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Animal Justice and Moral Mendacity

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this article is to present the respective representations of and attitudes towards animals in as broad a compass as possible: Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Jewish and Christian, with some references to Gandhi and the secular modern West. The focus will be placed on how Indian and Western religious thought position themselves on the challenges of theodicy and on animal utilization, in light of current philosophical and scientific speculations on the supposed sentience of animals.¹

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Introduction

There is always the risk of romanticization when it comes to tackling the topic of animals, from classical discourses to contemporary practices. There are numerous issues to consider where animals are depicted and represented, or misrepresented. These may pertain to human sacrifice of animals, symbolic imagery in high-order astral practices, mythic and hybrid iconography in ancient mythologies, art and religions. We might next mention the depiction of animals as the denizens of monstrous evil, as a threatening part of “brutish nature,” living out the law of the jungle, and hence requiring to be subdued under the law of the survival of the fittest. Huge dinosaurs, mammoths and other “monsters” – consider the rich imaginary in movies like *Jaws*, *Armageddon*, and *Avatar*, etc. – are

¹ I wish to express gratitude for help with editing the essay to Jessica Paduganan and Farha Naaz, as well as the chief editor and the two anonymous reviewers for their work on the BJRT.

reconstructed (often digitally) or virtually resurrected from fossils and archaeological excavations, albeit without theoretical sophistication, which end up being projected on large cinemascope screens. Then there is the utilitarian deployment of animals in agro-culture, farming – the importance of the poultry, bovine, and other animals species in dietary consumption, but also in game hunting, the circus and the zoo, domestic pet culture, animal guide (for the challenged human), animals pornography, and other unrecorded implicates of animals in the human life-world.

Animals have become indispensable in scientific explorations also: consider how animals provided clues for the supposed missing links in the evolutionary chain of being, with the pioneering works of Lamarck and Darwin (animals were reconfigured, even invented, to fill in certain lacunae in neo-Darwinian theories); Dawkins and Dennett take evolution of organism (by various chance factor) as the side-show in the primordial soup of the Big Bang. Many discoveries in biology begin with or are hypothesized from observations of animal behavior and vivisections, testing of tissue-cells, and extended to pharmaceuticals and drugs that are then dispensed to ailing human beings. The refinement of these products may involve genetic-manipulations and animal experimentation in biomedical laboratories and in psycholinguistic research units. Then there are implants of monitoring devices in animal bodies to monitor their flight paths and behavior in natural and artificial environments. Last but not least, animals are sent to the stratospheric space or deployed in astronomical travels (e.g. chimps and dogs in unmanned rockets), and so forth. These mark the more recent inclusion of animals in the human theoretical and far-reaching geographical epistemologies.

It is somewhat disarming to realize the extent to which the ontology of the non-human animal species is inexorably and pervasively linked with the human imaginary and *Lebenswelt*. What would the human world have been like without animals? Perhaps as human beings have done away with the gods in the modern world and replaced them with cell phones, we may

be on the brink of doing away with vegetation with a disturbingly similar fate awaiting the animal kingdom also. Some philosopher-scholars who are concerned with engaging in ethical reflections and debating theories of justice at large have found in this field of discourse a fertile ground for mining conceptual resources and mapping certain blind-spots and lacunae prevalent in the human moral menagerie. The analogy here is to the sudden ripples felt in the hitherto paternally constructed moral systems – ethics, justice, law, penal codes, “rights of man”, toleration, inclusiveness, etc. – when it was discovered that slaves, women, people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, indeed even minorities and “aliens” (foreigners), may have an inalienable right to liberty, equality, basic capabilities, justice and fairness, along with certain positive rights that entail duties on the part of the state or the dominant majoritarian group that would enable the flourishing of the members of the alienated or segregated groups. Moral antinomies lurk beneath many a good intention that may not be immediately detected, especially when one principle can lead to two contrary, if not clashing, derivative outcomes. And there are likely to be antinomies in respect of human disposition towards animals, their welfare, treatment or neglect of moral considerations, across all traditions, for one cannot assume a priori that this area of possible moral concern toward non-human “individuals” or species was all already sorted out and even fine-tuned before we or the current generation(s) came on the scene. That there really is a no moral problem outstanding here and hence there are no antinomies to boot.

