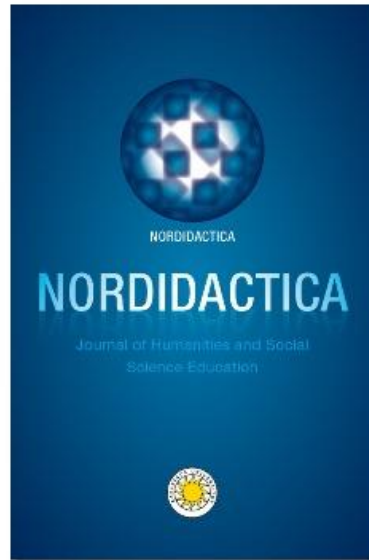


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## Non-human animals in Finnish worldview education textbooks

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*Abstract: Education plays a key role in ethical development, and worldview education emphasizes ethical questions. Ethical discussions within education about the treatment of non-human animals are urgently needed. In Finland, worldview education is a compulsory subject, introduced to students from the first year of school. In this study, we turn to Finnish educational material on worldview instruction groups for Lutheran, Orthodox and Islam religion and for the secular subject Culture, Worldview and Ethics for grades 1-2 to ask how non-human animals, and the relation between humans and non-human animals, are portrayed. The article provides a Finnish perspective on animal ethics in worldview education. Through discourse analysis, we examine how humans' relations with non-human animals are presented in educational materials. We find a dominant discourse of human-animal separation, where humans are portrayed as capable of thinking and feeling, in contrast to non-sentient animals. Non-human animals are presented as utility animals that supply human needs, being used for labour and for food, constructing the consumption of non-human animals as food as natural. We discuss the challenging intertwined discourses of care, protection and utility of non-human animals and call for a stronger focus on animal ethics within worldview education.*

**KEYWORDS:** WORLDVIEW EDUCATION, NON-HUMAN ANIMALS, RELIGION, TEXTBOOKS, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL GRADES 1-2, FINLAND

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## Introduction

The role of animal ethics has developed significantly within societal and philosophical debates (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011; Nussbaum, 2023). One reason for this is an increased scientifically based understanding of non-human animals as thinking and feeling creatures (Kupsala, 2020). Another reason for discussing human-animal relations is a widened understanding of the huge challenges posed by climate change and an increasingly rapid biodiversity loss, on which livestock farming and meat production have a significant impact (Machovina et al., 2015). A root cause of these crises lies in how human societies in many parts of the world relate to the non-human environment and non-human animals. Western and industrialist societies such as Finland commonly hold on to human-centred views, and this disconnection from nature is coupled with dominant economic systems that are detrimental and challenge planetary health (Redvers, Guzmán and Parkes, 2023). However, contemporary views of nature are not new, and as Skilbeck (2021) points out, religion has played a major role, not only in the West, in shaping human minds, and the influence of religions is still evident. In the current time, increasingly called the Anthropocene, ethical questions relating to the boundaries between humans and non-human animals have been raised. The Anthropocene refers not only to a geological epoch, when humans have started to influence the state of the entire earth, but also to a time for critical reflection that creates new ways of being in the world (Paulsen, Jagodzinski and Hawke, 2022). Therefore, to transform current societies towards sustainability, rethinking the relationship between humans and other animals is most urgent (Vinnari and Vinnari, 2022).

Education plays a key role in how new generations develop their understanding of and relations with non-human animals. Finland has seen some changes regarding the way in which ethical questions are conceptualized on a curricular level. In Finnish education, worldview education has traditionally been assigned the task of providing students with an ability to reflect upon ethical questions (e.g. FNAE, 2016). Because of this, ethics has not existed as a separate school subject in Finland. However, similarly to sustainability perspectives in general, worldview education has barely focused on animal ethics. Contrasted with previous curricula, the *Finnish Core Curriculum for Basic Education* of 2014 links the aim of sustainability to the development of an ethical stance, not only towards other people, but also through respecting and recognizing the rights of non-human animals and other parts of nature. This aim is emphasized as fundamental to becoming a humane and educated individual in the tradition of *Bildung* (FNAE, 2016). However, it is not clear how this aim is enforced in educational practice or to what extent it is visible in various curricular subjects. Finnish worldview education has a separative approach and students are divided into groups and given instruction according to the worldview backgrounds in their families (Åhs and Salmenkivi, 2022).

Different instruction groups have separate curricula and textbooks. The study at hand aims to give further insight into the human-nature relationship in worldview education through a specific focus on how the human relationship with non-human animals is represented in educational material, and by widening the scope of textbooks to include Christian Lutheran and Orthodox textbooks, as well as Islam, and Culture, Worldview

and Ethics educational material. The article starts with a brief theoretical discussion about the role of animal ethics in culture and society today based on the common Abrahamic roots of Christianity and Islam and on secularist understanding. After that, it presents the Finnish educational context and the empirical part of the study. Finally, the resulting discourses are presented in three parts, followed by a discussion about their implications.

