3) steward-perspective), with each conceptualisation based on four characteristics (1) centrism, 2) intrinsic value, 3) human moral superiority, and 4) human authority). This conceptualisation resulted in the following interpretations of the perspectives:

- The dominator-perspective is an anthropocentric perspective that denies animals (and nature) intrinsic value, which makes that humans are morally superior over animals and have therefore complete authority over them, without any responsibility.
- The cospecies-perspective, as an ecocentric perspective, regards humans and animals as moral equals, with both having intrinsic value, excluding any human authority over animals.
- The steward-perspective, which has a theocentric character, regards humans as managers over creation who need to take the intrinsic value of animals into account, even though humans have a slightly morally superior position due to the special vocation that prescribe responsibility to humans, which is accompanied by authority.

To discover which of these perspectives can fit with a Biblically-inspired interpretation of the characteristics, Biblical passages and verses are explored. This exploration showed indications that the Bible presents a theocentric outlook on the human-animal relation, that presents animals as valuable, while establishing a moral superior position of humans that grants them a serving authority over animals. The perspectives that is most befitting with this Biblically-indicated view on the role of humans towards animals is the steward-perspective. The cospecies-perspective and the dominator-perspective deviate from the Biblical-inspired indications on one or more of the four characteristics. Therefore, only the steward-perspective fits with the Biblical-inspired indications.

In order to demonstrate whether, and how the steward-perspective can cope with ecological challenges that include animals, this perspective is used to investigate two ecological challenges: 1) humane livestock farming and 2) the wolf's re-inhabitation in the Netherlands. The case of humane livestock farming shows that the steward-perspective can present better argumentation for the acknowledgement of animal intrinsic value, and the requirement of ensuring positive animal welfare. The case concerning the wolfs re-inhabitation in the Netherlands shows that the steward-perspective is able to present insights on possible directions to navigate in this challenging discussion, and can offer an additional ethical foundation for decision-making.

Based on these findings, I conclude that, of the three predominant perspectives in Dutch society, the steward-perspective as defined in this thesis is befitting the Biblically-inspired indications of the four characteristics, and is, furthermore, capable to cope with ecological challenges that include animals.

It is important to note the limitations of this conclusion. That the steward-perspective is befitting the Biblically-inspired indications of the four characteristics, does not necessarily mean that the steward-perspective can be viewed as a Christian perspective that is completely coherent with the Bible. This thesis presented a mere exploration of Biblically-inspired indications, seeing as this is an applied-ethical thesis instead of a theological thesis. This exploration was sufficient to investigate which perspective could fit the Biblically-indications. Nevertheless, to establish a Christian perspective on the role of humans towards animals, a more in-depth theological research on the four characteristics is required.

Furthermore, due to feasibility, this thesis has only included the three main perspectives that currently exist in Dutch society, excluding other possible perspectives on the human-animal relationship. It is important to note that other perspectives on the role of humans towards animals can exist. These perspectives might also fit with the presented Biblically-inspired indications. It could, therefore, be interesting to do further research the possibility for other perspectives to fit with the Biblically-inspired indications on the four characteristics.

On the other hand does this conclusion also present opportunities. The mere exploration of the two cases shows that the steward-perspective can provide new insights and arguments on other current ethical issues regarding ecological challenges that include animals. The steward-perspective can present an ethical foundation for the intrinsic value of animals, the moral position of both humans and animals, and for the human authority over and responsibility for animals. Additional exploration of the new insights and arguments in various ethical issues that can be provided by the steward-perspective would be an interesting topic for further research.

Furthermore does this thesis show that Biblically-inspired indications can provide a perspective that can introduce new insights into a discussion. The subject of focus in this thesis was animals, but that does not mean that Biblically-inspired indications on other topics cannot provide perspectives that can support and aid in other discussions. Therefore, it would be interesting as further research to adopt a similar approach to discover (other) perspectives that would fit Biblically-inspired indications on other topics as well.

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