

We Are All Noah: Tom Regan’s Olive Branch to Religious Animal Ethics
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Abstract

For the past thirty years, the late Tom Regan bucked the trend among secular animal rights philosophers and spoke patiently and persistently to the best angels of religious ethics in a stream of publications that enjoins religious scholars, clergy, and lay people alike to rediscover the resources within their traditions for articulating and living out an animal ethics that is more consistent with their professed values of love, mercy, and justice. My aim in this article is to showcase some of the wealth of insight offered in this important but under-utilized archive of Regan’s work to those of us, religious or otherwise, who wish to challenge audiences of faith to think and do better by animals.

Introduction

The scenario is unlikely. After fifteen years of writing pioneering contributions to peer-reviewed secular scholarship in moral philosophy, Tom Regan turns his hand to documentary filmmaking in service of a decidedly different demographic. At a glance, the list of his cohorts in this enterprise reads less like a casting call for an animal ethics documentary than a set-up for an irreverent joke. One can well imagine two rabbis, a fundamentalist preacher, a Catholic priest, a Cambridge theologian, and a Methodist minister walking into a bar to predictably humorous effect. But one can be forgiven for failing to predict their shared commitment to a religiously motivated and unabashedly evangelical compassion for animals, especially because the year is 1986—barely a decade

since Peter Singer's "brief history of speciesism" had identified Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism as a seminal cause of the deplorable plight of animals in the contemporary West.¹

If unlikely in some respects, however, the resulting documentary—*We Are All Noah*—delivers just what one would expect from Tom Regan.² The film exemplifies an approach to animal ethics that is ecumenical but still respectful of difference, attentive to both theory and practice, and uncompromising in its witness to the full range of ways animals are exploited for human purposes. For any animal ethicist or activist who has devoted effort to engaging religious audiences, hearing the closing words of this film from a leading secular voice in the field is validating: "Like Noah, we must take responsibility for the fate of animals, especially when their fate is sealed by our decisions. In some ways, we are all Noah." For me, this olive branch has served as a source of encouragement to persist in hoping that religious people have a role to play in the re-imagination and redemption of human-animal relations.

Thankfully for those who share this hope, *We Are All Noah* was just the beginning. For the past thirty years, the late Tom Regan bucked the trend among secular animal rights philosophers and spoke patiently and persistently to the best angels of religious ethics. The resulting stream of publications enjoins religious scholars, clergy and lay people alike to rediscover the resources within their traditions for articulating and living out an animal ethics that is more consistent with their professed values of love, mercy, and justice. Regan isn't just speaking to religious people in these publications, however. Importantly, he

¹ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, New York: Ecco, 2002, 185-212.

² *We Are All Noah* was written, directed, and produced by Tom Regan in 1986. Online at <http://tomregan.info/video-gallery/documentaries/>, accessed on June 7, 2016.

submits this work as a challenge to non-religious scholars and activists to acknowledge the value and importance of engaging audiences of faith and of coming to view them as potential allies. My aim in this article is to showcase some of the wealth of insight offered in this important but under-utilized archive of Regan's work—an archive that, despite its low profile,³ has something to offer everyone, religious or otherwise, who wishes to challenge audiences of faith to think and do better by animals.

Regan's contributions to religious animal ethics focus primarily on the Judeo-Christian tradition. In engaging these contributions, accordingly, my account focuses largely on this tradition as well—a tradition which, in full disclosure, also happens to be my own. But if my account here is both largely about the Christian tradition and written from within it, I write without pretense that Christianity has a corner on animal-ethical wisdom. Far from it, in fact. I readily admit that Christianity's track record on these matters is checkered at best (notwithstanding Regan's generosity in speaking to its better angels), and that Christians have a lot to learn both from secular animal ethics and from other religious traditions.

