

# 1 Anthropocentrism as Christian patrimony. About the question of this book

One of the most successful East German music groups, Die Prinzen, released a new album to mark their 30th anniversary in March 2021. The title song has the following lyrics:

## *Crown of creation*

We came down from the trees and went up to the stars  
From a stone-age cave to an energy-saving house  
And evolution took its course  
Today we are the king, but far from being satisfied  
We have spread ourselves all over the planet  
And whatever gets in our way gets flattened

The whole forest is singing in chorus:  
“What on earth is the matter with you?”

We are the crown of creation  
Well, that's alright then  
After us the deluge, after us the deluge  
Be on your guard  
We are the crown of creation  
What a shame  
For the animals I mean, the poor bastards  
No really, what a shame

We invented nuclear power and the TV schedule  
Automatic coffee makers, chicken barbecues  
It's cool to be king, the things you can do  
We can travel at supersonic speed, wait in rush-hour traffic  
Prove black holes and not understand the world  
We are the crème de la crème in every field

The whole ocean is screaming:  
“Hey, who do you think you are?”

We are the crown of creation ...

Sometimes I ask myself, “Aren't we ourselves the problem?”  
Like a flaw in the matrix and the system  
We rule while the planet is on fire

We are the crown of creation ...

(Die Prinzen 2021, CD Krone der Schöpfung, Songwriters: Alexander Zieme/ Henri Schmidt/ Jens Sembdner/ Mathias Dietrich/ Sebastian Krumbiegel/ Tobias Kuenzel/ Tobias Roeger/ Wolfgang Lenk, Lyrics by Krone der Schöpfung © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd.—official music video on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9Ru>

ONRmI\_8&ab\_channel=DiePrinzen and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo81IHKd51E&ab\\_channel=DiePrinzen-Topic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo81IHKd51E&ab_channel=DiePrinzen-Topic) accessed 5.11.2022)

Five musicians in Die Prinzen received their training in the 1980s in the Thomanerchor in Leipzig or the Dresdner Kreuzchor. They come from a form of church socialisation that is unusual for the GDR and know what the allusions to the Bible in their lyrics mean. That is what makes this song so interesting, for it positions traditional Christian convictions in the conflict between modern evolutionary theory and ecological catastrophes. The song has a four-part structure:

- On the one hand, the *stanzas* describe the enormous progress humans have made since they evolved into their own species, homo sapiens sapiens: From the trees on which our pre-human ancestors sat, to the stars to which we send unmanned and possibly soon-to-be manned spaceships, from stone-age caves to energy-saving houses, but also to nuclear power plants and supersonic aircraft. On the other hand, the stanzas depict the ecological catastrophe that is spreading with the almost infinite increase in human knowledge. Overwhelmed by our own abilities, we ascribe to ourselves the role of “king” and make ourselves wider and wider on the small planet Earth, without our hunger for more and more ever being satisfied.
- In a relatively short *interlude* between the verses and the chorus, the song changes perspective and slips into the viewpoint of the animals, who only shake their heads and are completely stunned in the face of anthropogenic environmental destruction. The animals of the forest ask, “What on earth is the matter with you?” And the animals of the ocean, “Hey, who do you think you are?”
- Finally, the *chorus* manifests how little humans are impressed by animals’ objections. Naïve as little children, they cling to their biblically based credo: “We are the crown of creation... After us, the deluge”.
- Only at the very *end*, in the singular and no longer in the plural of the first person, comes the question of whether we humans are not the real problem and the systemic fault. “We rule while the planet is on fire.”

It is remarkable that the chorus contains two allusions to the biblical Creation narratives in Gen 1–9. The “crown of creation” alludes to the image of God in Gen 1:26, the “flood” to Gen 6–9, very deliberately suggesting that the root of the present ecological catastrophe has something to do with the Christian message. Since the 1960s, as we shall see (chapter 1.3), this has

been a widely accepted thesis. But is it true, and if so, to what extent? That is the guiding question of this book.

In this first chapter, I will first look at the current position of the Catholic Church, which is showing the first signs of moving away from anthropocentrism but has not yet completely overcome it. Then I search for an urgently needed conceptual refining of the talk of “anthropocentrism”. On this basis, the guiding question of this paper can be precisely determined. Ten core theses describe the book’s main intellectual thread before a brief look at the structure is given in conclusion.

### *1.1 The current Roman Catholic position on the moral status of animals*

#### *1.1.1 The 1991 Catechism of the Catholic Church*

What the Roman Catholic Church officially teaches on a particular issue can usually best be read in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” (CCC) from 1991. As questionable as it may be to write a catechism at all in the 21st century, because such a catechism is not the pedagogical method of choice in the context of the modern (and, by the way, well Socratic!) conception of education as education for independent thinking and of religious education as education for trust in God, and as dubious as the concrete text of the CCC may seem to many in the light of Vatican Council II, it should in most cases provide a rough initial guide as to what the majority of the universal Church hierarchy thinks about certain questions of faith and morals and how they “tick”.

This is all the truer if there is not yet a detailed papal or conciliar teaching letter on a topic. This is precisely the case for animal ethics. It is true that Pope Francis wrote a teaching letter on environmental ethics in the 2015 encyclical “*Laudato si'*”, as indicated by the subtitle “on care for our common house”. Although animals appear on almost every page, they are not the actual topic, but are predominantly perceived as part of ecosystems. Only in passing can individual animal ethics conclusions be derived from *Laudato si'*—a systematic form of animal ethics is not the goal.

So when we ask what “the Church” in the sense of the hierarchical ministry (and in this case most likely also in the sense of a large part of Christians) thinks about animals, the relevant sections of the CCC can certainly give us some initial guidance. They can be found in Article 3.2.2.7:

“The seventh commandment: ‘Thou shalt not steal’ (Ex 20:15; Dt 5:19; Mt 19:18)”. I quote them unabridged and add in brackets some technical terms of the original Latin text which allow the intention of the text to be understood more precisely:

“2415. The seventh commandment also enjoins respect for the integrity of creation (*observantiam integritatis creationis*). Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity [Cf. Gen 1:28–31]. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man’s dominion (*dominatus*) 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 neighbour, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation (*integritatis creationis religiosam observantiam*) [Cf. CA 37–38].

2416. Animals are God’s creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care (*Ipse ea Sua providentiali amplectitur sollicitudine*) [cf. Mt 6:26]. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory [cf. Dan 3:57–58]. Thus, men owe them kindness (*benevolentiam*). We should recall the gentleness (*accurata consideratione*) with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.

