

CARNAL: Eco-Ethical Articulations of Body, Meat, and Flesh

A Project sponsored by the Velux Foundation January 2024-December 2027

1 Introduction to the problem and how we approach it

Everyone must eat, but how to understand the contested aspects of meat in daily meals? Everyone needs a place to live, but how to perceive the interplay between concrete human and more-than-human bodies in humanly constructed habitats? These sweeping questions of who eats whom, and how homes are related to habitats, are core to ecological sensibilities of everyday life and to emplaced political life.

In this research project, theologians and anthropologists help rethink actual conflicts in ecological articulations of the materiality of shared flesh. Through the concepts of interacting *bodies* (non-human and human organisms), *meat* production and consumption (food from farms to forks) and *flesh* (the shared materiality of the world) this project probes into how the *carnal* (embracing body, flesh, and meat) can be operative in lived ecological ethicalities today.

Meat production and consumption, central to the world's strongest economies, are also central to scientific investigations and public recommendations for major processes of adaptation and mitigation in relation to the global ecological crises. CARNAL zooms in on the important transformational processes reconfiguring the relations between the perception of non-human bodies, domesticated and rewilded flora and fauna, and the production of red and green meat. We do so in the wider context of an ecological rethinking of what it means to live a carnal existence in world where nature and culture morph deeply into each other. Building on anthropological and theological studies, the project seeks to develop new conceptualizations of the relation between humanity and nature in a potentially enchanted world, recharged by interlaced biological agencies.

CARNAL expands the ethical tradition of self-care and care for other humans into an ecologicalized ethics of care. We focus on everyday dilemmas and options for change in the areas of consumption, biodiversity, and conceptions of everyday human interactions with the corporeality of ecological networks. To this end, CARNAL develops a conceptual tool of three interrelated, malleable, and yet analytically distinct aspects of ecology: *The first ecology* addresses the environment as a non-human alterity, perceived as “wild,” “raw”, or potentially “enchanted.” *The second ecology* addresses environments as cultured landscapes, gardens, and cities wrought through human stewardship, using ever-evolving technologies that reshape “nature”. *The third ecology* views all human beings as deeply intervoven or “entangled” with the environment. In this perspective, humans are decentered and part of nature-culture networks.

From this shared analytical platform outlined by Rubow 2020, 2022, adapted by Gregersen 2022 and based on Pálsson’s conceptualization of “paradigmatic human-environmental relations” (1996), CARNAL points to three potentially conflicting ethical commitments with roots in both academic traditions:

- **Ecology1** consists of *ethics of self-withdrawal* from one-sided environmental exploitation. In ecotheology foregrounded in Jensen 1976, 2011; in anthropology by Candea et al. 2015 and Ginn 2014.
- **Ecology2** relates to various *ethics of intervention* that carefully implements political and technological solutions, developed in a plethora of ethics of care. In anthropology, among others, by Mattingly 2014 and Tronto 1993; in theology, e.g. by Midson 2017 and Hefner 2000.
- **Ecology 3** unfolds an *ethics of entanglement* with an appreciation of natural processes as something that “resonates” with human beings, even if sometimes constituting a threat.

In anthropology advanced by Latour 1993 and Ingold 2012, 2020; in theology by McFague 2008 and Gregersen 2019a; 2020.

Our guiding hypothesis is that ecologies¹⁻²⁻³ are intertwined in lived ethical practices, and we employ and tests the fertility of this analytical platform in selected anthropological and theological studies with interlinked interfaces between body, meat, and flesh. Our research design outlines cases centred on meat, meals and animal bodies in Danish contexts that allow for collective fieldwork, shared empirical material, and an iterative dialogue between the research participants.

2 State of the Art and Theoretical Contexts

Environmental sensibilities arise at the interface between everyday human choices and wider socio-cultural and cosmological frameworks. This project seeks to overcome conventional divisions within environmental ethics by a new interdisciplinary approach. We believe our ecologies¹⁻²⁻³ framework has relevance for other disciplines as well, but we have chosen to focus on the challenging, yet obvious task of bringing anthropology and theology together. In times of ecological crises, we are in dire need for new scholarly articulations of the materiality we share as earthlings.