## **Tracing animal ethics in religion and society**

Since ancient times, ethical concerns for non-human animals have been part of philosophy. From the very beginning, Western history has included both defenders of and antagonists to the idea of human superiority over other creatures (e.g., Attfield, 1994). Some pre-Socratic philosophers, and some of the Stoic philosophers considered vegetarianism as righteous (Komorowska, 2021; Nussbaum, 2023; Stephens, 2022), and many Stoics saw harmony with nature as the goal of life, even if they regarded humans as different from non-rational animals (Carone, 2001). The choice of vegetarian food was not only a stance against eating meat, it was also a stand against the important role that food played in human lives (Stephens, 2022).

Through the ages, not just religion, but also politics and economics have had an impact on how non-human animals have been treated. However, attitudes, values and actions have changed over time. According to many environmental philosophy scholars, the human use of nature is rooted in an intertwining of Christianity and Ancient Greek philosophy (Attfield, 1994; Belshaw, 2001). Christianity as the main religion in the West, has been accused by many of the ecological crises and humans' domination over the rest of nature, especially by Lynn White (1967). Even if this view is widespread, it has also been met with criticism (Harrison, 1999). Within both Christian and Muslim theology there have been calls to question humans as more special than other animals (White, 1967; Tlili, 2018). However, it is important to understand that sacred texts often include inconsistent messages that are difficult to understand, leaving it up to the reader to interpret them in accordance with their own interests (Wolff, 2011). Therefore, sacred texts have always been invaluable for talented rhetoricians, who have used them to exploit nature and other creatures. Often it has been seen as a human duty to put humans before the rest of nature, in accordance with a picture of humans as a supreme creature (Schreider, 1997; Skilbeck, 2021). However, the sacred texts have also been interpreted to emphasize humans' role in taking care of the Earth, as the creature who is responsible for all aspects of nature (see Angga & al., 2020; Skilbeck, 2021; Wolff, 2011; Zilliacus et al., in press). Especially the Qu'ran has been read in this way (Safitri et al., 2019; Tlili, 2012; 2018).

Medieval Christians used the *Scala Naturae*, an idea of a ladder, where species had their specific positions. The only purpose of the ladder was to indicate permanent superiority and inferiority (Nussbaum, 2023). Humans were considered distinct from other animals, but non-human animals were also stuck in their ranked positions. According to Nee (2005), this way of ordering nature is still obvious in contemporary

Western cultures. The religious disassociation of humans from non-human animals and placing humans at the top of a hierarchical order relates to the partly similar separation of the body from the soul, in which the soul is more eminent than the body, because of humans' relation to God (Skilbeck, 2021). Many thinkers have positioned humans between God and non-human animals: between animal evilness and divine goodness, the brutish and the civilized (Suutala, 1996). While the boundary between humans and non-human animals was seen as flexible, humans needed education to become good and rational and to repress their animal nature (Skilbeck, 2021; Suutala, 1996).

Even if thinking of humans as both a soul and an animal body has flourished long before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, philosopher René Descartes is held responsible for the widespread idea of the split between the body and the soul (Skirry, 2005). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many authors have rejected the notion of separating the body from the soul and humans from other animals, but the influence from earlier times is apparent. Some species are appreciated more than others, and especially small creatures, like insects, have often been harmed. Many species of animals have been domesticized and used as pets, labour or nutrition, and religions have emphasized these divisions, for instance by regulating what animals to eat or not to eat. Some animals have even for centuries been regarded as 'cleaner' than others (e.g., Rooke, 2019).

Today, an awakened understanding of the urgent need for sustainability has prioritized animal ethics on the contemporary philosophy agenda. Nussbaum (2023) points to three reasons for an urgent ethical discussion about the treatment of non-human animals. First, the negative impact of humans on the lives of non-human animals has grown immensely during recent times, and new forms of maltreatment continue to emerge. Some forms of cruelty are more direct, such as the treatment of non-human animals in the meat and dairy industry, while others are caused indirectly, such as destroying habitats by means of pollution, or supporting harmful industries. Second, while ancient philosophers and medieval Christians knew very little about the sentient nature of non-human animals, the world is different today. Science continues to show that animal intelligence, emotions and sociability exceed previous understandings. As Nussbaum points out, this must have significant ethical implications. Third, referring to other historical injustices, she stresses that the only hope for improvement within politics and legislation is an informed ethical debate, and that there is reason to believe that more ethical debates could bring about change, since an informed public tends to support animal rights and oppose industrial farming measures. However, according to Kupsala (2020), this is not sufficiently reflected in policies and legislation regarding animals. The link between knowing what is morally right and acting accordingly is, nevertheless, not straightforward. Oliver (2009) points out the ambivalence towards animals in Western philosophy and culture started with Descartes and discusses how animals have been distinguished in Western philosophy after Descartes. Instead of trying to see other animals as similar to humans, Oliver asks us to notice their differences and to develop an ethics of difference, relationality and responsivity, as well as 'response-ability', that is to learn live together on a shared planet, since attempting to master other animals is futile.