2417. God entrusted animals to the stewardship (*procurationi*) of those whom he created in his own image [Cf. Gen 2:19–20; 9:1–14]. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing (*uti*). They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure (*assistant*). Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice, if it remains within reasonable limits (*intra rationabiles limites*) and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.

2418. It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons (*Animalia amare licet; affectio solis personis debita ad ea averti non deberet*).”

First of all, it is noticeable that some formulations remain unclear: What does it mean to “respect the integrity of creation (*observantiam integritatis creationis*)” (twice in CCC 2415)? If one takes “*integritas*” literally, man should not interfere with creation at all, but that is hardly what is meant. What are “reasonable limits” of animal experimentation (CCC 2417)? What is the measure of their reasonableness? And finally, what is “the love due

only to persons” and not to animals (CCC 2418)? With these questions, one notices that the text suggests evidence that it should actually create.

Beyond these serious ambiguities, the text as such is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it strives in many respects for an appreciation of animals. Thus, the animals are presented as God’s creatures whom he embraces with his caring providence (*amplectitur*). They praise God by their very existence and deserve human benevolence and sensitivity (CCC 2416). Therefore, they are entrusted to the caring stewardship or, more literally, the vicarious care (*procuratio*) of man (CCC 2417).

The reinterpretation of concepts of loving relationships into hierarchical relationships of domination, as the official German translation (unlike the English one) does, however, already shows that the Catechism has another tendency: It clearly advocates anthropocentrism, i.e. the conviction that the whole of creation ultimately exists solely for the sake of human beings. This is already expressed in the fact that animals are subsumed under the VII Commandment “Thou shalt not steal”. First and foremost, they are understood as things, as human possessions, and not as independent living beings created for their own sake. Consequently, they are mentioned in the text in the same breath as inanimate nature and natural resources. The standard for their “reasonable” treatment is not their own well-being, but the common human good understood across generations (CCC 2415). Cruelty to animals contradicts human dignity, not animal dignity (CCC 2418). From all this follows a clear hierarchisation or prioritisation of needs: Human needs come before animal needs, and human love is above animal love. As much as the Catechism strives for an appreciation of animals, this always remains within the limits of a consistently anthropocentric world view.

### 1.1.2 The 2015 encyclical *Laudato si’*

The same ambivalence between the classical anthropocentric framework and the pursuit of a new appreciation of animals is equally found in the encyclical *Laudato si’*, albeit with noticeable shifts in favour of non-human creatures.

In several places Pope Francis advocates classical anthropocentrism when he refers to CCC 2418 (LS 92; 130) or when he explicitly rejects biocentrism (LS 118). However, Francis clearly rejects the core thesis of classical anthropocentrism: “In our time, the Church does not simply state

that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish.” (LS 69). And: “The ultimate end of other creatures is not us.” (LS 83). Furthermore, the “value proper to each creature” is described as one of the central themes of the encyclical (LS 16; cf. also LS 76; 208). Because the encyclical, like the *Canticle of the Creatures* of Francis of Assisi on which it is based, also uses “creature” to refer to living spaces (sun, water, earth, fire, etc.), it could even be classified as ecocentric or holistic. For it speaks of the intrinsic value of living beings (LS 69; 118), of species (LS 33; 36) and of the world (LS 115).

The closeness of *Laudato si'* to holism is also evident in the conviction that everything is interconnected—according to LS 16, one of the “central themes running through the entire encyclical”. From this descriptive picture of the world as an inseparable unity then normatively results the demand for fraternal love: “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” (LS 42). In keeping with the Franciscan style, the Pope emphasises the universal brotherhood of all creatures (LS 92; 228) and their belonging to a universal family (LS 89–92).

In terms of content, the intrinsic value of creatures is understood in contrast to the use value of a resource: “It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential ‘resources’ to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves” (LS 33). Intrinsic value is not scalar but transcends any calculation (LS 36). To perceive it is only possible from a different perspective than the “technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings” (LS 118). The technocratic paradigm, which Pope Francis vehemently rejects, is blind to the intrinsic value of creatures. His thinking in categories of human ownership is opposed to the faithful view that creation is on loan, entrusted to human beings in faithful hands: “The created things of this world are not free of ownership: ‘For they are yours, O Lord, who love the living’ (Wis 11:26).” (LS 89). With this postulate of a divine claim to ownership, humans’ power of having creation at its disposal is massively limited. The exclusive or primary subsumption of non-human creatures under the VII Commandment is thus actually obsolete.

With reference to CCC 2416, Francis twice emphasises that the intrinsic value of creatures is based on the fact that they “give glory to God by their very existence” (LS 33; 69). God did not create creatures so that they might delight him, but so that they might experience delight in their own lives.

God rejoices precisely because creatures rejoice in life. The emphasis in *Laudato si'* is therefore on existence rather than on praising God: creatures do not first have to produce a benefit or an achievement in order to acquire value—this is given to them through their existence alone. Their existence is valuable in itself.

Francis is aware of the danger of playing environmental protection and human protection off against each other. But his prescription against this is again formulated in a strongly anthropocentric way. He tirelessly emphasises the “immeasurable” (LS 65; 158), “infinite” (LS 65), “unique” (LS 69), “special” (LS 154), even “very special” (LS 43) dignity of human beings. At a decisive point, therefore, he seems to want to reject biocentric egalitarianism: “This is not to put all living beings on the same level nor to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails. [...] At times we see an obsession with denying any pre-eminence to the human person; more zeal is shown in protecting other species than in defending the dignity which all human beings share in equal measure. Certainly, we should be concerned lest other living beings be treated irresponsibly. But we should be particularly indignant at the enormous inequalities in our midst, whereby we continue to tolerate some considering themselves more worthy than others.” (LS 90; similar LS 119)

Of course, it is absolutely true that a commitment to the environment and animals cannot justify the neglect of human rights and interpersonal justice. And it is probably also true that some radical environmentalists and animal rights activists do exactly this by referring to the egalitarianism of all living beings. But the basic biocentric idea of the equality of all living beings actually says something different. In this respect, LS 118 is more cautious and therefore more accurate: “This situation has led to a constant schizophrenia, wherein a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings.” This suggests that the denial of human and creaturely dignity usually goes hand in hand: Those who treat human beings primarily or exclusively as commodities with a price will do the same with non-human creatures and vice versa.