In philosophy, environmental ethics is usually clustered in anthropocentric (Thompson 2017; Norton 2013), sentience-centered (Gruen 2017; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011), biocentric (Palmer 2017; Lanza and Berman 2010; Taylor 1986), or ecocentric (Cafaro 2017; Rolston 1989; Næss 1973) positions. None of these clusters offers an one-size-fits-all approach to ethical issues emerging in the green transition, since climate change and species extinction have already diluted barriers between humanity, non-human beings, and ecosystems. CARNAL contributes to a *lived* environmental ethics by taking a *case-sensitive approach* capable of integrating hitherto separated aspects of environmental ethics in the understanding of contested forms of concrete bodies and concrete meat. While CARNAL is inspired by concepts of “vital

matter” regarding shared flesh (Bennet 2010), especially when coupled with an organismic perspective (Bennett 2020), we are more hesitant about the approach of the “object-oriented ontology” (Harman 2018), since it risks evading the concreteness of interacting bodies, and eluding the call for human responsibilities within ecological ethics (Hendlin 2023).

CARNAL, by contrast, explores a *lived ecological ethics of care*. Self-care has been a central topic in existential philosophy since Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927). The Judeo-Christian tradition has prioritized inter-human care too, especially of vulnerable persons one can see, recognize, and respond to (Lévinas 1961/1969; Løgstrup 1956/1997; Jeanrond 2010). For long-time survival, it is urgent to expand the call for care to the *more-than-human* as well as to *future* interweavings of humannature entanglements.. This expansion requires a stretching of our ethical imagination and spheres of responsibility. This is crucial when addressing largescale ecological developments such as (a) the invisible and (sometimes) relatively distant climate changes (Hulme 2020; 2009), (b) the loss of species, including critters for which most of us do not, indeed cannot, feel sympathy (Ginn 2014; Ginn, Beisel, and Barua 2014; van Dooren and Rose 2011), and (c) the life conditions of future generations. A revised idea of human stewardship must thus include a longitudinal and more-than-human approach (Baumgartner 2017).

By combining anthropological and theological concepts and pointing to lineages as well as conflicts between the ethical perspectives of ecologies¹⁻²⁻³, CARNAL seeks to overcome the above mentioned divisions in environmental ethics. By investigating both environmental conflicts and the moods and motivations for concerted action we offer a correspondingly attuned analysis that may inform pathways for positive ecological change.

In our approach to environmental sensibilities we concur with Jecker and Reich 1995 that care entails both anxiety and action. Anxiety characterizes how we relate with alarm to our ecological futures (Pikhala 2020; Clayton 2020) in view of increasingly pessimistic scientific

projections (Tollefson 2020; New et al. 2011), unless concerted actions of adaptation and mitigation are taken at the individual, cultural, and political levels. Our assumption is that both wild, cultured, and intertwined natures can elicit experiences of resonance. Anthropological and theological literature on *resonance* presently intersects creatively with those of sociology, political science and environmental humanities (Kamitsis and Francis 2013, Ives et al. 2017, Haraway 2016, Bennett 2010, Zhang, Howell, Iyer 2014, Rosa 2019, Krøijer and Rubow 2022). CARNAL will build on those and seek out new pathways to collaborative cosmo-ecologies across theology, humanities and the social science.

3 Methods and Interdisciplinary Concept Development

The project contributes to interdisciplinary environmental research through a rare collaboration between the academic fields of anthropology and contemporary theology . Historically, the two disciplines have been at odds with one another. While early anthropology and sociology acknowledged Christianity’s influence on secular modernity, Christianity and its many theologies were generally treated as “obvious” or “known” phenomena that therefore “does not require fresh and constantly renewed examination” (Cannell 2006:3). Since early anthropology challenged Christian theologies by relativising Christianity as one religious imaginary among others, genuine interchange between the disciplines rarely occurred (Rubow 2008).