I submit these reflections on Regan's work, then, as a case study of the prospects for religiously-grounded animal ethics in one tradition in hopes of promoting interfaith dialogue with other traditions on matters of shared interest. Indeed, many of the guiding insights that Regan brings out in this body of work—for instance, that human beings and animals share an intimate ontological bond as fellow creatures, that human imitation of the divine results in compassion rather than tyranny, and that courageous moral imagination

³ As far as I am aware, Regan's many efforts to engage religious audiences have not received any sustained attention in the literature.

can uncover transformative new epiphanies in ancient sacred texts and rituals—are insights that resonate deeply with the thought and practice of many other religious traditions.⁴ I hope, additionally, that anyone concerned with animal ethics, religious or otherwise, might appreciate a case study that offers resources for understanding and appealing to Christians as potential allies.

I develop this case study in four steps. First, I consider the historical and contemporary significance of Regan’s contributions to religious animal ethics as a potentially valuable body of work for religious and secular audiences alike. Second, I offer an overview of the range and character of the contributions that Regan has authored, edited, or collaborated on for religious (especially Christian) audiences. Third, I foreground some of the most important recurring themes in this work, suggesting that they contain the kernel insights of a potent if informal religious variety of what Mylan Engel, Jr. and Kathie Jenni have described as a “consistency argument for the ethical treatment of animals”—an argument, in short, that demonstrates that consistent maintenance of one’s previously assumed beliefs requires the ethical treatment of animals.⁵ In this specific case, I maintain, the consistency argument in question creates potentially transformative cognitive dissonance for Christians

⁴ For an introductory survey of the topic of animals and religion (through the lens of food ethics) across a broad array of traditions, see Tyler Doggett and Matthew C. Halteman, “Food Ethics and Religion,” in Barnhill, Budolfson, and Doggett, 2016. For more direct engagements with the traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, indigenous religion, Islam, Judaism, Wicca, and others can find a wealth of resources in two recent anthologies: *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, & Ethics*, Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton, eds., New York: Columbia University Press, 2006; and *Call to Compassion: Religious Perspectives on Animal Advocacy*, Lisa Kemmerer and Anthony J. Nocella II, eds., New York: Lantern Books, 2011. Lisa Kemmerer’s *Animals and World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) is another good resource.

⁵ Mylan Engel Jr. and Kathie Jenni, *The Philosophy of Animal Rights: A Brief Introduction for Students and Teachers*, New York: Lantern Books, 2010, 29.

who come to realize that their anthropocentric attitudes and actions toward other animals in daily life are not consistent with the theocentric vision of a creation beloved of God that ostensibly grounds their religious beliefs. But if many Christians will be moved by this argument into cognitive dissonance, the resulting awareness of inconsistency is often not enough to move the average Christian to a full acceptance of the moral importance of animals, much less toward an engaged practice of the way of life that (at least ideally) should accompany such acceptance. With this potential obstacle in view, fourth, I sketch a roadmap for Christian “muddlers”⁶—Regan’s term-of-art for someone who “grow[s] into animal consciousness step by step, little by little”—that leads from the dissonance generated by Regan’s consistency argument through the spiritual discipline of more compassionate eating practices toward a more robust appreciation, both in thought and practice, of non-human animals as inherently valuable subjects-of-a-life.

1. The Historical and Contemporary Significance of Regan’s Contributions to Religious Animal Ethics

The historical significance of Regan’s work in this field is straightforward: he was the first marquee secular ethicist to stake a positive claim on the value of Christian animal ethics and its potential importance for the animal justice movement going forward. Starting in the mid-1980’s—a decade in which scholarship in Christian animal ethics was still very rare, and collaboration among noted secular and religious animal ethicists was virtually non-existent—Regan invested considerable effort both in highlighting the potential value of Christian thought and practice for advancing the cause of animal justice, and in enjoining

⁶ Tom Regan, *Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, 25.

secular ethicists and activists to acknowledge and encourage this religious ferment for animals' sake.