A significant spiritual depth shines forth when in a few passages reference is made to the fact that the Christ “incarnate”, i.e. having become creature, “has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light” (LS 221). He has thus become “a seed of definitive transformation” of the entire universe (LS 235). Here, Francis explicitly

refers to Teilhard de Chardin: “The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things.” (LS 83) The interpretations of the Colossian hymn (Col 1:15–20) and the Logos hymn (Jn 1:1–18) in LS 99 are particularly dense: “One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole.” Christian anthropology often points out that in the incarnation of God the dignity of the human being shines forth in a unique way. By analogy, one would have to conclude from the papal interpretation of the incarnation as the becoming of a creature that in it the dignity of both human and non-human creatures shines forth in a unique way.

An encyclical is not a scientific theological treatise and therefore enjoys the right to remain conceptually and argumentatively somewhat fuzzy. Pope Francis is recognisably trying to preserve the concern of classical anthropocentrism to protect human dignity and to stand up for interpersonal justice, but on the other hand to combine the concern of biocentrism and ecocentrism with respect for the intrinsic value of creatures and to fight for justice towards all creatures. *Laudato si'* thus goes a decisive step further than the Catechism. However, the encyclical does not achieve a complete paradigm shift. It continues to oscillate between traditional anthropocentrism and modern biocentrism and ecocentrism, even if it does show a sympathy by the Church for the latter that was hitherto undreamed of.

## *1.2 Clarification of the term “anthropocentrism”*

The debate about anthropocentrism is still often characterised by confusion of terms. For although in all language families accessible to me it is now clear that one must distinguish between three perspectives, this differentiation has by no means reached the entire breadth of the discussion. For this reason, I would like to present the current “state of the art” in advance (cf. for the German language area first Gotthard M. Teutsch 1987, 16–18 and Bernhard Irrgang 1992, 17):



The *epistemological, methodological or epistemic perspective* asks what standards are available to humans for environmental ethical judgements<sup>1</sup>. Here it is completely undisputed that it is only possible for them to look at the world with their human imaginative possibilities. They can expand these imaginative possibilities through technical aids, but not in principle leave them behind. For example, many animals emit sounds that humans cannot hear. However, humans can measure them by means of sonography and in this way make them accessible. Some animals also have sensory organs that humans do not possess, such as sensitivity to the earth’s magnetic field, which they use for orientation. Here, too, measuring devices can replace what human senses lack. In this respect, human perception of the world around us has expanded enormously in recent decades.

At the same time, this perception remains trapped in principle in humans’ opportunities for cognition. For even if we draw valid (!) conclusions about our own subjective feelings through the behaviour of animals and plants, it will forever remain closed to us to feel “what it is like to be a bat” —the title of the famous essay by Thomas Nagel in 1974. In other words: humans methodically recognise the world anthropocentrically, dogs methodically cynocentrically and bees methodically melissacentrically<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, certain animals, like humans, have a high capacity for empathy across species. The similarities in the structure and functioning of the brain cause similarities in gestures, facial expressions and behaviour, so that these in turn allow conclusions to be drawn about inner experience per analogiam. In order to compensate for the weaknesses of *methodological or*

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- 1 Anthroporelationality is sometimes spoken of (e.g. Hans J. Münk 1998, 231–245 and Markus Vogt 2009, 258–259)—but without defining exactly what is meant normatively by it and what derivations result from it. Münk and Vogt suggest that they understand the term and the concept behind it as an alternative and “compromise formula” (Markus Vogt 2009, 258) to teleological anthropocentrism. However, from everything I read there, it seems to me that this could rather be a refinement of methodological anthropocentrism.
  - 2 The idea of a species-specific epistemic limitation is already found in the reflection by Xenophanes (born between 580 and 570 BC) that if animals had hands, lions would make lion-like and oxen ox-like images of gods (Hermann Diels (ed.)/ Walther Kranz (ed.) 1972–1975, 21 B 15/16), and in a poem attributed to Epicharmos (c. 540–460 BC) that dogs find other dogs most beautiful, donkeys other donkeys, pigs other pigs and indeed humans other humans (Hermann Diels (ed.)/ Walther Kranz (ed.) 1972–1975, 23 B 5). Cf. Urs Dierauer 1977, 62.

*epistemological anthropocentrism*<sup>3</sup>, the greatest possible development of the ability to empathise and think, i.e. to put oneself in the shoes of another species, is required. And yet limits remain.

The inescapability of methodological anthropocentrism has an immediate ethical consequence: it requires great humility. For in view of the relativity of the human perspective of knowledge, it is important to avoid any arrogance that expresses itself in the belief that humans know how nature works and what needs to be done to protect the environment and our fellow human beings. If we do not even know “what it is like to be a bat”, then it is not for us humans to elevate ourselves above animals and plants. Environmental and animal ethical decisions that we make are always subject to the limited perspective of knowledge that we humans are given.

The second, *formal perspective* asks who can assume what responsibility for their actions and whether one should speak of responsibility at all in the case of non-human animals. This second question is increasingly answered affirmatively in research, at least for certain animal species, with regard to intra-species rule-setting and rule-following (Fiona Probyn-Rapsey 2018, 49). However, this never addresses the immense responsibility for the survival of the biosphere as a whole. Here, it should be indisputable that only man rudimentarily possesses this opportunity. He is the addressee of global ethical demands—and only he.

Again, there is a danger of drawing wrong conclusions from this special position of man. In connection with the image of God in Gen 1, one can easily see where such unfounded conclusions can lead. While the image of God there describes only *formal anthropocentrism*, in later centuries the term was read as an answer to the third perspective, and material anthropocentrism was derived from it. From this historical fact, many American creation ethicists conclude that one should abandon the concept of the image of God as well as its modern translation with “stewardship”. Of course, this would be possible in principle—but it would in no way escape formal anthropocentrism. It would only be a matter of cosmetics and semantics, not hard content. I would therefore rather ask how a more effective firewall can be drawn between formal anthropocentrism and material anthropocentrism.

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3 Angelika Krebs 1997, 342–343 calls methodological anthropocentrism “metaethical anthropocentrism”. The adjective can be used appropriately, but the noun, as so often, disregards the distinction between anthropocentrism and anthropocentrism that is justified on the following pages.

