

Towards a Christian Ethics of Animals

Richard Wade

Abstract: Ecotheologians and systematic theologians within the various Christian traditions have explored environmental problems. However, there has been little work by Christian ethicists from within the Roman Catholic tradition to develop an ethic of animals. This article remedies this defect. Taking up and developing a line of ethical reflection upon animals which Aquinas derived from the Roman jurist Ulpian, it proposes an alternative to Peter Singer's animal ethic, which it finds unsatisfactory on several accounts.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE is to make a contribution to the discussion on animal ethics. It is my contention that there is no need to invent, as it were, a Christian animal ethic, because respect for animals is found within the Christian tradition. In this article, I develop a Christian ethic of animals as an extension of a Roman Catholic ethical tradition, which has its origins in Aquinas' incorporation of insights from the Roman jurist, Ulpian. I am proposing this as a more appropriate ethic than Peter Singer's animal ethic, which I intend to critique.

In contemporary society there has been a cultural shift in our understanding and valuing of animals. This cultural shift in thinking leads us to discuss the traditional relationship of humans to animals. Traditionally we have used animals for food, work, clothes, transport, experimentation and recreation. Frequently, the Scriptures are cited in support of the view that animals are primarily for human benefit. At the popular level, many interpreted the "dominion over animals" text (Gen 1: 26) as giving humans power over animals, with blanket approval to use animals in any way that benefited humans. However, a scholarly interpretation of the Scriptures and a re-examination of our beliefs indicate it is our responsibility to be God-like in our treatment of animals.¹ This relationship of responsibility to God for animals is embodied in the virtues of justice, wisdom and compassion (Wis 9: 2-4). The manner in which humans relate to animals and take constructive

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary* (rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1972) 196; see pp. 59-60.

responsibility for them is a fundamental dimension of our relationship with God.² In contemporary society, there is a growing awareness of animal rights and indeed of human duties to the environment as a whole. This development has challenged Christian ethicists to reflect on an area of contemporary Roman Catholic theological ethics that has largely been ignored.

NATURAL LAW ETHICS

A way forward in developing an ethic of animals is the natural law tradition, which not only has a long history and wide appeal, but also has a close association with Christian ethics. The philosophical natural law tradition dates back to Greek philosophers such as Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and also Roman jurists such as Ulpian (c. 170-228 CE). In terms of Christian ethics this tradition is found in the works of St Augustine (354-430 CE) and in particular St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). It has influenced Christian ethics ever since.³

As a general description, natural law is about fulfilling one's nature. Animals do this by instinct but humans have to make decisions about how best to live fully human lives. Ulpian defines natural law as:

*that which nature has taught to all animals; for it is not a law specific to mankind but is common to all animals – land animals, sea animals and birds as well. Out of this comes the union of man and woman which we call marriage, and the procreation of children, and their rearing. So we can see that the other animals, wild beasts included, are rightly understood to be acquainted with this law.*⁴

This fact – that the natural law is expressed in terms of animal well-being – opens up the possibility of an animal ethic within the existing Christian ethical tradition. For this same thinking is found in Thomas Aquinas, in his account of natural law as the fulfilment of our rational animal tendencies. Aquinas incorporated Ulpian's definition of natural

2. Brendan Byrne, *Inheriting the Earth* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications, 1990) 16-17.

3. For example, one prominent contemporary version tends to identify the basic ingredients of human fulfilment as consisting in general goods which it claims all reasonable human beings would accept. These basic goods/values (for example, life, health, friendship, truth), if chosen and lived out, will contribute to our happiness. See Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus: a Summary of Catholic Moral Teaching*, Vol. 1. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) Chapter 5.

4. T. Mommsen and P. Kineger (eds.), *The Digest of Justinian. Vol. 1*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) Book One, 1.1.3 (italics mine). The context of this passage is a discussion of three types of law: *jus gentium* (the law of nations), *jus civile* (the law of the city) and *jus naturale*. Ulpian also discusses four-footed animals in Book Nine of the *Digest* (1.1.7.10): under the law of *pauperies* he discusses what action may be taken when animals cause damage when unprovoked. Action could only be taken if the violence was "contrary to the nature of its kind". Wild animals are not included in this because they are "wild by nature".

law (“*that which nature has taught all animals*”) into his ethical thinking on natural law (*jus naturale*). Here is the “gateway” through which Ulpian’s insights became embodied within the Catholic tradition.

