A CATHOLIC CASE FOR VEGETARIANISM

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Very few Catholics become vegetarians for moral reasons, and virtually no one would expect them to since vegetarianism seems to go hand in hand with views which are incompatible with the Catholic faith. The purpose of this paper is to show that the Catholic Church accepts principles—widely accepted by others, too—which imply a conditional, though broadly applicable, obligation to avoid killing animals for food. Catholic thinkers have not hitherto applied these principles to vegetarianism, but have long used them in other ways. The case is built on texts from St. Thomas Aquinas and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

It is not surprising that Buddhism leads Buddhists into vegetarianism more often than Catholicism does Catholics, but it ought to be, because time-honored Catholic ethical principles and recent teachings of the Catholic Church imply an obligation to vegetarianism. The obligation is conditional (even Singer and Regan admit that in some circumstances it is permissible to kill animals for food), but not so narrowly conditional as to be only of academic interest. Many people, I suspect, will find that their circumstances are such that the obligation applies to them.

As it is the case for vegetarianism is usually presented in a way Catholics can only reject (think, for example, of Regan's and Singer's attempt to collapse the essential difference between humans and animals, or of the latter's utilitarianism).[1] What I propose in the following is a case for vegetarianism which does not reject anything the Catholic Church teaches and does not embrace anything she rejects, but rather uses principles she openly embraces herself. As a Catholic, these are not artificial parameters imposed for the sake of some passing intellectual project, but the natural framework of my thought.

I will not attempt the impossible, however. I will not argue that the Catholic Church has ever issued any authoritative statement to the effect that vegetarianism is even conditionally obligatory. Nor will I torture the text of any major (or minor) Catholic author to argue that they held such a position. That kind of *historical* case is hopeless.

However, this does not mean that a *logical* case is also hopeless. It may be that the Church has accepted principles without realizing that they imply vegetarianism in some cases. There is nothing in her teachings which says she must immediately understand all the implications of every truth she accepts. Quite the contrary, in her understanding of the development of doctrine the Catholic Church recognizes that her appreciation of the truths of faith and morality deepens over time.[2] An example of this is her recent recognition of the right to religious liberty. This right is only explicitly recognized in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council (in *Dignitatis humanae*), and while one can make a logical case that the principles implying it have long been accepted by the Church, one cannot make a historical case that this right has always been recognized. What I will do in this paper is make the logical case that certain principles accepted by the Catholic Church imply that vegetarianism is obligatory in some cases, even if these principles have been used only in other ways. In doing this I openly apply the principles in a new way, but I *interpret* them in traditional ways. I do not take a classical formula and give it a new meaning, but rather a new application.

Also, when I speak of the "obligation to vegetarianism" I mean more precisely the obligation to avoid deliberately killing animals for food, or to avoid buying them even if one does not kill them oneself. Note, the case presented here does not focus on the eating of animals, but the killing of them. It does not say it is wrong to eat meat (a position that could not be reconciled with the teachings of the Catholic Church), but wrong, under certain conditions, to kill animals for food or to buy those that have been killed for food. Moreover, since the focus is on the killing of animals, the argument here does not raise any moral objections to using animal products (such as milk or eggs) which do not cost the animal its life.

Now, the principles I have in mind are not matters of controversy between Catholics and other Christians. The ground is common, and so the case presented here applies throughout the Christian world. In other words, were I some day to write "A Christian Case for Vegetarianism," many of the names and sources would change, but the principles would be the same. Therefore, by calling it a "Catholic" case I do not mean to imply that the argument turns on any uniquely Catholic teaching, but only to point out that the principles involved are accepted by the Catholic Church.