But philosophers within the animal rights and animal liberation groups have been at pains to unearth a number of glaring antinomies and have pointed to a serious and significant moral problem facing human beings’ relation to animals in all the spheres and spaces where animals are involved or implicated. Of course, staunch rationalists may see no real problems with this lack or they may deny that there are any such antinomies because animals in their view do not share the same moral subjective status (as moral agents, moral patients, individuals with equal inherent values,

interests and rights, or jural entities in legal terms, such as corporate); and these despite the talk of 'natural duties', duty of justice (Rawls), non-cruelty/humane treatment, conservation of species or sustainability in the face of ecological degradation, environmental responsibility, and so on. But what does this all say about the reach and desired completeness, much less absoluteness, righteousness, of humanly conceived morality or be it moralism? Can non-humans be accorded moral significance or, more technically, moral considerability, and if so to what degree? There are numerous debates on the intricacies of each of these tropes in the spaces symbolically occupied between humans and animals in our modern times (across disciplines such as philosophy, cultural studies, feminism, as well as pop, media, and film cultures). Where do the religions – and their theologies or respective theodicies - under consideration, stand on these issues and challenges?

I wish to take up a few of these sentiments and put them to test in respect of the claims to moral high-grounds in Indian thought-traditions vis-à-vis mostly Western or biblical traditions, especially in America, turning the focus in this instance – on par with issues of caste, gender, minority status, albeit still within the human community ambience – to the question of animals, and to ask: how sophisticated and in-depth is the appreciation of the issues and questions that are being debated in contemporary circles? What degree of awareness could we say has been present in the traditions, and not just in some perfunctory, platitudinal, belief-based descriptions or prescriptions, but in actual explanatory and morally sensitized senses? I ask these questions because today's animal rights/liberation movements are based largely on moral-philosophical considerations with secular and legal sensitivities rather than on religious or religion-informed philosophies. In fact, someone like Peter Singer chastises religion (by which he means largely Western/Abrahamic traditions) for their animosity towards animals, even though the early roots of animal welfare – e.g. RSPCA/SPCA, anti-cruelty codes, and the first vegetarian movements – were all either Christian

or Jewish based (e.g. Lewis Gompertz; Henry Salt and his Vegetarian Society of London, which re-inspired Gandhi's vegetarianism; or the Seventh Day Adventist who started Sanatarium foods worldwide).² But there have been movements within Christian and Jewish theologies, and grass-roots movements in the West and Israel, as well as in India, to revive and reinterpret orthodox texts, and furnish fresh theo-philosophical grounds for the same arguments and ends that secular animal rights advocates have been striving towards. Morality can have many homes; it is not the exclusive proclivity of secular utilitarian philosophers or a handle-full of animal rights activists. That is my argument.

My aim is first to present the respective representations of and attitudes towards animals in as broad a compass as possible: Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Jewish, and Christian, with some references to Gandhi and the secular modern West. My concern will not be with details, but rather how Indian and Western religious thought position themselves on the challenges of theodicy and on animal utilization, in light of current philosophical and scientific speculations on the supposed sentience of animals. That is to say, how traditions look upon the life-status of animals and justify, or rationalize, the many topographies of evil in respect of the animal kingdom. These topographies include suffering, harm, unnecessary or untimely death at the hands of nature (climactic, environmental, inter/intra-species tussles, uncontrollable diseases, etc.) but also and in increasingly greater proportion, in the hands of (hu)mankind. A framing question I will be addressing is the extent to which orthopraxis have informed ethical views in these traditions, and vice versa. For example, we need to ask at what point and with what degree of compunction or complicity does Judaic thought move from the explicit vegetarianism of Genesis 1:29 to homologizing women and animals (*bestes puantes*) and considering flesh as food?

² Robert Tappan, "Feeding the Children of Abraham," in *Scholarly Works of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)*, 2. Lewis Gompertz was the British founder of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824.