Over the past two decades, the situation has changed. Recent methodological proposals for a coordination of anthropology and theology envision a “mutually generative dialogue” (Bielo 2018), in which neither discipline surrenders its methodological and analytical particularities (McGrath 2018) but commits to an open-ended cooperation that is genuinely transformative on both parts (Robbins 2020). CARNAL is committed to a vision of this sort. Following the approach of anthropologist Joel Robbins, theologians and anthropologists in CARNAL engage one another symmetrically—as empirically oriented researchers, but also as mutually stimulating theorists that permit scholars on both sides to

“ask new kinds of questions rather than only to answer their usual questions in slightly fuller ways” (Robbins 2020: 152). The primary methods deployed differ, however: anthropologists investigate on site ethicalities in selected ethnographic fields, while theologians describe ethically loaded everyday phenomena (such as shame and resonance). Following the ecophilosopher K.E. Løgstrup (1997; 1995), Niels Henrik Gregersen (NHG) supports the philosophical methods of a cosmologically and ethically sensitive phenomenology in their interdisciplinary theologies (Christoffersen 2021; Gregersen 2017); Cecilie Rubow (CR) and Matti Weisdorf (MW) contribute with novel conceptualizations of the eco-ethicalities arising in their ethnographic field material (Bielo 2018; Lemons 2018). By working together, the situation-based phenomenology includes anthropological findings, and anthropological analyses are developed in conversation with phenomenological sensibilities. The interdisciplinary dialogue will thus enable collaboration regarding the *concreteness* of ethical practices (e.g., choosing a beverage in the supermarket, witnessing rewilded nature) in their *cosmological* entanglement (the environmental implications of local practices). A shared ethos of the CARNAL-project is that ethical reflections must be informed by concrete cases, on-going dialogues, and communicated to multiple arenas in the broader public.

4 Project Members

Niels Henrik Gregersen (PI), Cecilie Rubow (Co-PI), one PhD (NN), and two prospective postdocs, one in theology (NN) and one in anthropology. A PhD student with background in theology and/or ethics working on the theology and ethics of domesticated animals will complete the team, expectedly from October 2024. Anthropologist Matti Weisdorf (MW) was elected postdoc from January 2024, and the postdoc in theology is expected to be hired from October 2024.

CARNAL builds on previous major projects. NHG was Co-PI in the UCph *Star Research*

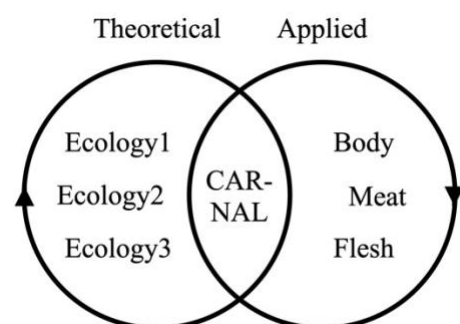
Center for Naturalism and Christian Semantics (2008-2013) and Co-PI in the UCph Interdisciplinary Excellence Programme *Changing Disasters* (2013-2017). NHG is currently director of the *Center for Science and Faith* at UCPH (2023-June 2024, co-director July 2024-June 2026). CR was PI of the DFF-funded *Enchanted Ecologies in Scandinavia* project (2018-2022) with MW as a PhD fellow. CR has extensive experience with collaborative research processes (Blok, Rubow et al. 2017), and has studied ecotheologies in Denmark and Oceania (Rubow 2016, 2020, 2022), and MW has long-term fieldwork experience among biologists working on rewilding projects (Weisdorf 2022).

The ethos of the project is that disciplinary and interdisciplinary work cycles go together. Anthropologists and theologians do ethnographic field work with a sense of the ecological articulation of ethicalities in their fields, just as theologians and anthropologist do phenomenological and textual analyses sensitive to the in-situ material.

5 Project Hypothesis and Applications

Following the pragmatist approach of philosopher Nicolas Rescher, CARNAL combines ‘theoretical work cycles’ with ‘applied work cycles’ (Rescher 1992:129-182). Theoretically, the project develops the dynamical typology of three ecologies relating to (1) nature as non-human, or more-than-human *alterity*, (2) nature as a space for human *stewardship and intervention*, and (3) nature as an *entangled network* of human-culture interactions.

Within this threefold typology, the applied work cycles focus on *meat* (food commodities) in the context of habits of social *meals* (WP 1-2), and on the understanding of living *bodies* in the wider context of shared *flesh*, the materiality of all beings (WP 3-5). The hypothesis is that neither non-human and human bodies nor meat can be understood apart from their ‘fleshy’ or matter-based ecological entanglements. So, green or red meat (ecology12) cannot

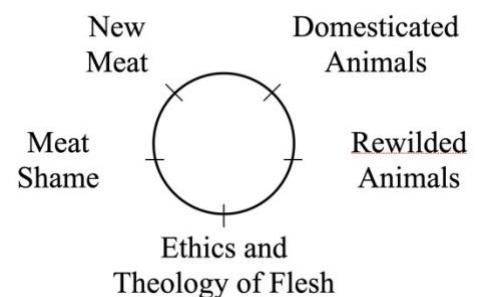


be understood apart from social meals that involve a deep human-nature entanglement (ecology3).