I St. Thomas

Given his dominance over Catholic philosophy and theology and his special title, "Common Doctor of the Church," I begin with St. Thomas. This may seem like an unpromising start since when St. Thomas explicitly addresses the issue of using animals for food he lays down principles which do not imply any obligation to vegetarianism. The less perfect were made for the more perfect;[3] we have no direct, but only indirect, duties to animals;[4] and, "the Lord, in order to inculcate pity to the Jewish people, who were prone to cruelty, wished them to practice pity even with regard to dumb animals...."[5]

But St. Thomas laid down another principle which can be applied to the issue of killing of animals for food even if he did not so apply it. In fact, this principle has played a much greater role in subsequent Catholic moral theology. I am thinking of the principle of double effect, or, more specifically, the condition of proportionate good.[6] In dealing with the problem of justifiable killing in self-defense St. Thomas writes:

and yet, though proceeding from a good intention, an act may be rendered unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end.[7]

We should notice first of all that the condition is very general. *Any* act is rendered unlawful if it is out of proportion to the end. St. Thomas introduces the condition in the context of killing a human being in self-defense, but the condition itself applies to the destruction of any good thing. And of course St. Thomas holds that all created things are ontically good, including animals.

The second thing to notice is that there are at least two ways to understand "out of proportion to the end." One is as it is generally understood in the principle of double effect, namely, that the evil effect must not outweigh the good one. If, for example, one good is brought about and another destroyed, the one destroyed must not have been a greater good than the one brought about. If it was, the action was not "worth it." The exchange was a bad one and unjustified. Thomas Higgins, for example, has this sense in mind in his exposition of the principle of double effect when he writes:

> 3. There must be a proportionately grave reason for placing the act and permitting the evil effect. *It would not be reasonable to allow a grave evil for a relatively insignificant good.*[8]

A second understanding of the phrase "out of proportion to the end" is the one St. Thomas himself uses in applying the principle.

> Wherefore, if a man, in self-defense, uses *more than necessary violence,* it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel force with moderation it will be lawful.[9]

Here it is not simply a matter of weighing one good against another to make sure the evil effect does not outweigh the good, but a question of destroying goods unnecessarily in the process of securing a good effect. Even if the evil effect does not outweigh the good, the action would still be unlawful if the good effect *could have been secured without the evil effect.*

We can use the case of self-defense to illustrate this point. If a person is being attacked, it may be permissible for him to kill his attacker, but not if there is a less destructive alternative. If he can safely run away, it would be wrong for him to kill the person. If he can't, but can get away by wounding the attacker, it would still be wrong to kill him. In both these cases killing the person would be "more than necessary violence." According to St. Thomas' principle, he must choose the option which represents the least destruction of good possible under the circumstances.

Before applying the condition of proportionate good to the case in point, vegetarianism, it is important to notice that in either of its senses the condition must be understood only as a *necessary* one which by itself tells us only when an action is *not permissible.* St. Thomas uses it only in this way. This is in marked contrast to, for example, Betham's "greatest happiness principle" or modern consequentialist uses of the principle of proportionate good as a sufficient condition. Under such theories the rightness of an action is determined simply by whether its good effects outweigh its evil ones. In St. Thomas' case, failure to comply with the condition makes an action wrong; in Betham's case, complying with the condition makes an action right.

The final piece to this case for vegetarianism can be found in St. Thomas' treatise on man in the *Summa Theologica.* Here St. Thomas teaches that the rational soul is higher than the sensitive, which in turn is higher than the vegetative. The determining factor is the degree to which the kind of soul "transcends the operation of corporeal nature."

> "There exists...an operation of the soul which so far exceeds corporeal nature that it is not even performed by any corporeal organ; and such is the operation of the rational soul. *Below this,* there is another operation of the soul, which is indeed performed through a corporeal organ, but not through a corporeal quality; and this is the operation of the sensitive soul...*The lowest* of the operations of the soul is that which is performed by a corporeal organ, and by virtue of a corporeal quality...Such is the operation of the vegetative soul.[10]

This means that even though all creation is good (whether because it comes from God, or because being and good are convertible) there is a hierarchy of goods within it. Humans are higher than animals, and animals are higher than plants.[11]

The important part of this view for our purposes is not that which draws the most fire from animal rights advocates, namely, the superiority of humans to animals, but the superiority of animals to plants. According to St. Thomas, animals are ontically higher than plants.[12]

The combination of the condition of proportionate good as a necessary condition for the permissibility of an action in ethics, and the ontic superiority of animals to plants in philosophical psychology (two well-known and, especially within Catholic circles, widely accepted aspects of Thomistic thought) imply an obligation to not kill animals under certain circumstances. Simply stated, whenever a person can serve his ends by killing plants instead of animals, then he may not kill animals since, as ontically superior to plants, doing so in those circumstances would constitute more than necessary violence.