On the Brahmanic-Hindu side, would animal sacrifice in the erstwhile *yajñās* of Vedism have ever sparked off moral conscience vis-à-vis *hiṃsā* (injury/violence), had it not been for Jain and Buddhist disquiet against the grain of *ahiṃsā* (a simple act of adding the negative ‘nañ’-prefix: a moral term that likely did not exist in Brahmanism before the rupture)? Thereafter Hindu texts rise to the occasion and increasingly become staunch advocates of animal care, welfare, proper husbandry, treatment and hospitality – in proportion to the inclusion of animal imagery in religious symbolism and deification. To ignore such penal ordinances (e.g. in *Arthaśāstra*, *Dharmasūtras*, *Nibandhas*, several *Purāṇas*, *Mahābhārata*), would be to risk punitive measures and expiation of the demerit (*prāyaścitta*), here and hereafter. Is modern Hinduism, even as it becomes more secular (cf. Hindu Code Bills), McDonaldized and globalized, after the Gandhian interlude, far behind abrogating the moral inclusiveness of animals in a reformed Hindu ethos? Or will the evangelism and self-righteousness of Hindutva, with its almost absolute embracing “revivification” of vegetarianism, likely to alienate secular Indian animalists by underscoring more of the orthodoxly-religious rather than on moral grounds? Still, India boasts the largest number of *faith-based* vegetarians, followed by Israel.

PART A

Rites over rights: Western origins of sanctified flesh consumption

First, I will present some standard – let us say, “official” – theological views and then offer moral hermeneutical critiques in terms of their relevance and ethical reach toward contemporary challenges and changers in the animal habitat or treatment brought about by technological and consumer-based developments and other “innovative methods.”

In the Torah, Genesis 1:26 states: Then God said, “let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over

all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis 1:29 suggests that people were initially vegetarians living on seed-bearing plants that God gave them. It wasn't until after the Flood (Gen. 9:3) that flesh of animals was permitted for food, and after the exodus from Egypt animal sacrifice also (Jer. 7:22-23). But this appeared to have been short-lived and was never intended to be an absolute prescription.

Of course, the Christian Bible did not interpret 1:26 in the light of 1:29, and took “dominionship” rather literally. So evolved the idea of humanity's prelapsarian stewardship over the rest of nature: God had indeed created nature that it may serve Man. The Jewish tradition, by contrast, has been more circumspect. The key principle or moral intuition that seems to have been the guiding force is the prohibition of inflicting suffering – *tsha'ar ba'alei chayim* in Hebrew – on living creatures. There seems to be some recognition in rabbinical rulings of the physical, psychological, and emotional suffering of animals, and hence the innumerable prohibitions against the over-use and recklessness towards, and abuse of, animals, whether in farming practices, extracting labor from animals, or in human dietary preferences and practices. Religious laws derived from this basic moral intuition have reinforced the duty human have towards non-human animals; however, in practice and especially religious and secular rites, there have been certain ambivalences and inconsistencies that modern scholars have been at some pain to point out.

While hunting and games which involve the death of animals are prohibited as these serve no religious purpose, animals can be slaughtered for food, but only sanctioned specialists who offer certain prayers in the process, and to see to it that blood is fully drained from the flesh, among other things. This rule, along with blessings offered at the table, ritualizes the consumption of flesh. Naturally deceased animals cannot for that reason be used for food, but their by-products, especially the skin and horns may be taken for other purposes. Animal products are used in religious rituals; skin and leather for the scrolls, mezuzah and the tefillin, the shofar

blown at Rosh Hashanah, and Kosher-meat is permitted on Shabbat and Pesach (what we call the Passover feast), and in daily meals as well. These Jewish dietary laws are given in the Torah, and the basic ones are:³

- Certain animals may not be eaten at all. Only animals that are ruminant (chew its cud) and have split hooves may be eaten.
- Of the animals that may be eaten, birds and mammals must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law.
- All blood must be drained from the meat or broiled out of it before it is eaten.
- Meat (the flesh of birds and mammals) cannot be eaten with dairy.