CARNAL presents an alternative to the view of leading ecothinkers that all boundaries between human beings and their environments should go, since nature has no boundaries (Næss 1973; Morton 2007; 2018). Thus, we keep the sense of alterity of ecology1 in mind. The Ecology1-3 model is an attempt to develop a theoretical grid for giving full due to different ecological problems, not only in ecology3 but also related to ecology1-2.

6 Research Design: The Synergy of the five WPs

The synergy of the project is provided by its shared theoretical platform and by addressing the inner relations between interacting bodies, meat, and flesh as particular expressions of Ecologies1-2-3. The *meat*-perspective to be addressed by anthropologist CR and the prospective



postdoc in theology; the concept of rewilded and domestic bodies by anthropologist MW and the theological PhD (NN); and the ethical and theological idea of shared corporeality by NHG. The ecologized ethics of lived care is shared by all project members, with a particular emphasis on body-based resonance experiences with nature.

WP1 New meat (CR): Through multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, in co-operation with COOP and COOP crowdfunding, this WP investigates the translation from meat to meals in new green food commodities. Inspired by commodity chain ethnographies (e.g West 2012) an analytical framework of Ecology1-2-3 will be developed by focusing on critical social transformations and affective effects of meat as both flesh and body. The study will contribute to the ethnographically informed field of sustainable consumption (Appadurai 1988; Isenhour 2019; Bell, Swaffield, and Peeters 2019) and to the sociology of mundane normativity in food production and consumption (Halkier 2022, Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012). The

ethnographic design will follow two low-carbon products (using red meat from a regenerative cattle farm and from plant-based meat) through all (or most) of the stages from farm to dining table. The last stages are co-designed with WP2 with a focus on the reception of new, local low carbon types of red and green meat at Danish folk high schools.

WP2 Meat shame and sociality (Postdoc, NN): In times of ecological crisis, *meat shame* is an increasingly widespread phenomenon. This WP explores the phenomenon of meat shame and its social contours in a theoretical and empirical perspective. In existential shame theory, meat shame is often ambiguous dynamic, oscillating between an anxious, destructive shamefulness and an active, constructive force in the pursuit of a perceived good (Landweer 1999, Christoffersen and Hjortkjær 2021). Developing the theory within the specificities of the green transition, together with WP1, this WP explores the sociality of meat shame empirically at two Danish folk high schools with distinct food policies through field observation and interviews with students, teachers, and leaders. Thereby, the WP investigates young people from the hypothesis that meat shame is constructive if experienced within an overarching ecological consciousness that combines *awe* of the alien nature (Ecology1), a sense of *calling* to take responsibility for nature, while also using nature for meals (Ecology2), and an honest *insight* into how human beings have already interfered with nature (Ecology3). Ethical concerns such as animal welfare, the climate crisis, and the difficulty of changing habits during a complex, socially invested everyday life are at stake.

WP3 Rewilded bodies (MW): To address current and alarming rates of biodiversity losses, increased space for natural ecological dynamics and processes in Denmark and beyond is regularly highlighted (Crist et al. 2021; Ejrnæs 2017; Wilson 2016). In accordance with this idea, the Danish government decided to initiate the establishment of 15 supposedly self-governing nature national parks around the country (Ecology 1), guided by principles of *rewilding*, key among them the introduction of large, feral herbivores – so-called taxon-