Thirty years later, Regan's efforts in this regard look as prescient as the need for continued work on these fronts is urgent. Now more than ever, pressing reasons abound, both for people of faith to recalibrate their attitudes and actions toward other animals and for the secular animal justice movement to lend collaborative encouragement to their efforts. Over the past decade, especially, industrial animal agriculture has become increasingly notorious for its contributions to the intertwined problems of global poverty, worker injustice, animal cruelty, climate change, and the propagation of diseases of affluence. For these and other reasons, there is now broad interdisciplinary consensus that a significant reduction in the global consumption of animal products is advisable from the standpoints of ethics, ecology, and public health.⁷ And if this consensus picture is correct, then there is also a pressing need to motivate many more of the world's people to reduce their consumption of animal products.

5.8 billion of these people self-identify as religious. 2.2 billion of them profess

⁷ Treatments of these interconnected problems are now ubiquitous in venues from newspapers to popular news magazines to scholarly articles and monographs. The definitive article-length round-up of these problems is John Rossi and Samuel A. Garner's "Industrial Farm Animal Production: A Comprehensive Moral Critique." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27: 2, 2014. For a very brief overview, see *Philosophy Comes to Dinner*, Andrew Chignell, Terence Cuneo, and Matthew C. Halteman, eds., New York: Routledge, 2016, 1-2. For a book-length treatment, see Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals*, New York: Little, Brown, 2009. For accessible overviews from a Christian perspective, see Sarah Withrow King, *Vegangelical: How Caring for Animals Can Shape Your Faith*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016; and Matthew C. Halteman, *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation*, Washington D.C.: Humane Society of the United States Faith Outreach, 2010.

Christianity.⁸ The beliefs and actions of many of these people are demonstrably motivated and sustained by reflection on religious doctrine and participation in religious cultures. If such people began to see humanity's attitudes and actions toward other animals as urgently in need of redress for explicitly religious reasons, their awakening could play an important role in prompting the necessary shift toward more just, compassionate, and sustainable ways of life. More concretely, if religious concern for other animals were to become mainstream, as religious support for the abolition of human slavery and the legislation of women's and civil rights once did, the implications for the movement could be profound. Given this prospect, one might expect to see a boom in religious animal ethics from all quarters; after all, ethicists and activists alike, whether religious or secular, would seem to have strong moral and pragmatic interests in mainstreaming morally-defensible thought and practice among religious people on such globally consequential matters.

But if such work is indeed a growth industry at the margins of religious applied ethics,⁹ it has not yet gained the sort of widespread traction that would land it on an average ethics syllabus (even at a religious college), much less on the agenda of the church. However urgent, these issues can be difficult to approach within religious communities where animal and environmental advocacy are often viewed with suspicion as exclusively secular concerns. Secular advocates are often equally skeptical of religious traditions, the hierarchies and disciplines of which may seem indifferent at best and antithetical at worst to the prospect of changing our collective attitudes and actions toward other animals and

⁸ Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, accessed online on June 7, 2016 at <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec>.

⁹ As attested by the selected resources list at the end of this article, this minority report is gathering momentum, especially over the past decade.

the Earth.

It is precisely because of challenges such as these that Regan's example is so instructive. On an ailing planet where 85% of the human population is religiously-affiliated, and where the vast majority of contemporary scholarly and activist agitation for animals and the Earth has been secular in orientation, the need is paramount both for religious reflection on the urgency of animal ethics and for animal ethics that can engage and inspire people of faith. I maintain that Regan's olive branch to religious animal ethics furnishes both an important historical touchstone for understanding this undervalued subfield as worthy of sustained attention from leading secular ethicists, and a valuable playbook for ethicists and animal advocates, religious or otherwise, who wish to engage audiences of faith.

2. The Range and Character of Regan's Contributions

One could devote an entire essay to describing the range and character of Regan's many contributions to religious animal ethics. I limit myself here to brief remarks on four of this archive's salient features: its extensiveness; its foundational status in the literature across a variety of audiences; its charitable observance of the multi-dimensionality of authentic religious belief and spiritual life; and its recognition of the need to take religious thought and practice concerning animals seriously regardless of whether one is favorably disposed to religion.