But what exactly is the significance of kosher and kushrat and their implications for moral thinking on animals? Do animals have any rights beyond being part of human rites? Should we talk of animal rites, rather than animal rights? Thus, is there something ambiguous in allowing the beasts of burden to rest on the Sabbath? And yet, apart from enforced rest and strictures on creative work, there seems to be concern for animals underscored in the prohibition against animals laboring on the day of rest (Genesis 8:1). Is a fully-fledged vegetarianism ever entailed in the beneficence shown to animals (Exodus 21:28)? Do we get close to minimal rights of animals in the Hebrew codes? Has contemporary (orthodox and liberal) Judaism countenanced the arguments of one of their own Israeli-Jewish animal liberationists and liberal Rabbis, declaring that the consumption of meat is now halachically unacceptable, and they blame Judaism for sanctioning slaughter of animals for food that through Christianity and Islam also has become a mainstay of Western culture? Although most do not dismiss Judaism for that moral fault, they instead work to build a new moral metaphysics and set of practices to honor more

³ Giora Shimoni, "What are Jewish Dietary Laws?" *About.com Guide*.
<http://kosherfood.about.com/od/kosherbasics/f/jewishdietlaws.htm>

rigorously the originary moral intuitions.⁴

Cheeseburgers are not kosher. But this speaks little of the animals as such.⁵ Likewise, the ambiguity surrounding the beasts of burden to rest on the Sabbath. But the strict adherence here underscores more of a religious based requirement than a moral understanding as such. Elsewhere feeding the animals before humans and allowing animals to have a right in the fruits of their labor, seems to be “based on a recognition of an inter-species moral relationship,” i.e., entitlement ensuing from investment of labor. The subjective qualities of animals possessing desires, feelings, and needs are given due accord. This is more clearly marked in the prohibition against taking a bird’s egg from the nest while the mother is present. Either this is in recognition of the mother’s ownership, hence right, over her own egg, or it may be in recognition of the same kind of attachment that humans have to their offspring, and it would be brutal in both instances to sever that connection. But the beneficence shown in these rules are constrained in two other areas, I shall explain.

When an animal kills or mauls any human person, according to Maimonides, that animal is tried in a court of 23 judges and sentenced to death, destroyed (and its flesh not be eaten), and the owner may be charged with homicide as well. It is a strange, though moral agency that is imputed on the animal when an animal kills out of its own volition, or some instinctual tendency. This renders the animal a jural entity, which no modern law accords to it (though the animal, such as an American Pitbull terrier that mauled a child in Australia was instantly destroyed). It is curious however that when animals are horded away to the slaughterhouses, notwithstanding the supervision of rabbis present that proper religious process is followed, animals are not given the right to defend themselves against being killed by humans, for their own dietary drives! “Oh Lord, thou preservest man and beast” (Psalm 36:7), but not mauled in Slaughterhouse 3. It would seem

⁴ See chapter 6 of Lisa Kemmerer, *Animals and World Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Stephen Moore (ed.) *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

⁵ G. Shimoni, “What are Jewish Dietary Laws?”

crueler to accord moral agency and a fake-right to self-defense in a mocking court, where an impending capital punishment is a foregone conclusion, than to foreclose the same right when the killing is in the reverse direction; this is not a bilateral arrangement, nor balanced in the inter-species inclusion of animals in the human community.

When Kosher Isn't Kosher Anymore (e.g. In the Feed-Lot Enclosure)

Modern challenges and practices of procuring meat has radically transformed since the industrial revolution and much more so with the corporatization of the hitherto village-based animal farming practices. Critics in the secular-rational-utilitarian front are all too aware that the meat industry is a heinously macabre enemy of the animal rather than its friend, for the industry treats animals as an almost inanimate object to be slaughtered and delivered to the dining table of their consumers who are, for the most part, blindfolded from the process and deceptions involved in the manufacture of meat products and its byproducts, their religious predilections notwithstanding. So if today's meat comes from the same abusive factory-farms as do most other meat, notwithstanding rabbinical or halal supervision and/or intervention to see to that prescriptive rules are followed, there are no standards to ensure that the slaughter is any less cruel or is humanely carried out (e.g. not killed before being stunned). In some instances, it has been shown to be much worse, according to animal industry sleuths, such as PETA.⁶

Furthermore, while Abrahamic teachings that, via Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Islamic teachings, form the bedrock of the modern industrialized world, emphasize the grave importance of protecting human health, the consumption of animal products is responsible for numerous diseases including heart disease. And just when over 1 billion people across the world do not have enough food to sustain themselves, our

⁶ "Animal Rights 101," *About.com Guide*. [http://animalrights.about.com/od/animalrights101/tp](http://animalrights.about.com/od/animalrights101/tp;); "USDA's official number of animals killed for food," *Animal Liberation Front*. <http://www.animalliberationfront.com/Practica/FactoryFarm/USDANumbers.htm>

carnivorous diets are at least ten times as wasteful of food resources as a vegetarian one.