replacements of the mega-fauna of yore. Biodiversity scientists and advocates generally salute this ethos of ‘giving nature first priority,’ but the scheduling of the national parks have also triggered local ire. Such ire is centred, above all, on the lives and wellbeing of large herbivore bodies – the introduced horses, cattle, or moose. While supporters of rewilding emphasize the unprecedented level of freedom afforded to these mammals, detractors see them utilized as biodiversity machines, unnecessarily exposed to hunger and illness in the name of little-regarded floral and faunal life (Ecology 2). Taking the nature national parks of Gribskov and Teglstrup Hegn as its point of departure, the project explores rewilding as one site for the negotiation and articulation of an ecologized care (possibly Ecology 1, 2 and 3), and it seeks to shine a light on ethicalities at play in this skirmish of ‘nature-lovers’ and the political potential they proffer. To this end, WP3 will feature sustained conversations with and work among planners and managers from the Danish Nature Agency as well as local stakeholders who actively and visibly support or oppose the implementation of rewilding. In so doing, WP3 mines the anxieties and “ethical doings” (Bellacasa 2017) implied in and realized through rewilded bodies.

WP4 Theology and ethics of domesticated animals (PhD, NN): This PhD-project will critically use and test the Ecology1-2-3 typology on the leading ecotheological views on animal husbandry and domesticated animals. In collaboration with WP3, this WP explores and compares different forms of human-nonhuman resonance experiences across rewilded and domestic animal bodies. Since Clough (2012; 2020), the theology and ethics of animals has become an emerging field in international ecotheology, not earlier addressed in DK.

WP5 Ethics and theology of the flesh (NHG): This WP develops the intersection between an ethics of resonance experience and the proposal of deep incarnation. Theologically, resonance experiences crisscross the theology of creation and pneumatology. Building on previous work on resonance as attunement to non-human features (Gregersen 2021; 2020; 2019a), NHG argues

that resonance experiences constitute a spiritual source for valuing nature, available both to religious and secular-minded people. While an ethics of resonance is no doubt *anthropogenic*, i.e., driven by a human engagement with nature, it is not necessarily *anthropocentric* (cf. Callicott 1989), but combines valuing nature for its own sake while having spiritual value for humans too. The eco-theology in the K.E. Løgstrup (1995, Jensen 2011) will be rearticulated in light of Hartmut Rosa's body phenomenology and sociological theory of resonance (2019; 2020). Further, inspired by CR (2020), NHG will expand the eco-ethics of the Løgstrup school from focusing only on nature as alterity and an object of care (Ecology1-2), to human-nature entanglements (Ecology3). The ethics of resonance experiences is internally related to deep incarnation, for 'incarnation' does not only refer to the particular 'body' of Jesus of Nazareth, but to the whole world of material 'flesh' (John 1:14). This WP unfolds the ecological implications of deep incarnation as a solidarity of 'all flesh' (Ecology3) and will argue for an extension of the inherited idea of neighbor love, sensitive to the ecological experience of resonance, dissonance, and conflicts between human and non-human bodies (Gregersen 2020; Christoffersen & Gregersen 2019).

7 Embedment, Work Pattern, Internationalization, Projects and Potentials

Embedment: Postdocs and PhD to be employed by the Faculty of Theology. CARNAL to be embedded at the Section of Systematic Theology with its expertise on ethics and collaborate with its Center for Science and Faith.

Work pattern: Bi-weekly collaborative seminars with cross-disciplinary readings, casework, and paper presentations. Two international workshops (one on *Zoom*, one *in vivo*) with stakeholders and collaborative board. Confirmed participation: Social antropologist Joel Robbins (Cambridge University), political philosopher Jane Bennett (Johns Hopkins University), interdisciplinary theologian Jan-Olav Henriksen (School of Theology, Oslo), and

anthropologist Thomas Roland (COOP CMO). Participation in Nordic and international conferences on environmental ethics.

Potentials and Projects: CARNAL promotes the green profile of UCPH, strengthens ecoethical research networks across disciplines, increases the social science awareness at the Faculty of Theology, and facilitates future collaborations with private companies (like COOP). The *research output* includes 2 monographs (NHG and MW). 1 anthology (co-ed. NHG) with three CARNAL chapters. 2 special issues, (a) on Ecologies 1-2-3 (prospectively) in the journal *Zygon* (ed. NHG/CR) with three CARNAL articles, (b) one special issue (confirmed) on *Resonance in dialog: A Journal of Theology* with three CARNAL articles; both Wiley Green-OA journals for UCph authors. Other output to be expected, including public presentations, op-eds in journals, and a summer course on *Environmental Ethics of Care* at UCPH offered to students of theology, social sciences, and humanities.

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