We can understand the nature and scope of this argument better as we see how it applies to the various ends served by killing animals. We begin with the maintenance of life and health.

If we can live well as vegetarians—i.e., be healthy by eating plants and animal products which do not require the killing of the animal (such as milk, cheese and eggs)—then killing animals to maintain life and health would violate the condition of proportionate good, since it would be destroying animals to achieve ends which can be achieved at the expense of lesser goods, plants. It would be "out of proportion to the end" in the second sense (the one St. Thomas explicitly uses). It would be an immoderate use of force, comparable to shooting an attacker when we could simply

run away, or better (since we are destroying some goods by eating plants), to shooting an attacker when by running away we would trample some flowers, for example. Anyone who could live well on a vegetarian diet (described above) would, other things being equal, be obliged to adopt it because this option would secure the great goods of his life and health while doing the least amount of evil.

Of course under this reasoning the obligation to be a vegetarian turns in part on the empirical question of whether one can in fact secure the goods of life and health without killing animals. This question can be broken down into two considerations: nutrition and availability.

Nutritionally vegetarianism is fully viable for the average person. There is no controversy on the subject; if anything, it can be shown that vegetarians are healthier than the average person and run fewer health risks.[13] (In fact, it is commonly supposed that when a person becomes a vegetarian it is precisely for health reasons.) However, for an individual with certain health problems, vegetarianism may not be nutritionally adequate. A celiac, for example, may not be able to maintain adequate levels of nutrition through a vegetarian diet because of his allergy to wheat glutton.

The question of availability breaks down in a similar way. Most people in developed countries have convenient access to plentiful vegetarian fare year round. They can get everything they need from the supermarkets they frequent. Therefore, vegetarianism is a viable alternative for them. However, this cannot be said of people living in developing countries, or of people living before the advent of the modern supermarket. In these cases, the available vegetarian fare may well be (or have been) insufficient to maintain life and health.

Where the empirical condition is not met, there is no obligation since the argument is conditional. *If* a person can secure the goods of his life and health by eating plants and animal products which do not require the killing of the animal, then he may not rightly kill animals to secure those goods. Doing so would violate the condition of proportionate good as it is understood by St. Thomas. It would be more than necessary violence.

One might point out that there are other considerations besides health and life. Suppose a person can live well on vegetarian fare, but only at the cost of other goods. In other words, suppose a person's doctor says he can safely switch to vegetarianism, but his psychologist says he should not. Would he violate the condition of proportionate good if he did not switch? Would it depend on how psychologically costly the switch would be? What if his marriage councilor tells him not to? And however these questions are to be answered, don't they call the argument itself into question? For how can we compare and weigh goods as different and variable as these?

First, since the key ethical principle here is the condition of proportionate good one must identify and if possible compare the various goods at stake. And admittedly this can make for muddy ethical situations. It should be noted, however, that this is not peculiar to the issue of vegetarianism. According to St. Thomas, any action is impermissible if it violates the condition of proportionate good. Therefore Thomas himself lays down a condition for right action which requires us in some cases to identify and compare various goods, however diverse and thus to grope about in ethically muddy water. A person, then, would have to lay this complaint at Thomas' feet.

But this complaint would only be fair if the principle were *never* clearly applicable, which is not the case. Sometimes the condition of proportionate good is clearly violated (killing someone in self-defense when one can simply run away), and sometimes it is clearly not violated (when a switch to vegetarianism would jeopardize one's marriage or mental health, as in the above cases). In such situations it offers clear guidance to right action. The fact that it does not in every situation shows its limits, but certainly not its falsity. It is one thing to insist that a principle have some clear application, and quite another to insist that it make everything black and white.