Finally, the third, *material or teleological perspective* asks for whom the earth is to be preserved: Who are the *téle*, the (self-)ends, for the sake of which the means of nature may and should be used? Is it only human beings, as anthropocentrism claims? Is it all sentient, pain-sensing living beings, as pathocentrism or sentientism holds? Is it all living beings, as biocentrism postulates? Or is it living beings and inorganic matter, even collective entities such as ecosystems and species, as ecocentrism or holism would say? This is the Gretchen question of environmental and animal ethics par excellence, and it is not as trivial as one might think.

First of all, it is clear that all four teleological determinations are compatible with both methodological and formal anthropocentrism, indeed that all four usually affirm both of these. For no matter which teleological determination we choose, we do it as human beings and thus methodologically and formally anthropocentric. Hence, biocentrism, for example, emphasises the formal special position of human beings associated with their unique responsibility (Friedo Ricken 1987, 20; Hans J. Münk 1997, 26). It also methodically recognises that humans make environmental ethical value judgements according to human standards (Paul W. Taylor 1981, 204; Hans J. Münk 1997, 26). The same is true of ecocentrism (J. Baird Callicott 2017, 116; Helen Kopnina 2019, 4). Conversely, material anthropocentrism cannot necessarily be derived from the fact that humans are the only parties responsible and that they can only judge according to their standards of knowledge (Tim Hayward 1997, 49; Gavin Rae 2014, 7). The three perspectives must therefore be kept neatly apart and have no substantive nexus that would allow one to be derived from the other.

For the sake of this clear distinction between the three perspectives, I must at this point say a few sentences about *terminology*: Starting from the Anglo-Saxon area, it has become common in the last ten or fifteen years in the German and Romance language areas to speak of “anthropocentrism” when referring to the teleological question. I think this is a factually correct and appropriate development because the actual ideological positioning is linked to the teleological question—and semantically we traditionally designate ideologies with the suffix “-ism” and “-ist”.

However, “anthropocentrism” and “anthropocentric”, which is usually combined with it, do not fit together semantically. Purely linguistically, the adjective “anthropocentrist(ic)” belongs to the noun “anthropocentrism”—which is unfortunately not at all the case in English-language literature on this topic. Conversely, the adjective “anthropocentric” corresponds with the noun “anthropocentrism”, just as, for example, the adjective “ethical”

corresponds with the noun “ethics”. For linguistically, the suffix “-ism” denotes a world view, an ideology, whereas the suffix “-ic”—derived from the Greek adjective associated with it—denotes a method or approach (ethics, physics, logic...).

Consequently, a linguistically correct distinction must be made between moral, material or teleological anthropocentrism (with the adjective anthropocentric) on the one hand and formal anthropocentrism and epistemic anthropocentrism (both with the adjective anthropocentric) on the other (cf. Rob Boddice 2011, 13). This then also makes clear linguistically that no compelling conclusion leads from formal or epistemic anthropocentrism to material anthropocentrism. The firewall between the first two and the third perspective is clearly marked linguistically. This is exactly how I use the terminology in this book. Material anthropocentrism can then be referred to more briefly simply as anthropocentrism and anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism, on the other hand, always requires specification by an adjective so that it is clear in which perspective we are. Where I quote, however, I must leave the terminology of the source quoted. Here, the reader’s ability to recognise the possible terminological incongruence between the source and my commentary is then called for.

For me, it is a prerequisite that the designation of a teleological definition with an “-ism” only contains a description and in no way a valuation—neither positive nor negative<sup>4</sup>. This is by no means self-evident, because in social debates “-isms” are often accompanied by devaluations—just think of Islamism, racism or anti-Semitism. Those “-isms”, on the other hand, which are used in a less or non-judgemental way, are currently hardly present in public debates. This can lead to prejudice in one direction or another, and this is how I interpret the tendency of some animal ethicists to explicitly emphasise that they are material or teleological anthropocentrists, but not anthropocentrists. Here, a semantic trick is used that cannot be justified linguistically and should therefore be avoided.

Anyone who advocates anthropocentric teleology should unabashedly call themselves an anthropocentricist. There is no shame in that, for—it

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4 Lori Gruen 2015, 24 distinguishes between “inevitable anthropocentrism”, by which she designates methodological anthropocentrism, and “arrogant anthropocentrism”, which in our terminology is material or teleological anthropocentrism. In contrast to my proposal, she has thus integrated a direct valuation into the terms—not through the noun “anthropocentrism”, however, but through the two assigned adjectives. I, on the other hand, would like to separate description and valuation conceptually, which is why I do not adopt Gruen’s terminology.

should be emphasised—there are undoubtedly respectable models of enlightened and humanistically motivated anthropocentrism that can at least reject the overexploitation of the environment with excellent reasons. However, in doing so, they involve moral feelings only slightly and therefore take people along in a comparatively top-heavy manner. They do not offer an approach to loving nature and taking pleasure in it “just so”, beyond utility calculations. What weighs more heavily in our context, however, is this: Their justifications are less convincing in terms of animal ethics than in terms of environmental ethics. Why one should treat animals well beyond human self-interest can hardly become clear if animals are not granted any intrinsic value. And enlightened humanist variants of anthropocentrism cannot do that if they want to be consistent. Most of their representatives therefore reject the inherent value theorem (cf. Michael Rosenberger 2021, 135–141). At the same time, they declare themselves to be environmental rather than animal ethicists. This makes a small but momentous difference.

Nevertheless, this book should not be understood as a blanket condemnation of anthropocentrism. Rather, it is about a thoroughly appreciative critique of a tradition of thought that has shaped Europe for two and a half millennia and continues to do so, a form of thought that has produced much that is good, but also brings with it serious downsides—and, as we will see at the end of my discussion, not only in the area of animal ethics. In the best sense of the word, I am concerned with an elucidation of modern, ecologically influenced anthropocentrism by reconstructing its roots and asking whether it does not need to be significantly broadened in order to meet the current challenges of a threatened planet. I will tackle this task “sine ira et studio” and hope that all anthropocentrists among the readers can meet my thoughts with the same attitude.

### *1.3 The central question of this book*

In the above analysis of the animal ethics sections of the CCC, as well as in the search for the creation ethics rationale of *Laudato si'*, an undoubted tendency towards detachment from anthropocentrism has been noticed, which, however, has not yet reached its goal. In the CCC, the framework remains clearly anthropocentric; in *Laudato si'*, anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric thoughts almost balance each other out. The detachment of the Christian message from anthropocentrism, which un-

doubtedly has far-reaching consequences for the environment and animal ethics, is still pending.