In a key discussion of the natural law Aquinas indicates that there are three stages in the natural tendencies of the human person:

There is in man, first, a tendency towards the good of the nature he has in common with all substances; each has an appetite to preserve its own natural being. Natural law here plays a corresponding part, and is engaged at this stage to maintain and defend the elementary requirements of human life. Secondly, there is in man a bent toward things which accord with his nature considered more specifically, *that is, in terms of what he has in common with other animals; correspondingly those matters are said to be of natural law which nature teaches all animals, for instance, the coupling of male and female, the bringing up of young and so forth.* Thirdly, there is in man an appetite for the good of his nature as rational and this is proper to him.... whatever this involves is a matter of natural law.⁵

It should be noted that for Aquinas rational animality also involves the fulfilment of our biological tendencies. So natural law in Aquinas might also be thought to involve plants. In one sense this is true but from an ethical perspective it would seem that plants are unlikely to be morally considerable for their own sakes since they cannot enjoy fulfilling their natural inclinations or being frustrated in the non fulfilment of their natural inclinations. Aquinas’ ethics is concerned with the achievement of happiness⁶ and because happiness involves a subjective awareness of being fulfilled, this would seem to exclude plants. However, common sense maintains that animals do enjoy the fulfilment of their inclinations at their particular level of being. For example, animals have social, psychological and biological inclinations (sex, procreation, rearing of offspring, food, water, shelter, company, play, and so on). In so far as animals do enjoy these inclinations it would seem that they should be included in natural law under the ethical sense of the term. That is, animals have their own happiness/contentment in relation to their particular nature.

In discussions of the natural law, the Latin word *jus* is often translated “law”. However, in classic Latin usage *jus* means what is right. Following this line of reasoning, it seems to me that Ulpian is defining natural law in terms of its ethical sense. Violation of the natural instinct/inclinations of animals (for example, the infliction of pain and

5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars, 1969) 1a 2ae. 94, 2 (italics mine). Aquinas does not refer to Ulpian by name in this text but elsewhere in the *Summa*, Ulpian is referred to as “the Jurist”. For other echoes of Ulpian, see 1a 2ae. 94, 2 and 2a 2ae. 57, 3.

6. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a 2ae. 2-5.

abuse, deprivation of water, food, space to run free, and so forth) is against the interests they require to have their natures fulfilled. Since it frustrates the animal, such behaviour is not naturally "right". It is unethical because it causes animals to suffer the loss of goods they should by nature enjoy. In this sense the ancient Roman *jus naturale*, as defined by Ulpian, would appear to defend the natural right of animals. It would require, for example, that they be given water or at least not kept from having access to it; it would exclude putting a fence between the cow and the bull when the cow is in heat. Failure to respect the *prima facie* interests of animals based upon their nature is to deny them natural justice. This seems to be the correct interpretation of Ulpian.

Like everything else, animals have intrinsic value. However, in contrast to other beings, animals also have the capacity to enjoy living. At the level of their being it matters to them whether or not their lives go well or badly. Hence, they are also morally considerable. They have *prima facie* moral claims on humans to behave appropriately towards them. Cows and other animals, for example, can enjoy things (chewing the cud) in their own right for themselves. This can be maintained even if we admit that the sense in which non-rational animals appreciate living is imperfect as compared to human beings. If they enjoy living, they do not do so reflectively or self-consciously.⁷ So, although objectively these animals are morally considerable, at their own particular level their capacity for enjoyment differs from that of human beings.