Extensiveness. For a philosopher whose best-known works are aimed very intentionally at secular audiences and who routinely described himself as "very much a nonexpert" in

biblical and theological scholarship,¹⁰ Regan has an extensive publication record in this field. The list of contributions stretches from 1986 to 2010 and encompasses the aforementioned documentary film, numerous reviews, forewords, and articles, and five edited volumes, including, most notably, four editorial collaborations with Andrew Linzey—one of the world’s leading experts in religious animal ethics and the progenitor of contemporary Christian advocacy for animal rights.¹¹

Foundational status across a variety of audiences. It merits mention as well that these are not just any old edited collections, but in a number of cases the very first of their kind, explicitly undertaken in order to provide a variety of religious audiences—scientific, scholarly, student, clerical, and lay—with their first rigorous exposure to the animal question and its manifold implications for religious belief and practice.

In commenting on the primitive state of religious reflection concerning the use of animals in science upon the publication of *Animal Sacrifices* (1986), Regan observes that

it is not as if most religious ethicists have asked searching questions about the many uses humans make of animals and, after having given these questions a sustained, fair, and knowledgeable hearing, have decided to exclude them because the questions lack ethical significance. Rather, the questions are absent largely because they have not been asked.¹²

Animals & Christianity (1990) was prescribed as a “remedy” to a similar dearth of attention to animal issues at “church-related colleges and universities”—places deemed by Linzey and Regan to be a full decade behind the slow but steadily increasing progress being made

¹⁰ Tom Regan, “Christianity and Animal Rights: The Challenge and the Promise,” in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, Charles Birch, William Eaken, and Jay B. McDaniel, eds., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990, 73-87.

¹¹ The highlights of this archive are listed in the references section at the end of this article.

¹² Tom Regan, ed., *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986, x.

on this front by their secular counterparts, in part because of the notable lack of “a collection that sets out the relevant issues against the backdrop of Christian thought and experience.”¹³ As for clergy and church-going folk, *Love the Animals* (1989)—yet another collaboration with Linzey—offers a collection of creature-mindful meditations and prayers, because “Christian compassion, if it is to be sustained and constant and real, needs the support and inspiration of Christian liturgy and worship.”¹⁴

Recognition of the multidimensionality of authentic religious life. In addition to serving a multiplicity of audiences, Regan’s work also honors—as the previous collaboration indicates—the multiplicity and complexity of the shaping forces at work in the interior and communal lives of authentic religious persons. In an age in which people of faith are often characterized by the secular academy as if the most one-dimensional dogmatists and reprobate scoundrels among us speak and act for the lot of us, it is encouraging to find in Regan’s legacy a portrait of the religious person as someone whose identity (at least ideally) is negotiated in the difficult but often productive tensions among the theological, philosophical, scientific, moral, liturgical, pastoral, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of her thought and life. Apropos of these last two aspects are two further Regan and Linzey collaborations—anthologies of collected poems (*Song of Creation: Poems in Praise of*

¹³ Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, “Introduction: ‘A Great Ethic’”, in *Animals and Christianity: A Book of Readings*, Linzey and Regan, eds., New York: Crossroad, 1990, xv.

¹⁴ Andrew Linzey and Tom Regan, “Introduction: Preaching the Gospel to Every Creature”, in Linzey and Regan, eds., *Love the Animals: Meditations and Prayers*, New York: Crossroad, 1989, xxiv.

Animals, 1988)¹⁵ and prose (*Other Nations: Animals in Modern Literature*, 2010)¹⁶ that witness to the need for our renewed vision of animals to be nourished by “the inspiration of poets as much as the example of saints and the teaching of sensitive theologians. For poets often have that intuitive grasp of the unity of creation and the universal claim of compassion.”¹⁷

The importance of taking seriously religious discernment on animals. The very fact of Regan’s sustained attention over the decades to this wide diversity of religious animal ethical concerns speaks for itself regarding his outlook on the importance of taking seriously the shortcomings and the prospects of traditional and contemporary religious discernment on animal issues. Nonetheless, it is worth keeping in mind his more explicit assessment of the significant opportunity costs of failing to engage these problematic views and neglecting to supplant them with better alternatives that are viable from within a religious frame of reference:

For many of us, I imagine, it is difficult to take some of the biblical...arguments [that have been advanced to curtail the liberation of oppressed groups] seriously. But this we know: many people did (and many still do) take these ideas seriously; indeed, many Americans lived their lives the way they did, and many continue to live their lives the way they do, BECAUSE these ideas were or are taken seriously. It is no merely academic matter...to accept these facts and try to make sense of them in our own lives.¹⁸

In summary, the question of how Christians (and more broadly, the almost six billion religiously-affiliated people around the globe) typically think about and act toward

¹⁵ *Song of Creation: An Anthology of Poems in Praise of Animals*, Tom Regan and Andrew Linzey, eds., London: Marshall Pickering/Harper Collins, 1988.

¹⁶ *Other Nations: Animals in Modern Literature*, Tom Regan and Andrew Linzey, eds., Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010.

¹⁷ Linzey and Regan, “Preaching the Gospel to Every Creature”, xxi.

¹⁸ Regan, “Patterns of Resistance”, in *Defending Animal Rights*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois.

animals, as well as the challenge of appealing to religion's better angels on this front, should be matters of serious concern not just to people of faith, but to all who seek justice for animals. In any case, these issues are most definitely matters of concern for the billions of sentient non-human creatures that religious people eat, wear, hunt, trap, experiment on, and exploit for entertainment.

3. Creating Dissonance for Christian Anthropocentrism

In turning now from the general character of Regan's work in religious animal ethics to a more explicit discussion of the potential of its content to produce theologically and morally productive cognitive dissonance in the lives of Christian people, my hope is that even those who eschew religion may find something of use for engaging religious colleagues, students, family or friends. There are four insights in particular that I wish to draw out here: the potentially liberating ambiguity of Judeo-Christian scripture on the moral standing of animals; the idea that the creation of human beings in the image of God (*imago dei*) is a call to moral responsibility for the flourishing of all creation; the Edenic vision of an all-species kinship described in the Christian creation narrative; and the eschatological significance of the "cosmic Christ" and his lordship over the "peaceable kingdom."

The ambiguity of Judeo-Christian scripture. One of the keys to Regan's persuasiveness in addressing audiences of faith is his even-handed biblical hermeneutics. This trait shows up first and foremost in his refusal to oversimplify Christian scripture. He frankly admits that the scriptural record is complicated, that it often seems to be in tension with itself, and that it does not give us definitive answers on the two key questions we'd most like to have

settled about our relationships to animals:

As very much a nonexpert in the area of biblical exegesis, I am somewhat reluctant to make confident declamations about how the Bible answers [the questions of what kind of value nonhuman creatures have and which creatures it is possible to act rightly or wrongly toward]. But like the proverbial fool who rushes in, I shall make bold and hazard the opinion that there is no one, unambiguous unwavering biblical answer to either question.”¹⁹

But if there is evidence in scripture that can be marshaled in support of both traditional Christian anthropocentrism and a non-anthropocentric, theocentric ethic, it is precisely in this ambiguity that Regan finds the potential for theological and moral imagination to resist anthropocentric readings and entertain the broader biblical narrative in a new light:

The upshot, then, to my mind at least, is that we are left with the awesome responsibility of choosing between alternative biblical representations of the value of nonhuman creation, none of which is clearly or incontrovertibly the correct one.²⁰

I use this insight as a set-piece with colleagues and students all the time, and I usually hasten to add that when it comes to guiding our choices on these matters, the Bible comes equipped with at least two internally-approved disambiguation devices specially designed for trouble-shooting such perceived conflicts: the assurance that general revelation (or the teachings of the book of nature) will be consistent with the directives of special revelation (scripture); and the injunction—in the absence of specific directives—to follow the Holy

¹⁹ Regan, “Christianity and Animal Rights: The Challenge and the Promise”, in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, Charles Birch, William Eaken, and Jay B. McDaniel, eds., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990, 9. See also in Regan and Linzey, “Introduction: ‘A Great Ethic’”, xiii.