Fortunately, a considerable portion of the picture is black and white when it comes to vegetarianism. Many of us have normal health needs, live within easy distance of a supermarket, are psychologically robust enough to be able to handle a shift to vegetarianism (gradually if need be), and will not end up in divorce court over it. Whatever inconveniences we might encounter acclimating to the change are more than offset by benefits to ourselves and others.

Another objection might be that the argument so far has relied on the mere fact that animals are ontically higher than plants. But isn't it necessary to show that they are significantly higher? Otherwise, there would be no significant difference between killing one instead of the other. In this case any added benefit to killing animals (such as the additional pleasure one gets from their flavor) might be enough to satisfy the condition of proportionate good. The argument defended here would then present no more than an academic obligation which applied to virtually no real situations.

Of course no numerical figure can be assigned to represent the ontic gap between plants and animals, but some sense of the magnitude of the difference can be gathered. To begin, the difference between plants and animals is one of kind, according to Aquinas, not one of degree. Aquinas maintains this because animals can do things that plants cannot. Leave aside their ability to move from place to place, and focus on the fact that animals can feel and perceive and remember. These abilities may be common, but that fact should not blind us to their high ontic status. Think of how Augustine (in the *Confessions*) is overcome with wonder when he meditates on the phenomenon of memory. Or think of Aquinas' view that knowledge is the highest of faculties because it enables one to possess the object. While perception of individual material things is not knowledge in the sense of rationally justified belief, or grasp of the universal essence in the thing, it is having an object in a mental way. Moreover, how can something possess another as an object of perception without itself being a subject? Perception does not imply personhood, but is not some form of subjectivity necessitated by it? Are not the experiences of an animal every bit as private as those of a person? And therefore, don't they constitute an "inner life"? Isn't this also true of sensation and memory? How can there be pain without there being someone to feel the pain? How can there be a memory without someone remembering? The step from the plant to the animal is at least the step from the non-conscious to the conscious, from the amental to mind. Perhaps it is also the step from "something" to "someone"

I realize I have unloaded a handful of major theses in the above paragraph, and because I can't launch into a defense of them here I couch them tentatively. Their purpose is to offer some basis for the view that there is indeed a tremendous difference between plants and animals. In any case, given our experience of animals, the view which requires a labored defense is the contrary, namely, that differences between plants and animals are trivial, and that therefore it makes no difference whether we kill the one or the other.

What about bodily pleasure? Is the fact that animals taste good a proportionate reason for killing them? It should be granted that bodily pleasure is a true good of the person in the sense that any proposed course of action which requires one to forego it altogether would be quite serious. But vegetarianism is not that course of action, since there are many delicious vegetarian foods. The vegetarian's life is more than adequately furnished with the pleasure of eating. All one misses out on is the pleasure of certain flavors, and that is hardly a serious matter. One can easily lead a full human life without the pleasure of certain flavors. Consider the analogy of recreation. To ask a person to forego all recreation would be serious, almost inhuman. But to ask that he give up certain specific forms of recreation, like poker or basketball, would not. Such a person can easily lead a normal human life.

Moreover, killing animals for pleasure does not harmonize with other principles of St. Thomas. The passage quoted at the beginning of the paper shows that he teaches that God wants us to pity the animals: "the Lord, in order to inculcate pity to the Jewish people, who were prone to cruelty, wished them to practice pity even with regard to dumb animals...." In another place Thomas even says,

> "it is evident that if a man practice a pitiful affection for animals, he is all the more disposed to take pity on his fellow-men."[14]

It is important, then, to avoid killing animals for pleasure.