In line with this tradition, the welfare interests of animals make moral claims on us compassionately and wisely to do the right thing by their nature/teleology/purposes. Claims to food and water, freedom from harm and so forth are not unlike the notion of rights claimed for human beings. However, given animals' imperfect appreciation of living, it seems that none of their claims could ever be absolute. The *jus naturale* as defined by Ulpian and incorporated into Aquinas' exposition of natural law is, in the interpretation I am proposing, a duty to do what is ethically right with respect to the nature of the animal (the kind of being the animal is). The claims of animals thus generate in us a duty to care for their welfare. But, since not all natures have equal value, such claims may be overridden to preserve a proportionate good. To save my life, for example, I can defend myself by wounding or killing an animal, even though the animal has its own natural right. And, of course, even if it could be maintained that pests (like mosquitoes) and viruses (HIV) might appreciate living in some very rudimentary way, the fact that they cause major harm to humans and other animals provides a proportionate reason for destroying them.

7. See Peter Drum, "Aquinas and the Moral Status of Animals," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992) 483-8.

While we have *prima facie* duties to animals, we also have duties to human persons with a reasonable need. When these duties and needs conflict, the challenge for Christian ethics is to ensure that we do not smuggle our prejudices and culturally conditioned assumptions about the moral status of animals into the argument. To rightly adjudicate between the competing interests of animals and humans will require the intellectual and moral virtue of prudence. For example, in the face of long waiting lists of people needing heart transplants and too few human donors, scientists are looking at new ways to use animals to save human life. One way is to genetically engineer the hearts of pigs for transplantation into humans. The question arises whether, given the circumstances, this is ethically acceptable.⁸

A REPLY TO A POSSIBLE OBJECTION

Some might object that, while recourse to Ulpian's sense of natural law makes a nice historical note, he was, of course, unaware of the *is-ought* distinction of David Hume (1711-1776) and what G. E. Moore (1873-1958) termed the "naturalistic fallacy". I would, however, defend my interpretation of Ulpian against those who might consider that I have committed the philosophical howler of ignoring the clear divide between facts and values, making the unjustified move from descriptive (factual) judgements to commendatory or evaluative (normative) judgements. In this instance, I have moved from describing the interests of animals based on their teleology/nature/purposes and their additional capacities for appreciating these ends to indicating moral obligations towards them. Objectors would claim that a bridging principle is needed to move from fact to obligation.

But Alasdair MacIntyre has shown that Hume's *is-ought* distinction is not some timeless truth. Rather, it arose out of a revolutionary moral outlook (ably assisted by the new sciences of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) that rejected the Aristotelian tradition. The Aristotelian tradition did not draw a sharp distinction between fact and value. Its key concept was that humans and animals have a fundamental nature and essential purpose/*telos*.⁹

MacIntyre points out that Hume's reason for maintaining that facts and normative statements are opposed to each other is not because facts are objective while normative judgements are subjective and simply sentiment. Hume took this stance because he believed that it is our emotions and desires and not facts that motivate us to action. Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues, Hume was mistaken to say that there is

8. See Donald Bruce and Ann Bruce (eds.), *Engineering Genesis: The Ethics of Genetic Engineering in Non-human Species* (London: Earthscan, 1999).

9. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory* (2nd ed.; South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984) 58.

a sharp divide between fact and value. Underpinning the *is/ought* distinction is a particular ideology: the assumption that moral argument and all moral concepts do not involve functional/purposeful notions. As soon as the concept of essential purpose/function was rejected, it ceased to be convincing to consider moral judgements as statements of fact.¹⁰ A wedge was driven between the world “out there” and the world of the human subject. The world became value neutral, static, mechanistic and purposeless. It was now up to the human subject to impose moral value on the physical and neutral world of fact. This type of attitude to the created world has been a contributing factor to the environmental crisis.

Using the example of a watch, MacIntyre shows how it is possible to move from description of the watch (*is/facts*) to commendatory or evaluative (*ought*) judgements about it. To say “this is a good watch” is in fact to say that it has some particular function/purpose. If the purpose of a watch *is* to tell the time accurately, then a good watch *ought* to be accurate in telling the time.¹¹ The initial move in ethics is not to embrace the *is/ought* distinction but to identify the *telos* of human life. Once the purposes of the human person are identified, then it is possible to state that “you ought to do such and such to satisfy your well being”. Moral judgements, then, express what is considered to be teleologically appropriate behaviour for human persons in community. This is another way of talking about the natural law. Likewise, it is possible to indicate our obligations to animals once we have identified the distinctive dimensions of the animal’s *telos*. Respect for animals entails *prima facie* respect for the teleology pertaining to them. Roman law categorised animals as objects. Yet Ulpian, himself a Roman jurist, interpreted the natural law in terms of a duty to respect the requirements of the nature of animals.