Secularist understanding thereby builds largely on religious traditions, but highlights individual rationality. In Finland in the curriculum for the school subject Culture, Worldview and Ethics, it is stated that “human beings are understood as actors who reshape and create their culture and experience and produce meanings in shared activities and in interaction with the surrounding world” (FNAE 2016, p. 211). To this it is added: “Worldviews, human practices, and the meanings attached to them are viewed as products of interaction among individuals, communities, and cultural heritage. The ability of human beings to actively influence their own thinking and actions is emphasised in the subject of ethics” (FNAE 2016, p. 211). Culture, Worldview and Ethics is not based on sacred texts, but is connected to societal issues that are relevant to pupils’ lives. Questions of sustainability and the relationship between humans and other animals are highly relevant as ethical topics. However, considering humans to be active agents who construct meaning based on interaction and active thought processes has also met with resistance. Gruen (2015) argues that ethical theory has failed to meet the real moral problems, since people do not necessarily practice what they preach. Humans live in a paradoxical situation where there is an increased concern over animal wellbeing while the meat industry is rapidly growing. Aaltola (2019) connects this paradoxical state to the philosophical notion of *akrasia*, meaning being in a situation where one knows the good and chooses to do the opposite. In practice, the struggle with *akrasia* can lead people to demand that non-human animals are treated well, but mainly to avoid the risk of having to confront their suffering. People might also choose to consume domestically produced meat in the belief that it is cleaner, safer and more ethically produced than other meat. This is often the result of powerful advertisements linking the consumption of domestic meat to patriotic good deeds (Kotilainen, 2015). The call for better treatment of non-human animals, even if supported by the public, is not reflected in consumer choices (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011). Knowledge about how non-human animals are treated seems to have an effect; however, the further away animals are from people’s lives and routines, the easier it is to disregard animal rights (Kupsala, 2020).

Finnish history has seen a range of animal activism among young people, such as resistance to fur farming (e.g., Juppi, 2004). In a large-scale survey among adults and young people in Finland, a third of the participants shared the view that nature is primarily a resource for humans (Haanpää and Laasonen, 2020). However, another survey on Finnish young people’s relations to nature showed that 86% argued that the intrinsic value of nature needs to be taken into consideration in decision-making. Compared to young people in other European countries, Finnish youth has shown more favourable attitudes towards strengthening legislation on animal welfare and an inclination to pay more for products that promote animal wellbeing. In the same survey, protecting animal rights was seen as important by any means possible by 86% of young people. Preserving biodiversity was similarly seen as important – results that show that not only human-centred perspectives prevail among young people (Kiilakoski, 2021).

Young people are naturally affected by a number of different viewpoints, not only those that are presented by schools and textbooks. While not all worldview topics are necessarily relevant for children, animal ethics certainly interest humans from an early

age. A part of secularist understanding is that children are confronted by abundant images of non-human animals in culture. From the earliest years, non-human animal characters act as protagonists in stories, cartoons, TV shows and games. However, non-human animals in fiction are often given human-like traits, abilities and emotions, while there is a silence around their realistic living environments, such as industrial farming (Koljonen, 2021). Waxman et al. (2014) argue that the fact that non-human animals are so often portrayed as human-like in children's culture strengthens children's anthropocentric views, ignoring non-human animals as biological creatures. At the same time it is apparent that knowledge about non-human animals and their natural habitats is essential to evoke empathy and to encourage ethical reasoning (see Young, Khalil and Wharton, 2018).

### **Constructing an understanding of ethical education within Finnish worldview subjects and textbooks**

In Finland, children generally start school the year they turn seven. For children, the starting years of school shape many perspectives for learning and can consequently be considered crucial for their education. Worldview education, a compulsory subject, is provided as part of comprehensive-level and secondary-level education and is introduced to pupils from the first year of school. The lessons of worldview education are organized in school as separate lessons based on pupils belonging to certain religious groups. Currently, in Finland there are 14 different curricula for different religious groups. The majority religious groups in school are Lutherans, although there is an increasing number of Islam pupils in Finnish schools. The other large groups are Greek Orthodox and Catholic. For pupils who are not members of a religious community an alternative subject called Culture, Worldview and Ethics is provided. In Finnish research literature, the different religious instruction groups and the secular subject of Culture, Worldview and Ethics are nowadays commonly subsumed under the term 'worldview education'. Although education is organized according to the student's own religion, religious education in Finnish schools is not confessional in character. The aim of worldview education is to produce all-round religious literacy.

The educational task is to familiarize pupils with their own religions, with Finnish religious traditions, and with other religions to help pupils understand the meaning of religion in culture and for the members of a particular faith, to introduce pupils to notions of ethical responsibility and to help them understand the ethical dimension of religion (FNAE, 2016). The different religious education instruction groups follow the same core curriculum, which is divided into three sections: 1) the student's relationship with their own religion, 2) the world of religions and 3) the good life. Environmental ethical questions connected to the human-nature relationship are included in the curricula, particularly the third section 'the good life'. This content is somewhat different with different religions in the first two school years: Lutheran education contents include "pupils' own actions and their consequences for other people but also to the environment and nature" (FNAE, 2016, p. 144). Orthodox religion articulates the

“responsibility for the environment and nature as well as the uniqueness of life” (ibid. p. 146). Islam education curricular content does not mention nature-related content, only that the contents include “the foundations of a good life according to Islam” (ibid. p. 148). The curriculum of Culture, Worldview and Ethics differs from the above in its key content areas 1) reflecting on good life, 2) different ways of life, 3) foundations of communal life and 4) nature and a sustainable future. In the last content area “pupils explore different forms of life, reflecting on the finite nature of life. The pupils familiarize themselves with different creation myths. The pupils examine their own surroundings and the impact of their own choices and actions on it. The pupils seek meaningful experiences related to nature” (ibid., p. 150).