We need not (and should not) pretend that St. Thomas thinks we should take pity on animals for their sake. It is enough for our purposes that he thinks we should have pity on them because we will thus cultivate dispositions and habits that help us to treat other people well. Obviously, killing for pleasure can only nurture opposite tendencies.[15]

One last word on pleasure. If we try to compare the worth of an animal's life with that of a human pleasure we may feel we are considering the proverbial apples and oranges. I can't help thinking one must either greatly over value the bodily pleasure of tasting a flavor, or greatly under value the ontic stature of a conscious being to find the matter puzzling. But setting that aside, we can use an extension of the Thomistic distinction between a human act and the act of a human to show that we are really dealing exclusively with apples. For tasting the flavor of an animal is not a human pleasure, but merely the pleasure of a human. It does not require any specifically human faculties, but only animals ones. (The "rational" in "rational animal" does not figure in, only the "animal" does, since a dog, for example, certainly experiences the pleasure of meat in a comparable way.) The pleasure of eating meat is more accurately described as only an animal pleasure that a human has. Therefore, when we ask if it is proportionate to kill an animal for the pleasure of eating it, we are asking whether an animal pleasure is worth an animal's life, a question which answers itself.

Of course for humans the significance of eating goes beyond life, health and pleasure. A meal is ideally a social event. But the communal, social dimensions of sharing a meal and the role which food plays in feasting and celebration do not satisfy the condition of proportionate good either, for these goods can be secured without killing animals. A vegetarian feast can be joyous and festive, in fact, not being built on the unnecessary destruction of a conscious being (and therefore on the possible annihilation of a true subject), it can be light-hearted and peaceful in a way that an omnivorous feast cannot. This atmosphere is more conducive to rejoicing.

There would be serious economic upheaval if society as a whole suddenly stopped killing animals for food to become predominantly vegetarian since so many jobs are linked to it in one way or another. Perhaps avoiding this upheaval is a sufficiently weighty reason not to require vegetarianism. This objection is at best a reason why there is no obligation for a sudden societal shift to vegetarianism. But of course this will never happen. It will take at least a generation for people to even take the possibility of the obligation seriously. And if that day ever comes, the difficulty of giving up the bodily pleasure of eating meat will ensure that any such shift is gradual.

To conclude this segment, the case for vegetarianism presented here has not appealed to the rights of animals, or tried to collapse the fundamental difference between them and us, or condemned all killing of animals for food. It has centered on two simple Thomistic principles, ones that are widely held even by non Catholics: animals are greater goods than plants, and it is wrong to do "more than necessary violence."

II The Magisterium of the Catholic Church

St. Thomas may be the Common Doctor of the Catholic Church, but he is not her official voice. A stronger Catholic case for vegetarianism would have to be founded on official Church teaching. The Catholic Church, however, has very little to say about animals, and, again, what she does teach seems, for my purposes, rather unpromising. For *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes it quite clear that it is legitimate to use animals for food (as well as for clothing, work, leisure, and experimentation).

> 2417 God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals, if it remains within reasonable limits, is a morally acceptable practice since it contributes to the caring for or saving of human lives.

Here the Church lists some of the legitimate uses of animals.[16] No argument which denied that they may be killed for food could be Catholic, but the argument presented above does not deny it. It denies that it is legiti-

mate to kill animals for food *when this is unnecessary*. The Church's statement above does not contradict that. So what exactly is it saying?

The moral theory of the Catholic Church distinguishes the "object" of an act (kind of behavior), the end aimed at (intention of the agent), and the circumstances of the act (of which consequences would be one sort). These three together determine the moral goodness of an act. "A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances."[17] If we read the passage from the *Catechism* in light of these three considerations, we can see that the Church has committed herself to the view that the object "killing animals" is not intrinsically disordered. (She couldn't possibly sanction it if she thought otherwise.) Also, since she gives a list of ends for which animals may be killed, she commits herself to certain intentions being legitimate (food, clothing, work, leisure, and experimentation). None of this contradicts the thesis of this paper, however, which makes no claims about the object of the act or about the intentions of the agent listed above. Rather, it claims that *under certain circumstances* killing animals for food is wrong.

The question, then, is: does the *Catechism* say anything to the point about circumstances? Consider the following:

> 2418 It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.

This is a statement about circumstances. In those situations where the suffering or death of the animal is needless, i.e., can be avoided, it is not permissible to cause such suffering and death. Far from contradicting it, therefore, the *Catechism* confirms the key point of the argument: in Thomas' language, that it is wrong to do more than necessary violence.