SINGER’S ANIMAL ETHICS

Peter Singer, undoubtedly the most prominent advocate of animal liberation, maintains that Christian theology is ethically bankrupt when it comes to discussion of animals. The only exception on the landscape, according to Singer, is St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226).¹² Some “animal theologians” – Andrew Linzey, for example – have incorporated some of Singer’s terminology (“speciesism”) into their theology. In the light of Singer’s allegations, and Linzey’s appropriation of certain of his con-

10. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 56-7.

11. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 57-8.

12. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (rev. ed.; London: Pimlico, 1995) Chapter 5.

cepts, it is important to critically examine Singer's beliefs concerning animals.¹³

In Peter Singer's version of utilitarianism the entry requirement for moral consideration is the capacity to have experiences, interests and preferences. All sentient animals have this capacity – the capacity to have preferences of pleasure/ enjoyment and of avoiding suffering/ pain.¹⁴

As a first category we may consider sentient creatures that are not self-conscious. These, according to Singer, since they are not aware of themselves as individuals over time, do not desire or prefer to continue living. They have instant preferences, and death marks the end of such preferences, just as birth marks the beginning of them. Therefore, if the killing of such animals is painless and does not bring about deprivation to members of the animals' group, then it may be morally permissible. Sentient animals are, to use his image, receptacles of value.

Singer, however, realises that this metaphor has its limitations. What is intrinsically valuable are experiences of pleasure. If a receptacle breaks, it can be replaced by another receptacle into which the intrinsic pleasures can be poured. According to Singer, the killing of these happy animals may reduce the quantity of happiness in the world, and, if indeed the animals are wronged in this way, then, the scales can be balanced by the birth/replacement of similar creatures, who will be happy over time.¹⁵ The analysis does not, for instance, justify the factory farming of animals for food because the industry ignores the interests/preferences of animals. Singer's animal ethics only permits the killing of animals for food if it is a matter of survival.¹⁶ Thus Singer advocates vegetarianism. It is in the best interests of all concerned that we refrain from killing and eating animals.¹⁷ Vegetarianism puts an end to taking animals' lives, prevents animal suffering and stops us thinking of animals as objects. Animal experimentation, likewise, would only be tolerated for the greater good if similar experiments were permitted on similar humans.¹⁸

A second category of animals (for example, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangoutangs) Singer identifies as non-human persons. Persons are self-aware, have the capacity for enjoyment and suffering, have preferences

13. Andrew Linzey and Paul Waldau, "Speciesism" in Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey (eds.), *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 788-92. It is beyond the scope of this article to criticise the assumptions and theology of Linzey.

14. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 13-15, 57-8, 94-5, 131.

15. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 120-121, 125--126, 131-133.

16. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 62-64.

17. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 134.

18. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 67.

and, as individuals, desire to live over time.¹⁹ Only persons have the right to life.²⁰ Singer cites empirical evidence in support of his claim that animals of this kind are self-conscious individuals. He cites research to justify the claim that gorillas and chimpanzees can communicate using American Sign Language.²¹ Furthermore, in the light of the fieldwork of Jane Goodall, for example, Singer concludes that chimpanzees have an intellectual and emotional life which, he states, measures up to the criterion of personhood.²² Only when an individual can be identified as lacking rationality can the absence of personhood be inferred. According to Singer, the killing of a non-human person is worse than killing a human being who lacks the characteristics of personhood.²³ Singer emphasises that the difference between animals and humans (in terms of emotions, intelligence, sensory awareness, desires, memory, genes, and so on) is a matter of degree. He denies that there is any morally significant feature that would make humans distinct from animals and justify different treatment. Any treatment of humans that favours human interests because of their species is, according to Singer, wrong. Such a bias towards the human species is condemned as "speciesism"²⁴ – something analogous, in Singer's view, to racism and sexism.²⁵