²⁰ Ibid. Lest there be any doubt that Regan is well aware and suitably critical of the tragic legacy of traditional Christian anthropocentrism, see his forceful repudiations of it in “Patterns of Resistance” (107) and “Christians are What Christians eat”, among many other places. A passage from the latter is particularly stringent: “It is an arrogant, unbridled anthropocentrism, often aided and abetted in our history by an arrogant, unbridled Christian theology, not the philosophy of animal rights, that has brought the earth to the brink of ecological disaster.”

Spirit where it leads and to know it by its fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness (mercy), and self-control. I submit that honest contemplation on the traditional anthropocentric ethic and its contemporary consequences for our fellow creatures, ourselves, our neighbors, and our planet strongly suggest that this ethic does not fare well on either of these two yardsticks.²¹ After all, the book of nature (in the forms of common sense and scientific evidence²²) firmly corroborates our kinship with and responsibility toward our fellow creatures who are subjects-of-a-life, and—to put it mildly—the fruits of the spirit are hardly clustering in abundance around the activities of eating, wearing, trapping, and experimenting on them. If we are to take St. Paul’s advice to think and act upon whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise, we find very little reason indeed to stick with the anthropocentric ethic.²³

The image of God in human beings as a call to moral responsibility for the flourishing of all creation. In rounding out the picture of the theocentric vision with which he hopes to supplant this failed ethic, Regan starts by reimagining the doctrine that is often assumed to be the very basis for Christian anthropocentrism: the special creation of human beings in God’s own image. The ingenious way in which he preserves the spiritual uniqueness of human beings (a non-negotiable for many Christians) while turning the standard “dominion = domination” reading on its head merits a lengthy citation:

Now I am not ill-disposed to the idea of there being something about humans that gives us a unique spiritual worth, nor am I ill-disposed to the idea that the ground of

²¹ I offer a more detailed argument for this view in Matthew C., “Knowing the Standard American Diet By Its Fruits: Is Unrestrained Omnivorism Spiritually Beneficial?,” *Interpretation* 67:4, 2013, 383-395.

²² Regan, “Christians are What Christians Eat”, 179.

²³ Matthew C. Halteman, *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation*, 22.

this worth is to be found or explicated in the idea that humans uniquely image God. Not surprisingly, therefore, the interpretation of these ideas I favor, while it concedes this possible difference between humans and the rest of creation, does not yield anything like the results favored by speciesism, whether categorical or moderate. The position I favor is one that interprets our divine imaging in terms of our moral responsibility. By this I mean that we are expressly chosen by God to be God's viceregents in the day-to-day affairs of the world; we are chosen by God, that is, to be as loving in our day-to-day dealings with the created order as God was in creating that order in the first place. In this sense, therefore, there *is* a morally relevant difference between human beings and every other creaturely expression of God. For it is only members of the human species who are given the awesome freedom and responsibility to be God's representatives within creation. And it is, therefore, only we humans who can be held morally blameworthy when we fail to do this, and morally praiseworthy when we succeed.²⁴

Where popular readings of the special creation of human beings in the divine image often find a mandate (or at least permission) to exploit other creatures, Regan finds a special calling to care for and protect other creatures in a way that reflects divine love and mercy.

The Edenic vision: an all-species kinship of inherently valuable creatures of God. As for where to go in scripture for the clearest sense of what constitutes success in fulfilling this special calling, Regan looks to the creation narrative where God's original intentions for the world and its inhabitants are expressed. His "serious" if "not literal" interpretations of the relevant passages suggest to him that God's intentions are well established in scripture: animals were not created for human use, but were recognized to have inherent value when God called them "good" before (and indeed, on a theistic evolutionary interpretation, *long* before) human beings were on the scene. Regan's reading of Genesis 1:29 paints a stark contrast between God's original intentions and the anthropocentric selfishness of fallen human "dominion:"

The message could not be any clearer. In the most perfect state of creation, humans are vegans (that is, not only is the flesh of animals excluded from the menu God