While the themes of environmental awareness and approaches to non-human animals in textbooks have been studied internationally (Awayehu Gugssa, Aasetre and Lechissa Debele, 2021; Fonseca, 2023; Cho, Kim and Stoltman 2022), these studies have mainly focused on textbooks in science. However, questions concerning the relationship between human beings and nature have always been central in curricula and textbooks of worldview education. As we have found in our parallel study on the human-nature relationships in Finnish worldview textbooks in Lutheran and Orthodox religious education for grade 1 and 2 in basic education (Zilliacus et al., in press), the separation between humans and non-human nature appears strong overall in Finnish textbooks. Based on De Groot’s and van den Born’s (2007) four metaphors of human-nature relationships as Master, Steward, Partner and Participant we concluded that the former two metaphors, which reflect human-centred and hierarchical relationships, were strongly apparent in textbooks, whereas the latter two metaphors reflecting interconnected and non-hierarchical relationship were rarely present. Animal ethics has not been introduced as a subject of inquiry in the Finnish early years of schooling (Aarnio-Linnanvuori, 2013). In the Finnish core curriculum, non-human animals are framed as resources in food production throughout the early years of schooling, and only in secondary school philosophy courses is animal ethics introduced as a subject of study, leaving “nine years of formal schooling to adopt a welfare framework for teaching and learning about animal use” (Saari, 2021, p. 107).

## Methodology

In this article, we turn to Lutheran, Orthodox and Islam textbooks as well as to Culture, Worldview and Ethics educational material for grades 1-2 to ask how non-human animals, as well as the relation between humans and non-human animals, are portrayed. The material consists of 8 textbooks, 6 assignment books and one digital education unit, all published between 2009 and 2022 that have been used in education during a curriculum that has been in force since 2016 (FNAE, 2016). The book series are *Himmel och jord* [Heaven and Earth] (La1; La2), *Hjärtat* [The Heart] (Lb1; Lb2), in Lutheran education, *Sofian elämä* [Sofia’s life] (Oa1-2) and *Aksios* (Ob1; Ob2) in Orthodox education and *Salam-islamın polku* [Salam – the path to Islam] (Is1-2) in Islam education. There are several Lutheran textbook series, of which we have chosen



two widely used ones. Except for the *Himmel och jord* series, all material is written originally in Finnish; the *Hjärtat* series is analysed as a Swedish translation of a Finnish original. The books are referred to in the analysis section through the above acronyms. Assignment books are referred to through the letter A (e.g., Is1-2A)" (see appendix for full details). Most of the material consists of printed textbooks, but we have also chosen to include a digital educational unit for Culture, Worldview and Ethics, too. We noted quickly that analysing digital educational material has its challenges. While a printed textbook is easier to follow as a narrative, the digital material consists of texts and assignments that may have a clear structure, but that branch out in a way that potentially makes it challenging to perceive. We still found it important to include the material, since digital educational materials are increasing in Finland. Our choice of focus on educational material specifically for the first and second grades also excluded several printed textbooks for Culture, Worldview and Ethics, where textbooks are often written for a wider age gap. There is a lack of research about the use of textbooks (Karvonen, Tainio and Routarinne, 2017), and this also concerns worldview education. In Finland, teachers are free to choose to what extent they rely on textbooks. According to Åhs and Salmenkivi (2022), access to choices of textbooks that depend on the worldview curriculum of the student places pupils in unequal positions.

Through a discourse analysis grounded in Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001), we examine the educational material as discursive products that influence society by creating a version of what can be seen as objective knowledge. In Laclau and Mouffe's version of discourse analysis, objectivity is created through articulations, such as talk, text and actions. Our focus is on how objectivity is created through these kinds of articulations regarding relations between humans and non-human animals. In the case of textbook research, discourses are visible in acts of language as well as in requests for bodily action in the form of textbook assignments that ask students to for instance categorize, fill in or draw links (Mikander, 2016, p.50). Since the material is devised for first and second grade pupils, the texts and assignments are written concisely and clearly. Demands for simplicity require textbook authors to assess critically what is essential to cover. Consequently, it becomes significant what is included in these books and what is omitted. However, the limited amount of text also gives teachers space for interpretation and for making room for other perspectives in teaching practice in the classroom. Our analysis is restricted to the discourses in the educational material. We consider the texts, assignments and images as articulations of discourse. Articulations are included in, but also build and transform discourses (Holmberg, 2015). In the analysis of the material, all references to non-human animals were initially coded in a software program (NVivo). The next step was analysing how these articulations, in the form of text, assignments and images, could be seen to form discourses. We studied how the images and assignments constructed the relationship between humans and non-human animals. Images in textbooks can be considered to either strengthen or question an otherwise dominant discourse. Assignments tend to strengthen discourses in the text by repeating and highlighting what is considered to be core knowledge; however, they also require action from the pupil, thereby connecting the discursive to material action

(see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985/2001, p. 108). The discourses are described and discussed in the following section.