So the question arises as to where this anthropocentrism actually comes from and what were the reasons for introducing it into the Christian message? The answers to this question have so far been mostly very superficial and clichéd or very fragmentary because they focus on a single epoch in history.

Largely unnoticed in his time, but probably the first to raise the question of the roots of European anthropocentrism, Albert Schweitzer did so between 1939 and 1942 in his fragmentary *Philosophy of Culture*, published only posthumously: “Why is it that European thought does not address the question of ethical behaviour towards creatures, or addresses it only reluctantly?” (Albert Schweitzer 2000, 139) Schweitzer’s still rather crude first ideas are worth reading and noting. He sees that the origins lie not in Judaism but with the Greeks, but also emphasises the catalysing contribution of early Christianity: “However the fact [that] Jesus does not recommend compassion for creatures may be explained: it has a disastrous effect on European thought. The view that ethics is concerned only with behaviour towards human beings and not also with behaviour towards creatures is regarded by him as sanctioned by Christianity. Throughout the centuries, this deeply ingrained prejudice has remained. Even today it has not completely got rid of it.” (Albert Schweitzer 2000, 143)

However, the public debate was opened in 1967, when the medievalist Lynn White published a sensational article in the scientific journal “*Science*” on “the historical roots of our ecological crisis”. In it, he proves that the technological and scientific dynamism of Western Europe, which began in the 11th century and continues today, has its roots in the widespread Christianisation by the Carolingians in the 9th century, for this led to a combination of two basic spiritual attitudes:

- Firstly, the biblical Creation narratives were understood in such a way that everything created existed solely for the benefit and well-being of man, because he alone was God’s image. Christianity had thus become the most anthropocentric religion in the world. “God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. (...) Christianity, in abso-

lute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." (Lynn White 1967, 1205)

- Secondly, however, the significant difference between the Latin Western and Greek Eastern Churches had to be explained, for only the Latin Church had produced the aforementioned technological–scientific dynamic, while the Christian East had lagged behind technically and scientifically. Here, White refers to the voluntarism of the Western Church, which emerged in the 11th century, and which places the human will and its freedom before or above the knowledge of reason. In contrast, the Greek Eastern Church remained intellectualistic, i.e. it placed the knowledge of reason before will and freedom.

This leads to the following conclusion for White: "first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realisation of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature". (Lynn White 1967, 1206) The ecological crisis cannot be solved simply by more natural science and more (environmental) technology, but only by spiritual conversion. The creation mysticism of Francis of Assisi and his idea of fraternity with all creatures lends itself to this, White concludes.

With this small essay, White initiated a debate that has not died down to this day. However, his thesis has often been coarsened and robbed of its temporal and spatial limitations. The medievalist White only analyses the Middle Ages. He does not ask where the medieval interpretations of the biblical narratives come from and whether they are exegetically correct. He also does not ask what is at the origin of Western voluntarism and why this only affected the Christian West, but not the Christian East. Finally, he does not analyse the post-Reformation and modern developments, which indicate that it was not so much Catholicism as Protestantism (and there especially Calvinism<sup>5</sup> as well as the Free Churches) that promoted environ-

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5 In his classic thesis, Max Weber attributed the economic success of Calvinist countries to their doctrine of predestination. Heinz Schilling 2022, 243–259 and more recent historical research, on the other hand, assume much more prosaically that the cause, analogous to the European Jews, lies in the expulsion of Calvinists from most of their areas of origin. As migrants, they were excluded from politics and all public offices in their new places of residence, so they could only gain the respect of their



mental destruction (cf. Peter Hersche 2020 and 2020a). As a medievalist, White sticks to his last. However, the title of his essay suggests that one has arrived at the historical roots, as if there were no prehistory for the Middle Ages. This is precisely what leads to uncovered generalisations and very sweeping accusations against “Christianity”. In the German-speaking world, it was above all Carl Amery who spoke out in 1972 with his monograph on the “merciless consequences of Christianity” and Eugen Drewermann in 1986 with his treatise on the “destruction of the earth and of man in the legacy of Christianity”. In popular science, their view of things has remained dominant to the present day.

Recently, Lynn White’s thesis has been put into perspective from another angle. Anthropology increasingly recognises that the medieval marriage morality of the Latin Church has been one of the most important causes of the economic development of the West in modern times. The strict demand for lifelong monogamy, the very far-reaching ban on intermarriage (up to second cousins!), the teaching that the consensus of the bride and groom constituted the marriage (and not the blessing of the priest, as in the Eastern Church!), the favouring of living spatially separated from relatives and the superiority of the spiritual family of the Church over the biological family led to the dissolution of clan structures step by step in the Latin West. Yet, sociologically, these are some of the greatest obstacles to innovation and economic progress (Jonathan F. Schulz et al. 2019, 1–12; Joseph Henrich 2020; Duman Bahrami-Rad et al. 2022, 1–3). Thus, at least in part, the “merciless consequences of Christianity” were not caused by Christian (Western and Eastern Church) anthropocentrism at all, but by Western Church marital morality (which differs strikingly from Eastern Church marital morality!) and were therefore not directly intended, but unintentionally contributed to as a “side effect”—a connection that has only received scholarly attention in the last decade.

Nevertheless, Lynn White’s thesis can hardly be dismissed as completely absurd and unfounded. There is probably a kernel of truth in it. The churches have therefore taken it up late, but very clearly, and acknowledged their complicity. The European Ecumenical Assembly (EEA) in Basel in 1989 stated: “We have failed because we have not borne witness to God’s

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fellow men through economic success. Moreover, due to migration, they have fewer traditional (extended family) ties. And finally, they live in locally autonomous religious communities whose members travel a lot for work and therefore maintain exchange and international contacts, which also benefits trade.



caring love for all and every creature and because we have not developed a lifestyle that corresponds to our self-understanding as part of God's creation. (EEA 43) And: "Conversion to God (metanoia) today means the commitment to seek a way out of the separation between human beings and the rest of creation, out of human domination over nature, out of a lifestyle and economic modes of production that seriously damage nature, out of an individualism that violates the integrity of creation in favour of private interests, into a community of human beings with all creatures in which their rights and integrity are respected." (EEA 45)

Pope Francis also candidly admitted in 2015 that "This allows us to respond to an accusation against Judeo-Christian thought: [...] If it is true that we Christians have sometimes misinterpreted the scriptures, today we must emphatically reject the inference of absolute dominion over other creatures from the fact of being created in the image of God and the mandate to rule the earth." (LS 67)

Despite this fundamental acknowledgement that Christianity has contributed significantly to anthropocentrism remaining the dominant ethical ideology in the West to this day, one must still ask where the Carolingian early Middle Ages took it from. After all, it is not an invention of Carolingian theology. Obviously, one has to go further back, into antiquity, to trace the roots of Western anthropocentrism. So where do its earliest beginnings lie? And if, as we shall see, these are to be dated centuries before the birth of Christianity, then what prompted Christianity to adopt it?