When we are faced with making moral choices that involve animals and humans, Singer directs us to the principle of equal consideration of interests (desires). This universal ethical outlook involves considering the interests of animals and humans as equal. In practice, it does not involve treating the interests of animals and humans as the same. Rather, it means treating interests in accordance with the nature of the being in question.²⁶ As a utilitarian, Singer argues, that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by consequences/outcomes and the situation. Different situations and circumstances may lead to different outcomes. Once the interests of animals have been considered, then the goods and bads are weighed and balanced. This is done like an arithmetical sum. The pluses are added up, the minuses calculated. Both are compared. The action that is good/best or least bad is the one that brings about the greatest balance of good (welfare/satisfaction of

19. Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of our Traditional Ethics* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1994) 183; also published by Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1995), see pp. 52, 200.

20. Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death*, 183; *Practical Ethics*, 120.

21. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 111-12.

22. Jane Goodall, "Chimpanzees – Bridging the Gap", in Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (eds.), *The Great Ape Project* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993) 12.

23. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 117-18.

24. The term was coined by Richard D Ryder and first used by him in a privately printed pamphlet, *Speciesism* (Oxford, 1970).

25. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 6, 9, 18-23 and *Practical Ethics*, 55-62, 88.

26. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2, 5, 8.

preferences) over bad (suffering) in the world as a whole.²⁷ This is the motive and *telos* of moral action. It is a rational, "common-sense", and empirical approach to moral choice.

27. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3, 11, 13-14, 207-213, 226.

PROBLEMS WITH SINGER'S BELIEFS AND METHODOLOGY

Like Ulpian, Singer is concerned with respecting animals and meeting the interests proportionate to their nature. However, there are a number of problems with Singer's utilitarian ethic and beliefs about animals.

Singer claims that some animals are persons. His definition of a person focuses upon the empirical capacity of personality to relate, to be aware of interests and have desires, and to use reason. The evidence he cites in support of his claim (for example, the use by chimps and apes, such as Washoe, Koko and Chantek, of sign language to "communicate") is dubious. Rosemary Rodd, a biologist and philosopher, suggests that the claims that apes and chimpanzees can "communicate" by sign language has more to do with trainers giving cues (for example, glancing from the pen to the mat) and guessing what the animals actually mean. Often the animals are unreasonably given the benefit of the doubt and, once humans and animals become familiar, it is difficult for the trainers not to impose their interpretation on the signs and facial expressions of the animals. In time, the older chimpanzees became bored with the ceaseless repetition and simply got what they wanted by being noisy and aggressive.²⁸

In the light of Rodd's comments, it would appear that if chimpanzees and apes "communicate" they only "communicate information" using symbols conditioned by their spatio-temporal framework. Unlike human beings, Washo and Koko's capacity for perception is limited to objects, associations and relationships within their surrounding space and particular time. In the absence of more and better evidence, it would seem that personhood as it is known is restricted to human nature. The human individual has an innate natural inclination to grow and develop to a point where the individual can exercise actions that are self-aware and rational.²⁹ Chimpanzees evidently do not have this natural human capacity. A chimpanzee's nature enables it to grow and develop into a chimpanzee and experience the simple life of a chimpanzee. So, contrary to what Singer argues, species membership is a morally relevant fact, determinative of how members of species ought be treated.

Another problem with Singer's argument is that he marginalises the unborn, infants, the intellectually impaired, and those suffering from Alzheimer's disease. In essence Singer does not give the title "person" to anyone he considers lacking in rational self-consciousness. But our

28. Rosemary Rodd, *Biology, Ethics and Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990; paperback 1992) 89-93, 98-101. However, Rodd takes the view that self-consciousness in animals is a matter of degree and form; see pp. 71-73.

29. Norman Ford, *When Did I Begin?: Conception of the Human Individual in History, Philosophy and Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 85, 77-8.

common humanity with such persons cannot be denied.³⁰ We respect the wishes they would have (wishes, that is, for their human dignity to be respected) were it not for the inability to express their desires.