Even though the educational materials represent different religions and traditions, we wanted to focus on the material as an entity for several reasons. Mainly, we wanted to focus on aspects of sustainability and discourses related to the curricular aim of encouraging sustainability in pupils lives and society by supporting students in developing an ethical stance to non-human animals.

## **Portraying non-human animals and human-animal relations**

Non-human animals are present in all of the educational material in this study. The first and second grades cover topics such as the creation, but also description of everyday life during the times of the sacred texts. In these sections, non-human animals are referred to in various ways, providing a context for understanding the world and the position of humans within it. We present three discourses in the studied material: a discourse of separation, a discourse of utility and a discourse of protection and care.

### **Separate and different: Anthropocentric descriptions**

In this section we focus on descriptions of non-human animals in textbooks. These textbooks provide their readers with an understanding of how the world is categorized. We find a dualism where humans are seen as separate from non-human animals and nature. As an example of this explicit separation, a Lutheran textbook describes the creation of nature and non-human animals:

*The water should teem with fish and aquatic animals. Birds shall fly over the Earth, said God. And it was so. God continued to create and made animals that lived on the land. He created animals as big as elephants and animals as small as ants. God was very pleased with what he had created. God wanted there to be someone on Earth who could take care of his creation and enjoy it. Someone who looked like him. Someone who could think and feel. God created man (La1, p. 16-17, all textbook translations by authors).*

In the above quote, humans are articulated as being able to enjoy, think and feel, as opposed to non-human animals that were created earlier and did not have these traits. Considering humans to be the only beings capable of enjoying, thinking and feeling, could be seen as a sign of Cartesian division in which non-human animals were regarded as merely mechanically operating bodies (Skirry, 2005). Describing non-human animals as being unable to think, feel or enjoy, as the text does, has consequences: it could imply that they can be maltreated without consequences (see Singer, 2023).

The digital educational material for Culture, Worldview and Ethics includes a task that asks students to draw three boxes, marked as Plants, Animals and Humans, and to draw two examples of each kind (Cwe, n.d., Luokat 1-2-S4-Luonto ja kestävä tulevaisuus-2 Maaailman synty-Tehtävät). This task is notable since, as will be shown, the Culture, Worldview and Ethics material also has a somewhat different way of approaching non-human animals. Since humans are placed in a separate box from other

animals, they are here discursively positioned aside from animals and nature. The act of categorizing by drawing is an example of embodied construction of discourse or creating an objective understanding of humans as separate from non-human animals. This example shows that even the secular subject of Culture, Worldview and Ethics material includes elements that separate humans from the rest of nature.

An Orthodox assignment book (Oa1-2A, p.79) includes a task where pupils are taught to play God's helper:

*We must remember that all of creation has its own mission and purpose. If you could have been God's helper in creating animals, what kind of animal would you have created? Draw a picture of the animal in your notebook and give it a name. Colour the picture.*

The assignment is another example of the discourse of division between humans and other animals, here also teaching young children to see themselves as creators, superior to the rest of nature. At a time when bioethics and the manipulation of living creatures are real dilemmas that require ethical competence, a task like this would require ethical reflection about the relations between humans and non-human animals in a future where it is in fact possible for humans to 'play God'.

In the Islam textbook (Is1-2, p.25), too, the separation between humans and nature is made clear: "In the world there are people and nature, which includes animals, insects and plants." However, the book cautiously introduces the idea that non-human animals could be compared to humans, as in the following, where two Muslim girls are portrayed looking at an anthill:

*"Imagine if we could understand what they [ants] say," Fatima ponders, like that prophet, Sulaiman... Mohammad also understood the speech of animals, their father reminded. "It would be quite a buzz," Zainab said, and looked at the swarming ant colony.*

Highlighting that the prophet Mohammed understood non-human animal speech could be interpreted as allowing non-human animals to speak, to have a voice, to even have some kind of agency. In the Salam assignment book, belonging to the series, the pupils are even asked to fill in speech bubbles with what they think non-human animals could say. The assignment includes a large picture of a forest and a meadow, where people are interfering with nature, picking berries, one cutting down a tree and another attempting to pick an egg from a bird's nest. Empty speech bubbles come from the mouths of a fox, a deer, a rabbit and a bird (whose eggs are assumed to be taken from the nest). The task is to point out what it is forbidden to do in nature, and to imagine what the non-human animals might say. This approach, attempting to understand human behaviour from a non-human animal point of view, is not generally reflected in the other textbooks in the material, where the anthropocentric perspective is dominant. Non-human animals are portrayed as separate from humans, and here it is understood not as a threat, but as non-human animals being expected to teach humans not to abuse nature and they could thereby be considered 'wiser' than humans, who ought to act better.