²⁴ Regan, "Christians Are What Christians Eat", in *Food for Thought: The Debate Over Eating Meat*, Steve Sapontzis, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004, 178.

provides for us, even animal products—milk and cheese, for example—are excluded.) And so I believe that, if we look to the biblical account of the “beginning” as more than merely one among many considerations, but instead as an absolutely essential source of spiritual insight into God’s hopes for and plans in creation, then, like it or not, we are obliged to find there a menu of divinely approved bodily sustenance that differs quite markedly from the steaks and chops, the roasts and stews most Christians are accustomed to devouring.²⁵

The eschatological significance of the “cosmic Christ” and his lordship over the peaceable kingdom. We also find a foil for anthropocentric selfishness in Regan’s repeated emphasis on the ontological kinship that Christians must assent to sharing with non-human animals as fellow redeemed creatures, made and ultimately reconciled to God through Christ, the Lord of all creation. To those Christians who would seek to justify their indifference to animal exploitation by claiming exclusive rights to Christ’s saving power, Regan takes a page out of Andrew Linzey’s book²⁶ and refers them to St. Paul’s vision of the “cosmic Christ.” Here are Linzey and Regan making the point together in “Preaching the Gospel to All Creatures” (1989):

Christ the supreme example of God’s love was also seen to be the agent of cosmic peace and reconciliation. ‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile himself to all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.’ (see Colossians I. 19-20) [...] If Christ is the Logos through whom all things come to be, and if this Logos, as St. Athanasius explains, permeates the universe ‘illuminating all things visible and invisible, containing and enclosing them in himself’, then it must follow that we are related christologically to all living things.’²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 180. See also Regan, “Christianity and the Oppression of Animals”, 216.

²⁶ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rights: A Christian Assessment of Man’s Treatment of Animals*, SCM Press, 1976. For a brief and bracing overview of Linzey’s seminal account of the Christological connections between human beings and animals and the potential of these connections to serve as a corrective of Christian anthropocentrism, see Linzey, “Liberation Theology for Animals,” in *Animal Theology*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994, 62-75.

²⁷ Linzey and Regan, “Introduction: Preaching the Gospel to Every Creature,” xviii-xix.

There are many related insights into the person of Jesus (and the Christian call to imitate him) that one could mobilize from Regan's archive in order to generate cognitive dissonance for Christians beholden to an anthropocentric ethic: Jesus as the lover of the unlovable, the ouster of the pigeon-sellers for animal sacrifices in the temple, the definitive abolitionist of the institution of sacrifice, the foil of Pharisees and hypocrites. But for me, at least, all these aspects of Christ's character and instruction come to an unsettling head in a single pointed question that I can imagine Regan posing with relish: What would the man who told an earnest inquirer that "he who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for service in my kingdom" say to people who glimpse the heights of the special call to serve the flourishing of all creation but turn instead, willfully and repeatedly, to attitudes and actions toward nonhuman beings that are the antithesis of this calling and that degrade in the process virtually all other aspects of the created order?

4. A Roadmap for Christian Muddlers

After a decade of work on animal ethics in a variety of collegial, curricular, extracurricular, and public contexts as a professor at a Christian liberal arts college, I have learned that questions such as these tend to weigh heavily on the consciences of many religious people who have the opportunity to ask them. I have also learned that one needn't formalize these insights into an "argument" per se in order for the inklings they prompt to inspire a transformed perspective on what unsuspecting Christians thought they knew about their station in respect to fellow creatures.