The intention of this question is not primarily historical but systematic, for only after a solid elucidation of the origins and theological motives of Christian anthropocentrism can the question be answered as to whether the positive concerns that motivated its reception can also be achieved in a contemporary form of theology with less or even no harm to non-human creatures.

The guiding question defined in this way outlines a field of the history of theology and the church that has not yet been dealt with, but also of systematic theology. While biblical animal ethics has been relatively well researched in recent decades (see chapter 2), the animal ethics of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy has at least begun to be explored (see chapter 3) and the animal ethics of the Middle Ages is increasingly being explored in a relatively large number of smaller studies, there have only been very selective analyses of the animal ethics of early Christianity, which do not yet allow for a coherent picture. This is therefore a missing link in the history of theology. If, as a systematic theologian, I venture into this incomplete

field, I do so with the necessary caution. As I said, my primary interest in knowledge is not of a historical nature, and my genuine expertise does not lie in historical research. Rather, I would like to better understand the current position of the church(es) in order to be able to make proposals for its reformation. Without a halfway differentiated perception of the origins, this cannot possibly succeed.

#### *1.4 Ten core theses of this study*

In ten core theses I would like to anticipate the most important results of this book. They will be substantiated and developed in detail in chapter 5 on the basis of textual testimonies.

- 1) As far back as in the earliest times of the Church, anthropocentrism was adopted by Christian theologians and is thus part of the “hereditary property”, the genes of Christian theology and the Church ethos. On the one hand, this explains why it has remained almost unquestioned for two millennia, and on the other hand, it makes clear the enormous challenge of overcoming it by modernising theology.
- 2) Anthropocentrism does not come from Jewish and biblical traditions, but from the mainstream of Greco-Roman philosophy, which has been anthropocentric since as early as the 5th century BC. By the time of the early Church, the anthropocentric paradigm had long since become so firmly anchored, well-argued and self-evident in Greco-Roman culture that its dubiousness was hardly noticed, despite lingering criticism from a small minority. It is—especially in Stoic popular philosophy—simply *sensus communis*. Moreover, it is (also) derived there from the belief in the good providence of the gods, i.e. theologically, whereby it literally imposes itself on early Christianity.
- 3) The Christian adoption of the anthropocentrism of Greco-Roman philosophy can only be understood against the background of two historical circumstances: On the one hand, the Roman Empire from about 300 BC to at least 400 AD is characterised by so-called Hellenism. Hellenism means that the entire culture of this epoch in the Mediterranean region and partly beyond is imbued with the Greek way of life. People (increasingly also the Jews!) move in this culture like fish in water—they often do not even notice that Greek culture is at work in a mode of behaviour or in outlook. On the other hand, early Christianity had already largely detached itself from its Jewish roots

around 200 AD. There are no longer any Jewish Christians, i.e. people who convert from Judaism to Christianity. And the dialogue between Christian and Jewish theologians continues (cf. Peter Schäfer 2010 and 2015), but only reaches a minority of believers in Christianity. This means that Jewish culture and beliefs have, to a large extent, been lost from view. Most Christians no longer notice that Judaism, and thus also Jesus of Nazareth, sometimes held decidedly different views than Hellenism. The language barrier—Christians can neither understand nor speak the Hebrew language of the Old Testament and the Aramaic language of the Palestinian Jews, in contrast to the Greek and Latin languages—does the rest.

- 4) Early Christianity's main arguments for anthropocentrism are not animal ethical, but have to do with core issues of early dogmatic development:
  - The starting point of all considerations is *soteriology* with the question under which conditions someone can attain eternal life. Step by step, the concept of free will crystallises itself, which only belongs to humans and fundamentally distinguishes them from animals. Humans are supposed to determine this free will through reason, which also distinguishes them from animals, who are called the “reasonless” (aloga).
  - This has mirrored consequences for *eschatology*: the Greek doctrine of the transmigration of souls, as it is found in Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy, is rejected in order to safeguard the idea of the uniqueness of earthly life, which characterises Jewish tradition and is an indispensable prerequisite for the concept of the Last Judgment and eternal life. But if souls are not allowed to wander from human to animal and from animal to human, as part of Greek philosophy assumes, then it is advisable, as a firewall between humans and animals, to make an essential and not merely gradual distinction between the rational immortal human soul and the exclusively vegetative and sensitive, therefore mortal animal soul.
  - In *creation theology*, one wants to emphasise God's wonderful providence and care for human beings—and does this in orientation towards the Stoa at the expense of non-human creatures by declaring human beings alone to be the purposes of creation. A hierarchy and a purely utilitarian relationship are thus created between humans and non-human creation. Even if one does not always

understand it, all non-human creatures supposedly have a benefit exclusively for humans.

- In *anthropology*, the soteriologically and eschatologically central rational nature of man is biblically underpinned by an essential ontological (instead of existential relational) understanding of the image of God in Gen 1:26. This biblical passage, which had no great significance within the Bible and in early Jewish times and was understood quite differently in general, now becomes the central evidence for the uniqueness of man and for the anthropocentric conviction that creation was created solely for the sake of man.
  - Finally, on the meta-level, there is a fifth issue: the *ability to engage in dialogue with the secular majority society* and to prove that, as a small splinter group with provincial origins, they are on the cutting edge of the anthropocentric philosophical mainstream. By the mid-3rd century CE, there were about 100,000 Christians living in the Roman Empire (Kyle Harper 2020, 231). Out of a total population of about 75 million, this was a good one per thousand. Christianity was not yet a world religion, but consisted of largely autonomous, very plural small groups (Peter Gemeinhardt 2022, 12). Half a century later, around 300 AD, Christians already comprised 15 to 20 per cent of the total population, i.e. 10 to 15 million people, one hundred times more than fifty years earlier. They had become a “mass phenomenon” (Kyle Harper 2020, 231). Yet it was to take almost another century before they became the majority of the population. Until then, it was those who were Christian, rather than those who adhered to a different belief, who had to justify themselves. Demonstrating knowledge, mastery and affirmation of the current philosophy was vital in this context.
- 5) All five motives for the early Christian reception of Greco-Roman anthropocentrism culminate in the basic Greek theorem of animals as *aloga*, as beings without reason and language. This theorem therefore logically, but ultimately hardly reflected upon, becomes the key to the perception of animals among the mainstream of Christian theology.
  - 6) Even the first three centuries’ theologians, who tended to be animal-friendly, did not question the *aloga* thesis, despite good scientific knowledge and obvious observations of animal behaviour to the contrary. It was so deeply inscribed in Greco-Roman society that one did not even think of overturning it. In this way, it became part of the genetic code of Christianity.