### **Categorizing non-human animals through human utility**

Across the material, we found articulations in the form of illustrations of friendly-looking non-human animals, often seemingly passive and in a marginal position compared to illustrations of humans that are placed mid-page and engaged in actions. We consider these articulations to construct a discourse of non-human animals as presented with less intrinsic value, valuable only through their expected service to humans. Non-human animals that are introduced in the textbooks are largely domesticated, such as dogs, cats and rabbits. There are also references to non-human animals used for consumption or labour, such as cattle, sheep, donkeys and camels. Some of the textbooks highlight divisions not just between people and the rest of nature, but also among non-human animals. There are rare references to wild animals, which are often expressed as distinct from domestic, human-friendly animals found in close connection to human habitations: “Hens, pigeons and sparrows were common birds. Eagles and other birds of prey soared high in the sky” (La1, p. 76). Except for referring to birds of prey, the same textbook constructs the categories of non-human animals to protect and be protected from: “Out in the fields the sheep and goats grazed. The shepherds protected them from wolves and other dangerous animals” (La1, p. 76). The wild animals in this textbook are presented as threats, while sheep and goats are portrayed as in danger, needing humans to survive. These positions differ from one another, but both place human actions in the center.

This discourse portrays non-human animals as useful, meaning that it is considered that their function in life is to be useful to humans. Non-human animals are thought to be useful, for instance, in their role as an aid to humans during times when the sacred scripts were written, and that they were created specifically for this purpose: “‘Allah has created horses, donkeys and mules for us to ride and walk on,’ continued the mother” (Is1-2, p. 90). The explicit choice of words in the Islam textbook is a message to the reader that non-human animals are created for humans to use, not just in past times, but also today.

In the Orthodox assignment book (Ob1A, p.79), pupils are asked to draw lines between non-human animals and their tasks. In the left column, there are pictures of a camel, a bull, a hen and a goat. In the right column, there is a plough, a basket of eggs, a small pulling cart and two jars of water. The assignment reads “What do the animals do? Connect the animal with its task.” This assignment is an example of how the creation of embodied discourse can play out, since “what the animals do” is limited to the possible tasks of pulling a plough or a cart, laying eggs or carrying water. When pupils are asked to connect an animal with its task or intended purpose, the act of responding to the assignment is an embodied act of discourse (Mikander, 2016). The role of non-human animals is constructed as objective in the task. The question could have been “What do humans keep animals for?”, but the question “What do the animals do?” relieves humans of the responsibility for their actions, implying simultaneously that being used by humans is in the nature of non-human animals, or the very meaning of their existence. Children who are asked to draw distinctions take part in strengthening this discourse.

Another striking example of bodily construction of discourse is an assignment related to Joseph and Mary's trip (Ob1A, p.64). The text reads: "Joseph and Mary travelled long distances on the back of a donkey. One donkey can walk for an hour at a time." The page includes rows of donkeys, and the assignment is to colour the correct number of donkeys – "How many donkeys are needed a) for a 4-hour walk? b) for a 2-hour walk? and c) for a 3-hour walk?" Within this discourse, there is no room for counter-discursive resistance towards treating non-human animals, here donkeys, as utile objects for humans. The young students are expected to take part in constructing the discourse of donkeys as a mode of transport by colouring them as units.

A Lutheran textbook (La1, p.76) introduces non-human animals in the following way:

*Animals in the world of the Bible - It was common for families to own a few sheep and goats and a donkey. Wool and meat were obtained from the sheep. The goats gave meat, milk, wool and skins. Donkeys were ridden. You could also load things on them. Camels can walk long distances and also survive well in the desert. The merchants loaded their goods onto them. Those who cultivated land often owned oxen. The oxen pulled the plough and were harnessed in front of the wagon. Those who were rich could own horses, which they harnessed to their fine carriages.*

Here, too, the donkeys "were ridden", and they could also be used for loading things. Interestingly, the goats are described as *giving* meat, milk, wool and skin. Describing non-human animals as giving humans food is a particularly topical example of the discourse of non-human animals as instrumental. Not only does this apply to food that humans can take from non-human animals, such as wool, milk, eggs or honey, of which there are several examples found in many of the books: "The cows give us milk, the hens give us eggs and the bees give us honey" (La1, p. 20), but even food that requires non-human animals to be killed – "giving meat". Humans are not presented as taking these products from them, non-human animals *give* them to *us*. While this discourse reflects a common framing of human consumption of non-human animals, one which could be considered to highlight gratitude to nature, the discursive construction nevertheless hides violence and power. Being ridden, milked or killed by humans is not a natural life for non-human animals, even if it is an age-old practice. Texts that veil the hegemonic dominance of humans over non-human animals do not give tools for ethical reflection.

