

Could Eating other Creatures be a Way of Discovering their Intrinsic Value?

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ABSTRACT

This contribution¹ is based on a conference theme, namely “Radical Ecological Conversion after *Laudato Si’*: Discovering the Intrinsic Value of all Creatures”, hosted at the Pontifical Gregorian University, from 7 to 8 March 2018. It puts an affirmation of the intrinsic value of other living creatures to the test. How could one eat such creatures *and* affirm their intrinsic value? This dilemma will be unpacked through critical reflection on each of the key terms in the conference theme with the addition of two others, namely “eating” and “way”, while the “all” in “all creatures” is tested for its inclusivity.

A Multi-layered Dilemma

Intuitively, eating another form of life may serve as a prime example of treating that form of life in terms of its instrumental value (for sustenance) and not its intrinsic value. This applies whether that form of life is animal, vegetable, fruit, nuts, seeds, grass or organic residues. It also applies whether the eater is human, animal, insect or plant. Admittedly, plants (except for carnivorous plants) do not “eat”; they have the ability to absorb minerals from the soil and to produce organic material through photosynthesis. Whenever organisms other than plants eat, they eat organic material. They have several options here: eating them alive, killing them first, relying on other members of the species (or other species) to do the killing, waiting for them to die first, or waiting for the organism to become decomposed.

This rudimentary observation poses an intriguing dilemma for any attempt to “discover the intrinsic value of all creatures” and to call for “radical ecological conversion”. There are multiple layers of this dilemma that need to be unpacked.

First, there seem to be limits as to how far one can go in recognising the intrinsic value of *other* creatures; at some point one has to eat. Would it not be

1. An earlier version of this article was published in a truncated form in a non-accredited journal as Ernst M. Conradie, “Eating other Creatures and Discovering their Intrinsic Value”, *The Ark: The Magazine of Catholic Concern for Animals* 239, 36-44.