There are certain ambiguities in the quote from the *Catechism*, however, which we should look at. First, one might object that I have assumed that "needlessly" means the same as "can be avoided." Perhaps by "needlessly" the Catechism means something like "serves no purpose." In this latter case, killing animals for food is not "needless" even when there is a vegetarian alternative, because it serves a purpose (in fact, one that the *Catechism* says is legitimate).

The problem with this reading of "needlessly" is that it commits the Catholic Church to sanctioning many instances of cruelty to animals. For example, people attend cock fights for recreation. And the Hopi Indian chicken-pull (where contestants tear a live chicken to pieces, the winner being the one with the biggest piece) is a form of recreation. But recreation is a kind of leisure (another legitimate end). Does anyone suppose the Catholic Church intends to give her blessing to such cruel treatment of animals just because leisure is listed as a legitimate end? Quite the contrary, things like the chicken-pull are no doubt precisely the kind of thing she has in mind when she says it is wrong to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.

But she doesn't say it is "wrong." All she says is that it is "contrary to human dignity," and this expression need not imply any moral condemnation. We might say, for example, that an adult who behaves like a child acts "contrary to human dignity" without suggesting that he is doing anything morally wrong. All we mean in this case is that his behavior is "undignified."

But this cannot be what the *Catechism* means. For first of all, at the beginning of this section the Church talks about the limits of man's dominion over the natural world and the "moral imperatives" he must respect so as not to transgress these limits.

> 2415 Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; *it requires respect for the integrity of creation*.[18]

Note, man's dominion over nature is limited by not one, but *two* moral considerations. The first refers back to man himself (the good of one's neighbor), but the second refers to plants and animals (the integrity of creation). Man's dominion (I should stress, man's God-given dominion) morally requires him to act with respect for creation even if his neighbor is suitably accommodated. Causing animals to suffer or die needlessly, however, is the epitome of disregard, the very opposite of respect for their integrity. Therefore, it is in violation of one of the moral imperatives limiting man's dominion over nature.

Moreover, earlier in the *Catechism* when the Church talks about the nature of man's dominion, she says that "it is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination."[19] But causing animals to suffer or die needlessly is both arbitrary and destructive.

Second, the Church's statement that it is "contrary to human dignity" to cause unnecessary suffering or death to animals is immediately followed by this one:

> *It is likewise unworthy* to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery.[20]

"Likewise" indicates that whatever the Church means to say by "contrary to human dignity" she means to say by "unworthy" (at least in this paragraph).

But "unworthy" here implies a moral objection. It is not morally innocent to spend money on animals when one's neighbor is in need, for, given that the earth's goods are intended for everyone's use,[21] to do so is actually a kind of stealing. Briefly, if your neighbor is in serious need, the surplus money in your possession is in a sense his. To spend it on luxuries or animals instead of him falls under the broad umbrella of stealing. It is no coincidence that paragraphs 2415-2418 are found in the section on the seventh commandment. Moreover, the cross-reference in the margin makes the connection to stealing explicit. "'Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.'"[22] But stealing, of course, is morally wrong. Therefore, when the Church says it is "unworthy" to spend money on animals that should as a priority go to people she is condemning it morally

The same, then, can be said for her equivalent expression, "contrary to human dignity."

What we are looking at in 2418 is a brief, general application of the moral imperatives mentioned in 2415. In exercising his dominion, man must maintain concern for his neighbor's welfare, *and* respect for creation. He violates moral imperatives if he fails in either case. Spending money on animals when one's neighbors are suffering is a violation of the first. Causing animals to suffer or die needlessly is a violation of the second. Both are morally objectionable.

In addition to these moral prohibitions, the *Catechism* identifies a duty humans have to animals, one that is not directly related to human good or human dignity, or to our general duty to respect the integrity of creation.

> 2416 Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness.