These discursive formulations construct an understanding of animal consumption for food as neutral, natural and unquestionable. This could be considered in the light of sustainability and animal ethics. Meat and dairy industries are major sources of global emissions (Tubiello et al., 2021). As Aarnio-Linnanvuori (2013) shows, discussions about consumer choices linked to food get little space compared to recycling in worldview textbooks, despite their substantial environmental impact. Ethical reasoning about food and its origins is relevant even to young children, since school lunch is an integral part of education in Finland, and all basic and secondary education students are entitled to lunch free of charge. Children's ethical or religious needs are to be considered when planning Finnish school food menus (Finnish National Agency for Education,

n.d.), and discussions about different food cultures often arise in the classroom (Zilliacus, 2014). One example is the origin of the cow's milk served at school lunch. Saari (2021) shows how advertisement narratives about the "milk's journey" obscure the understanding of cow's milk as a product of industrial impregnation and removal of calves from their mothers. The effective advertising by the dairy industry has a strong hold over Finnish food culture, not least in schools. In the following, we move on to discuss the incompatible discourses of utilization, protection and care.

### **Utilization, protection and care: Incompatible discourses**

Finally, we focus on discursive portrayals of how humans are expected to relate to non-human animals. The role of humans as protecting non-human animals is emphasized in the metaphor of the shepherd in several textbooks. We have already shown how the role of humans needing to protect themselves from non-human animals as well as being portrayed as protecting non-human animals from each other, as in the case of the shepherd protecting sheep from wolves.

*"I am a good shepherd," Jesus compared himself to the important profession of his time. [...] The brave shepherd defended the flock without fearing anything. He also took care of the small and weak members of the flock. When danger threatened, the shepherd carried them to safety. A good shepherd defended his flock to the death. (Oa p.112).*

The discourse of protection makes a clear distinction between domesticated animals and animals that pose a threat. Humans are placed in the rational role of sheltering the tame from the wild. The caretaking role is specified in La1, p. 17:

*We have been given the responsibility for taking care of the earth and everything that is here. Animals also have the right to wellbeing. If we take care of nature, humans also have greater wellbeing.*

As caretakers, humans are dependent on non-human nature, but taking care is also portrayed as beneficial to humans. Caretaking is highlighted as an important moral value in the entire material, even though the target is often other humans, such as family and friends. The excerpt above suggests a win-win game, where both non-human animals and humans benefit from human protection. Taking care is portrayed thereby as both a duty and a benefit for humans. In some of the educational material, there are tangible examples of the role of humans as caretakers, as in the following Islam textbook, where children and grandparents help and protect domestic animals in various ways:

*Grandma and grandpa gave everyone their own chores. Fatima was responsible for taking care of the ducks and chickens by bringing them food and drink. Adam and grandpa looked after the sheep. Father took care of the cows and gave them water and fodder. Mother and grandmother were preparing food and sister Zainab put herring in the cat's bowl. [...] Now it was meal time. Everyone was in the kitchen eating homemade food. Grandma told us that we had to take care of the animals and give them food and drink and call the vet if they got sick. It was nice to be in the country helping grandma and grandpa take care of the animals. Fatima thought, I have*

*learned that God has created animals for the benefit of humans. We must not tease animals. We should treat and care for them well. (Is1-2, p. 91-92)*

As spelled out in the quote above, the discourse of utility does not rule out the need for protection and care. Fatima's line of thought goes from considering her caretaking responsibilities, to having learnt that God created animals for human use, and back to the perception that humans are supposed to treat animals well, taking care of them and not torturing them. From the point of view of animal ethics, this quote raises questions. Humans are explicitly portrayed as responsible for non-human animal wellbeing and expected to utilize non-human animals. What does this mean for society's most pressing animal ethical questions, ranging from the meat industry to pollution and the extinction of species?

While the textbooks are generally careful not to blame humans for any destruction of nature, we find some elements of criticism. One Lutheran textbook (Lb2, p. 24) includes suggestions about what children can do to protect nature. "Man's task is to take care of nature – the trees, plants and animals. Everyone can help. Just like the ants pull straws to the hill, everybody must participate." The text contains one of only a few references to insects, here portrayed as a guide for humans. The Culture, Worldview and Ethics material includes a task where students are asked to make responsible choices and take responsibility for their choices with regard to sustainability. Students are asked to raise their hands if they concur with certain statements and squat down if they disagree. The statements include "I take care of my pet", "I would help an animal in need". This assignment expresses taking care of and protecting nature. However, the digital Culture, Worldview and Ethics material also includes a large segment about endangered animals and their protection. The protection of these non-human animals is highlighted as necessary. The ethics material includes a lengthy description about endangered white-backed woodpeckers and their living conditions. Students are asked to watch a video about the Saimaa ringed seal, another highly endangered animal:

*Watch the video and memorize important things [link to video: Only protection can save the Saimaa seal]. Choose the correct answer to the following question. What do Saimaa seals need to watch out for to survive? Fishermen's nets/Human-made holes in ice/Environmental toxins. (Cwe, n.d, Luokat 1-2-S4-Luonto ja kestävä tulevaisuus-3 Luonnonsuojelu-Tehtävät-Uhanalaiset eläimet 1)*

The students are expected to take the perspective of the seal in the task, as the question "What do Saimaa seals need to watch out for in order to survive?" While humans are understood to be responsible for the suggested answers, humans do not play the main role. This discursive framing is predominant in the section about endangered animals in the material. It states that the reason for the protection of non-human animals is the fact that they are at risk of extinction: "Wolverines are found in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. There are less than three hundred of them in Finland, which is why they are protected." (Cwe, n.d.,S4-Luokat 1-2-Luonnonsuojelu). Again, humans are not central, in fact, they are either given a very peripheral role or the negative role of threatening the endangered animals' existence. The descriptions of the endangered animals in the Culture, Worldview and Ethics material is an example of a discursive

element that challenges the anthropocentric worldview that is otherwise dominant in worldview educational material. In this counter discourse, protection and care are disconnected from utility, and the human perspective is secondary, as the quotes above show.