- 7) Even on this side of non-human animals, the reception of rationalist anthropocentrism produces considerable collateral damage for humans:
  - Theologically, the establishment of the ability to reason as the central dividing line favours, in the long run, the discrimination of all those human individuals who can never attain this ability—i.e. stillborn children or children who die in the first years of life, as well as people with mental disabilities. To this day, there are debates about their ecclesiological status and their entitlement to receive the sacraments or a church funeral.
  - Cosmologically, like the Stoa, one has to make absurd hypotheses about the benefit of mosquitoes, lions and many other animals for humans. From the perspective of modern ecology, one can only smile indulgently at such attempts.
  - In terms of environmental ethics, anthropocentrism favours the ruthless exploitation of nature because it lacks the emotional inhibition threshold and tends towards an under-complex determination of “utilities” of nature (Michael Rosenberger 2021, 178–180). This harms humans themselves, not only the extra-human creation.
- 8) The reception of rationalist anthropocentrism, however, has also resulted in incalculable collateral damage for animals:
  - In the field of applied ethics, it establishes an extremely far-reaching authorisation to use animals, which cannot be restricted by the needs of the animals, but only by the well-understood needs of humans. Animals do not come into view for their own sake, but only for the sake of humans.
  - From a fundamental ethical point of view, in view of the texts in the Bible that strive for animal justice, there is inevitably an irresolvable inconsistency in Christian animal ethics, as can be clearly seen in the current Catechism of the Catholic Church and also in the encyclical *Laudato si'*.
  - Soteriologically, the exclusion of animals from salvation is the consequence. Animals, according to the widely held conviction of theology and churches, have no place in God's eternity despite the fact that biblical texts lead one to believe otherwise. Indirectly, God's act of creation becomes mere preparation and a temporary backdrop for his act of redemption, which only applies to humanity.
- 9) From the beginning until today, there has been and still is an animal-friendly minority position in Christianity, which is partly more biblical

than philosophical, partly more Neo-Platonic than Stoic in inspiration. It is first represented by early monasticism, which seeks to live out the anticipation of paradisiacal peace between humans and animals. To this day, there are religious communities that see this concern as an integral part of their charism. It can also be found in some manifestations of popular piety, such as the blessing of animals and the sharing of Easter bread with animals, as well as in Christian art, for example when in many illustrations the ox and donkey stand closer to Jesus' manger than Mary and Joseph, or when animals are together with humans under the tree of life. Theologically, it is easy to argue why it is time to turn the minority position into the official position of the whole church:

- Creation theology: Against the background of evolutionary theory, the close relationship of the species *homo sapiens* with many animal species, but even with plants, is obvious. Modern biology shows more and more clearly that the transitions from less to more intelligent living beings are fluid and often only nuances lie between them. Only the development of a central nervous system constitutes a qualitative leap. Seen in this light, humans are the relatively most highly developed living beings at present. But it would be completely misleading to claim that the whole course of evolution has only run towards them. Theologically, this calls for a massive reduction of teleology and highly cautious speaking of God's plan of creation.
- Soteriology: Non-human animals are just as capable of redemption as human animals because they are created and loved by God. The ability to redeem is not based on an essence-ontological quality, but on God's devotion and loving care, i.e. a relational-existential quality. This does not necessarily mean that those people who are enabled by their gift of reason to assume responsibility no longer have to disclose it before the judgement seat of God. It only means that this is not the only criterion for access to eternity.
- Christology: The mystery of the incarnation can be interpreted as God becoming flesh, i.e. becoming a creature, closely following the biblical etymology of the Hebrew word *בָּשָׂר* / *basar*. In Jesus Christ, God became a creature and showed his solidarity with all creatures, which gives them an unsurpassable dignity. This thesis also takes much better account of the fact that the Logos hymn in Jn 1 has numerous connections to the Creation narrative of Gen 1.

- Eschatology: The soul, which is mortal (!) like the body, can be interpreted in the sense of the “*anima forma corporis*” in an Aristotelian way as a cipher for the independence and the practical self-relation of human and non-human living beings. Then it stands for the uniqueness of every living being and excludes transmigration of souls entirely by itself. A soul understood in this way in all living beings is very much in line with the Christian conviction of the uniqueness of earthly life. No devaluation of non-human creatures is needed to support it.
- Anthropology: If Christian theology can obviously leave anthropocentrism well behind without having to give up the motives that spawned its introduction, then the idea of man created as the image of God in Gen 1:26 can be interpreted without bias as it is meant biblically: as formal anthropocentrism and not as anthropocentrism. In Gen 1, the Creator ascribes to human beings the responsibility for the house of life on earth that has been lent to all creatures. This is exactly what is called “formal anthropocentrism” in modern specialist discussion and is fundamentally distinguished from “(material) anthropocentrism” (see above chapter 1.2).
- Ethics: Finally, the adoption of the traditional minority position as the official position of the church(es) also allows the voluntary option of a consistently vegetarian or vegan diet to be recognised as an anticipation of Paradise and as an evangelical council. With the reduction of the evangelical counsels to three in the 12th and 13th centuries, monastic vegetarianism came under the wheels of a church that wanted to lump all religious communities together. This does not do justice to the diversity of charisms and vocations of religious Christians. Again, it was collateral damage that, along with the diversity of charisms, also uprooted the value of an animal-friendly dietary style.
- Meta-level: On the one hand, a renewed, non-anthropocentrically thinking form of Christianity could be alternative and in a good sense elitist on the level of practice, if it visibly highly values the vegetarian and vegan option and places value on very limited meat consumption in the full breadth of its membership. On the other hand, such a form of Christianity, which is currently becoming a social minority again, would be on the cutting edge of social discourse and go along with the trend of modern ethics towards much greater protection of animals.