But if academic *philosophical discourse*—as Schopenhauer or Pierre Hadot might call it—is not always just what the doctor ordered for people who find themselves in this

predicament, *philosophy* as the lived pursuit of wisdom in one's daily affairs through the practice of spiritual exercises often is.²⁸ And when the muddlers (of which I was one not so very long ago) come knocking, wondering what to do after a public lecture on industrial animal agriculture, or a Students for Compassionate Living film screening, or the first week of an animal ethics course, or an adult education presentation in church, I can take another page out of Regan's lexicon and recommend to them an empowering place to begin their repetitive daily experiments with truth—intentional eating:

For here we are faced with a direct personal choice, over which we exercise absolute sovereign authority. Such power is not always within our grasp. How little influence we really have, you and I, on the practices of the world bank, the agrarian land-reform movement, the call to reduce armed conflicts, the cessation of famine and the evil of abject poverty! These large-scale evils stand beyond the reach of our small wills. But NOT the food on our plates. [...] To abstain, on principle, from eating animals, therefore, although it is not the end-all, can be the begin-all of our conscientious effort to journey back (or forward) to Eden, can be one way (among others) to reestablish or create that relationship to the earth that, if Genesis 1 is to be trusted, was a part of God's original hopes for and plans in creation.²⁹

This lived pursuit of a more consistent spiritual life brings one into contact with ideas and experiences that may never produce that crystal clear “eureka moment” that can catalyze so much (or not) when philosophers lay hold of a cogent argument, but it can nonetheless have a gradual, persistent, transformative effect on a person's attitudes and actions that enables one better to grasp things that are true.

Suppose, for instance, that one purchases a CSA (community supported agriculture) share from a local farm in an effort to begin making more intentional choices and to keep closer tabs on the values of those raising food on one's behalf. Now that one is buying produce directly from the farm, one meets new people (maybe even some animals), one

²⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, London: Blackwell, 264-276.

²⁹ Regan, “Christians are what Christians Eat”, 184.

goes to slow food markets and potlucks and events, one reads books and watches with heightened interest when Oprah, or Ellen, or Jon Stewart gives air time to animal concerns. And someday, perhaps unexpectedly, one realizes that one's horizons are shifting, slowly but surely: before too long, the faces of unique individuals are staring back where once one had seen only beasts. For many religious people who find themselves in the rhythm of repetitive daily practices that force them to consider the kinds of beings that animals really are, it is often just a matter of time—despite the heavy anthropocentric baggage they are often carrying—before they discover that their guiding moral question is no longer “How should we treat the animals we use?”, but rather “Should we be using animals at all?”.³⁰

Lest it appear that I'm trying force a deontologist into a virtue ethical box, I will give Regan the penultimate word:

Whether argued for philosophically or theologically, how nonhuman animals are treated is a matter of strict justice. It is not human kindness, not human generosity, not a tender human heart, not any human interest that is the basis of respectful treatment. It is justice, understood as treating others as they are due. Morally, we are obligated to treat nonhuman animals as they deserve to be treated, whether we like them or not and whether or not we view our own happiness as tied to their well-being.³¹

Indeed. But the intentional spiritual disciplinary cultivation of human kindness, human generosity, and a tender human heart undoubtedly increases the chances that people of faith become receptive to the abiding truths of animal justice.

³⁰ For a more in-depth account of how to expand animal consciousness through the practice of spiritual exercises, see Matthew C. Halteman and Megan Halteman Zwart, “Philosophy as Therapy for Recovering (Unrestrained) Omnivores,” in *Philosophy Comes to Dinner: Arguments About the Ethics of Eating*, Chignell, Cuneo, and Halteman, eds., New York: Routledge, 2016, 129-148.

³¹ Tom Regan, “Christianity and the Oppression of Animals”, in *Good News for Animals?: Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, Charles Pinches & Jay B. McDaniel, eds., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993, 216.

Conclusion

There are strong reasons to believe that a sea-change in human attitudes and actions toward other animals could play an important role in addressing many of the most urgent problems facing humanity, from climate change to global hunger to worker justice to the perpetration of cruelty to billions of other creatures used for food, clothing, research, and entertainment. Given that the vast majority of human beings self-identify as religious, it behooves all those who care about the plight of other animals, regardless of their personal disposition toward religion, to be prepared to engage audiences of faith or at least to recommend resources by those who are so engaged. I have argued that Tom Regan's sustained contribution to religious animal ethics in the Judeo-Christian tradition offers an instructive case study on how to carry out this important work.

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