As we see it, the conflicting perspectives of protection, care and utilization towards non-human animals, which is dominant in most religious educational material, makes it impossible to consider animal ethics seriously. As we have shown in our previous study on textbooks in Lutheran and Orthodox religious education (Zilliacus et al., in press), a discourse on God as an ultimate protector and saviour in times of crisis was important for humans' role in relation to non-human nature. God was described as an ultimate protector of the wellbeing of both humans and non-human nature. This can support children's feelings of faith and trust in the world and the future, but may also support a passive and naive attitude towards the surrounding world and developments that humans need to confront and take responsibility for. While it might be understandable that young children should not feel overburdened about this crisis, the combination that is portrayed points to a challenging position.

## **Concluding discussion**

The focus of this study is on how non-human animals, as well as the relation between humans and non-human animals, are portrayed. The results show that Finnish worldview educational material for the first and second grades constructs a separation between humans and other animals. This discourse is particularly visible in textbook descriptions about creation, where humans are portrayed as capable of thinking and feeling in contrast to non-sentient animals. Secondly, we highlight a discourse of utilizing non-human animals. This discourse is exemplified by descriptions of non-human animals used for labour, but notably also as food. We found that consuming animals as food was portrayed as natural, such as in the articulations "cows give milk" and "goats gave meat, milk, wool and skin". Thirdly, we found that the discourses concerning the care, protection and utility of non-human animals often intertwine in a way that makes discussions about animal ethics complicated to engage in.

The role of non-human animals connects profoundly with ethical questions. Through these debates, it is possible to connect with discussions about the conditions and rights of contemporary humans as well as present and future life on Earth, topics which are strictly dependent on the conditions of nature (see Saari, 2021). The results of our study clearly point to a contrast between current worldview education material and discussions about animal ethics. Non-human animals are portrayed differently depending on their instrumental value to humans. Some non-human animals are cared for, others considered threats, but caring is often connected to utility. The studied material introduces young children to an indistinct and uncritical discourse about humans' relationship with non-human animals.

When the curriculum encourages ethical discussions, but the textbooks provide uncritical statements, teachers are caught in a difficult situation and left with few tools.



In Leppänen's (2016) study, a large majority of student teachers believed that animal rights should be brought up in early school years. The student teachers unanimously agreed to the claim that students should be brought up to treat all animals as equally valuable. However, they simultaneously disagreed with the claim that the school should encourage students to have a vegetarian diet. This dilemma is just one example of how difficult it can be to navigate the educational discussions on animal ethics that arise in classrooms in both the early years and later. Teachers who deal with difficult questions, such as pondering why humans make decisions that are against their ideas of what is good, are generally not supported by the educational material that has been the focus of this study. The question of meat and dairy production is a good example of this kind of difficult issue. Learning about non-human animals and their conditions helps enhance empathy and encourages ethical discussions (Young, Khalil and Wharton, 2018). Thereby, there is a need for a more transparent and scientific base for discussions about choices for young people.

It is important that educational material provides a current research-based interpretation of the relationship between non-human animals and human beings. Worldview education textbooks could support discussions about animal ethics in a safe classroom environment. Ethical problems should be treated in a serious and credible manner, but they should also provide opportunities for empowerment, considering emotions, and instilling hope (Pihkala, 2017). A focus on non-human animals within ethical debates could mean questioning mundane habits and topics. Questions like "Should humans eat meat?", "Should animals be kept in factories?", "Is hunting ethically defensible?" and "Is it right to own a pet?" are pertinent. While not all these questions are equally relevant for small children, at least some of them do touch upon children's lives. Our research shows that questions such as these are largely invisible within worldview education textbook materials for young children.

The textbooks we have discussed in this article are not religious documents built on sacred scripts but constructed for the Finnish educational system. Typically, textbook authors are not specialized in questions related to the relationship between non-human animals and human beings. Their perceptions and views might not reflect debates about animal ethics within society and religions. It would be important for authors to update their conceptualizations carefully or have the produced texts checked by specialists within ethics prior to publication. There are reasons to continue studying these issues and develop educational material that relies more on ethical research. As Nussbaum (2023) suggests, moving towards more ethically responsible stances towards non-human animals is possible within various worldviews. While ethical questions are not easily solved, it would be important for young students to learn to develop their own judgements and their own solutions.

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## Appendix: School textbooks analysed

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