- 10) The last thesis is dedicated to the theorem of the “merciless consequences of Christianity”. Without question, Christianity, by adopting Greco-Roman anthropocentrism, contributed significantly to the fact that the instrumental, technical–rational appropriation of the earth as a resource had and has destructive consequences. But if Christianity had not been so successful and remained a small minority of European societies to this day, Western culture would still have retained anthropocentrism as its dominant matrix and passed it on (unless Greco-Roman culture as a whole had perished in the era of migration of peoples!). For when Christianity adopted anthropocentrism, it had already been the dominant ideology of Greece and later Rome for 500 years and would have remained so even without the Church. In a way, one can perhaps say: when Christianity was still a tiny minority in the Roman Empire, it almost inevitably adopted anthropocentrism as the dominant ideology of the majority society, on the one hand in order to have a say and keep up, and on the other hand because most Christians did not come from the Jewish but from the Greco-Roman cultural sphere. By the time Christianity had become the majority religion three centuries later, anthropocentrism was already so deeply anchored in Christian doctrine that it was no longer recognised as problematic. Unnoticed, an ideology had seeped into Christian dogmatics that had hardly any biblical basis, indeed was diametrically opposed to the biblical mainstream.

It is time to correct this flaw in the genetic and embryonic development of Christianity.

### *1.5 The structure of this book*

Eric Daryl Meyer aptly describes the problem of Christian anthropocentrism and its consequences for non-human animals. “Christian theologians and biblical scholars have nearly ubiquitously, for a range of historical reasons, thought about human beings as categorically distinct from and superior to all other animals. Scholars in the far-flung-and-still-emerging field of animal studies draw attention to the way that such anthropological exceptionalism leads directly to staggering suffering and injustice borne (and resisted!) by nonhuman animals.” (Eric Daryl Meyer 2018, 56–57)

In view of this, Meyer argues for a double task: first, the historical developments of Christian “exceptionalism” must be analysed, and second, it is



necessary to look for the aspects of Christian theology that can contribute to overcoming it. “Some urgent tasks emerge where this work intersects with Christian theology. The deep sources of the tradition (the Bible and influential figures across its history) must be critically analysed to discern: first, where and how the rigid boundaries between human and other animals collapse under the weight of their own assumptions and, second, what hidden resources the tradition holds for thinking differently.” (Eric Daryl Meyer 2018, 57)

That is precisely what I see as the task of this book. Meyer has also devoted himself to it (Eric Daryl Meyer 2018a), but from a different angle, namely “Inner Animalities”, i.e. the animal qualities in humans. His book uses the Cappadocian Church Fathers and contemporary theologians to expose the immanent contradictions of classical Christian anthropology. The core thesis is almost identical to mine: “Christian theology takes up anthropological exceptionalism from Greco-Roman philosophy (particularly the Stoics), amplifies it with theological and scriptural reasoning, and then, at the dawn of the era of European colonial expansion, passes it into the secularized exceptionalism of Enlightenment humanism.” (Eric Daryl Meyer 2018a, 6)

My study illuminates the same problem as Meyer, but from a different angle. It focuses on anthropocentrism per se as well as on the entire epoch of patristics and proceeds in the following steps:

*Chapter 2* is devoted to the question of how *animals* are perceived and classified in the *pre-Hellenistic writings of the Old Testament*. It will be shown that the texts emphasise the similarities between animals and humans far more than the differences. Above all, being directly created by a good and loving God fundamentally connects them. The logical consequence is that animals are included in God’s covenant with his creation. As subjects of law, they enjoy a similar position as other precariously situated groups in society. If one wants to assign biblical thinking to one of the theological reasoning approaches, it is biocentrist and not anthropocentrist.

*Chapter 3* attempts a passage through the *animal ethical considerations of Greco-Roman philosophy*. As early as in the time of the pre-Socratics, important courses were set, so that anthropocentrism was already firmly in the saddle by the time of Socrates. It is interesting that in Socrates and many other philosophers it contains a theological component: The fact that everything was created for humans proves the care of the gods for humans. In the Stoa, Greek anthropocentrism is systematised and brought to its

perfection. A five-part network of ideas, which are highly consistent with one another and can only be unlaced and changed as a whole, is stretched out. The popular philosophical current of the Stoa makes the five ideas associated with anthropocentrism socially acceptable, so that they spread throughout Greco-Roman culture in the following centuries.

*Chapter 4* takes into account the fact that Greco-Roman culture gradually seeped into parts of Diaspora Judaism during the long epoch of Hellenism. In traces, this also affects a few passages of the Old Testament, but above all the Greek translation of the Jewish Bible, the Septuagint. Those New Testament authors who, like Paul, come from Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism also adopt some paradigms of the Stoa, including its anthropocentrism. The example of the prohibition of ritual slaughter, which the early Church initially made binding for all Christians, but which lost all relevance by 200 AD at the latest, makes it clear how the animal ethical impulses of the Torah almost completely evaporated from Christianity within a few generations.

*Chapter 5*, which is by far the longest, goes through the *texts of the Church Fathers* and looks for traces relevant to animal ethics. These are analysed primarily with regard to the cornerstones of Stoic animal ethics. An enormous range of positions and approaches becomes clear. The aloga thesis and anthropocentrism are not fundamentally questioned anywhere. Nevertheless, there are remarkably many authors who take a far more animal-friendly position than the Stoa. Obviously, they have neither the intellectual nor the resource strength to ask the fundamental question, and perhaps they did not even recognise the problem as such in its profound dimension because they were too firmly rooted in Hellenism. Nevertheless, many of them strive for mindfulness before and sympathy with animals.

The last chapter, *chapter 6*, is about ensuring systematic yield in the sense of a *further development of Christian animal ethics*. The individual elements of the Stoic network of ideas around anthropocentrism are taken up again and brought into conversation with the current debates in the natural sciences and humanities. From this, perspectives emerge that anthropocentrism must be abandoned, but that this can only succeed in conjunction with a series of other overdue corrections of the Christian message. At the same time, it becomes clear that the Christian message carries the potential for healing. "While Christian theological anthropology is at least partly culpable for the structure of human self-understanding in the West, it also retains the disciplinary and discursive tools to address the widest frame in which human beings understand themselves." (Eric Daryl

Meyer 2018a, 14) This potential has significance far beyond the churches. For just as the genetic flaw of anthropocentrism is deeply rooted in Western thought, so too are those genes of Christianity that can contribute to a healthy development. It is only a matter of lifting them up.