Normally, human beings are autonomous, communicate their inner life to another, engage in meaningful and insightful conversation about the truth, have an enduring sense of self, make judgements and express these in language. The human person has a desire to continue to live, and has specific needs, character and attributes embodied in a rational and spiritual nature. It would appear that animals cannot be described as manifesting these characteristics, as noted above. So, describing animals as persons does not help the case of animal welfare. It is inappropriate and it is associated, in the arguments of Singer and other philosophers, with undermining the dignity of the human person.

Singer also reduces sentient non-selfconscious animals to replaceable vessels of pleasure and pain. In this ethic, animals could be killed and exploited provided the process is pain free and the animals are replaced. While the principle of utility has its appropriate secondary place in morality, it is not the foundational standard of ethics.³¹ Moral judgements are not just about maximising amounts of value in the universe. While preferences are morally significant, it is the individual person who finds them valuable. They are also expressions of the individual person who is the origin of their value and who is a being with inviolable dignity. Some interests can be arbitrary, irrational, prejudicial, and capricious (for example, sexism and racism). It is the human individual's rational nature, which is personal and social, that is the foundation and criterion of the value of interests. This is the springboard for considering the interests of humans and animals. We are bound to recognise that part of our nature shared with animals. If we are discourteous to the natures of animals, we are disrespectful to the animal and at the same time to needs that are integral to human nature.

The meaning of human behaviour is not simply about focusing on the outcome of actions. In order to have a full appreciation of the meaning of a moral action, it is important to consider the action itself, its consequences, and the intention of the moral agent. Consequences, and situations, although morally significant, do not in themselves determine the morality of actions. Some actions (murder, wrongful killing of animals, cruelty) are wrong in themselves apart from the effects they have on people and other animals. Animals can be wronged because some actions/omissions (for example, failure to feed and water our pets and livestock) are disrespectful to the animal and undermining of

30. Brian F Scarlett, "The Moral Uniqueness of the Human Animal" in D. S. Oderberg and J. A. Laing (eds.), *Human Lives: Critical Essays on Consequentialist Bioethics* (London: Macmillan, 1997) 92-3.

31. See Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (London: Routledge, 1984) for a detailed critique of Singer's utilitarian animal ethic.

human dignity. Morality is also concerned with the kind of persons we are and are becoming through our choices. It is through our morally good choices that we develop moral character and moral identity. We can become respectful, courteous, compassionate, caring and just in our relationships. Or we can become cruel, discourteous and disrespectful.

While utility is a *prima facie* principle it must give way to a principle of justice which is lacking in Singer's ethical theory. Even if all interests are equally considered, Singer offers no theory of justice or rights in order to distribute the benefits and burdens equally. Nor does he offer any objective criterion to show how to weigh all the goods and bads, values and disvalues that arise. He may argue that he has learned to balance well. However, it is quite conceivable that a committed preference utilitarian other than Singer could weigh things up and intuitively justify as ethically acceptable actions – animal experimentation, for example – that Singer himself would oppose. The utilitarian calculus does not guarantee the protection of animals (or humans) from exploitation. Fundamentally, Singer's beliefs in regard to human and animal natures do not ring true. His moral theory is unfair, unworkable and alarming.

CONCLUSION

As I have shown, respect for animals is long standing within the Christian tradition, although it has been somewhat neglected. The paradigm of duty as found within Ulpian's definition of natural law and incorporated into the Catholic tradition by Aquinas challenges us to consider seriously all animal interests (sentient and non-sentient). This animal ethic is more appropriate than Singer's because it respects human dignity and at the same time signposts an ethic that is respectful towards animals without suggesting that some animals are persons. If we work within the framework of Ulpian's definition it is possible to rehabilitate an understanding of natural law in terms of animal claims and human duties.

Animals are God's creatures. The manner in which human beings relate to them and take responsibility for them is a fundamental dimension of human relationship with God. My interpretation of Ulpian's natural law is one way to ground this human responsibility.

I would also suggest that the approach I have taken is one that blends with contemporary sensibilities and culture. It raises further ethical issues now being aired. For example, should human needs continue to override animal interests in areas such as medical experimentation, recreation, and food? The debate over a Christian ethics of animals is in its infancy, but our postmodern world demands that we encourage its growth.