Not only must we avoid causing them unnecessary suffering and death, we must be kind to them, and not because it is good for us, but because they are creatures of God. And while there is some question what exactly the duty of kindness entails concretely, causing them to suffer unnecessarily or killing them when there is no need to certainly violates a duty of kindness.

One might wonder how it can *ever* be permissible to kill animals for food if we have a duty of kindness toward them, because killing them for food is not an act of kindness. One response is that under certain circumstances the duty of kindness is not violated by acts which otherwise would violate it. We have, for example, a duty to be kind to other human beings. Indeed, we must love them. Still, it is not immoral to kill in self-defense when there is no alternative. This means that killing under these circumstances is not a violation of our duties to others. But killing in self-defense when there is no need, when there is a non-lethal alternative, is a clear violation of our duty to love and be kind to others. The same would go for killing animals for food. If one needs to, then killing animals for food is no breach of one's duty of kindness. But killing or causing animals to suffer when there is no need is certainly a violation of one's duty of kindness.

The fact that animals are God's creatures, that He cares for them, and that they bless Him by their very existence should affect the way a person views and consequently treats animals. A proper attitude in the face of these facts is one of respect and love, and of course these attitudes will incline or lead one to vegetarianism. They make one *want* not to destroy animals unnecessarily.

But isn't all this equally true of plants? Couldn't the *Catechism* say the same things about them? Yes, and an attitude shaped by a recognition that they too come from God's hand will lead a person to want not to destroy them unnecessarily either. Given our need for food and given what plants are, it is much easier to satisfy the condition of proportionate good in destroying them, but one may not destroy them without a proportionate reason either, for any act is rendered unlawful if it is out of proportion to the end. (There is a latent environmentalism in the condition of proportionate good.)

Finally, the *Catechism* holds up certain role models for emulation in our treatment of animals. "We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals."[23] These are not people who dismissed animals as insignificant because they are "irrational," but people who loved them as God's creatures in spite of their irrationality.[24]

The examples of St. Francis and St. Philip Neri ought to show that love for animals is not unCatholic. In fact, far from being a sign that one is going off the deep end, love for animals can be a sign that one is on the right track. St. Isaac even links it to holiness.

> What is a charitable heart? It is a heart which is burning with charity for the whole of creation, for men, for birds, for beasts...for all creatures. He who has such a heart...will pray even for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united to God.[25]

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NOTES

1. John Paul II rejects utilitarianism in *Veritatis splendor*. See paragraphs 71-82.
2. Cf. sections 29 and 53 of *Veritatis splendor*.
3. *Summa Theologica*, P. I, Q. 96, Art. 1, and P. II-II, Q. 64, Art. 1.
4. "He who kills another man's ox, sins, not through killing the ox, but through injuring another man in his property." *Op. cit.*, P. I-II, Q. 64, Art. 1.
5. *Ibid.*, P. I-II, Q 102, Art. 6. Repl. 8.
6. William May, in his entry to the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, tells us that by the nineteenth century the principle of double effect was widely applied until "it came to embrace almost the entire field of moral theology." See p. 317.
7. *Op. cit.*, P. II-II, Q. 64, Art. 7.
8. Thomas J. Higgins, S.J., *Man as Man: The Science and Art of Ethics* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1950) p. 76 (my emphasis).
9. *Op. cit.*, P. II-II, Q. 64, Art. 7 (my emphasis). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cites this passage. See, 2264.
10. *Op. cit.*, P. I, Q. 78, Art. 1, my emphasis.
11. In another place St. Thomas writes: "the imperfect are for the use of the perfect; as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals" (P. I, Q. 96, Art. 1).
12. Bernard Rollin makes the point that for the evolutionist "higher" can only be measured in terms of survival ability. See *Animal Rights and Human Morality* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992) p. 30. Some plants are superior to animals in this way, but St. Thomas uses a different measure, namely, the kind of soul possessed by each.
13. Kathryn Praxton George argues that there are seven groups of people who would be harmed by a "strict vegetarian" diet. (See, "So Animal a Human..., or the Moral Relevance of Being an Omnivore, *Journal of Agricultural*