We can speak of the number of animal skilled and how many end up in the well-intending dining and festive-celebratory tables (e.g. 280 million of one species of bird are being rounded up for ceremonial slaughter each year in the US for Thanksgiving feasts). Animals slaughtered in the US amounted to nearly 10.2 billion land animals and 52 billion sea animals in 2010. (Thus, a total of about 63 billion animals per annum.) This USDA figure does not include another 875 million animals that died from lingering deaths due to disease, injury, starvation, suffocation, maceration, or other atrocities of animal farming and transport; nor those in the wilderness killed by hunters, game-shooters, in-pounds, animal experimentations, laboratory research and genetic engineering, nor wildlife displaced by animal agriculture and human habitat developments, construction of dams, new housing zones, roads, waterways, etc., nor wildlife directly killed by farmers with the use of pesticides, traps, Monsanto's terminator seeds and other methods. Since the U.S. is a net exporter of both live animals and processed meat, the number of animals actually consumed in the U.S. is less than the number killed. Add to these, the numbers of land and sea animals (including whales) exported live or slaughtered, and from other countries across the globe, increasingly China, India, Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands, Russia, Latin America and African countries. Thus for example, India became the world's largest source of buffalo meat in 2012, ahead of Brazil. Buffalo meat is cheaper than beef. The Indian government has invested heavily in abattoirs. Recently released Ministry of Food Processing data showed that India exported 1.89 million tons of beef in 2012-2013, which is a 50 percent increase over five years ago. India's buffalo meat exports have nearly tripled since 2009, rising to 1.65 million tons in 2012, according to USDA figures.⁷

⁷ For more information see "Annual Report" in "Reports & Downloads," Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://www.mofpi.nic.in/>; for updated USDA statistics on exports, see "Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and Trade," United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, last modified April 2015,

There is also concern among ecologists and environmentalists on the huge impact the massive meat industry has on natural resources, drainage on the land, water usage, pollution (from the methane gas that cattle produce and the waste from the slaughterhouses), and other unmitigated consequences of the carnivorous fealty (which Michael Pollan and others have begun to bring to public consciousness). Animals have become just a veritable fodder for the excesses of human desires and commodified life-style.

A question arises: why do we not grant the same legal protections to animals while they are on the farm as we do in the case of domestic pets in the home, who may even be afforded full funeral rites upon their death? What has happened to the principle of universalization and universalizability that the Enlightened fathers, notably Kant, put forward? But of course they had not conceived of a sui generis animal ethic at all. Preference was given to negative utilitarianism that argues for the reduction of animal pain and which does not use the language of universal rights or equitable moral universalizability for animals; rather, it speaks of duty of care and respect and regard for the interests and desires of animals, on a par with human sentient beings, as one has towards one's under-aged children and aging parents (more usually than not in hospice care).

PART B

The Indian Animal: Animals and Ecology in the Pre-Vedic Age

It is generally believed that the Indus valley people (as far back as 10,000 BCE) domesticated several herbivorous wild animals. They trained those animals for use in agriculture, travel and hunting. Their settlements were on river banks, amidst dense jungles and forests and hence they maintained a close relationship with the natural environment. They superimposed a supernatural force on every aspect of nature and worshipped these. Trees and animals were objects of adoration and they treated them as the

accessed July 2, 2015, http://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/livestock_poultry.pdf

manifestations of a higher order (*ṛta*).

Hence, it is the cow who occupies a pride of place in several hymns of the *ṚgVeda*. The cow, its variegated species, and their habitat, are described in the texts in glamorous details. The sages considered the cow as the personification of motherhood, fertility, and liberty. The cow, like the horse, was also given as “gift of good milk cow” (*dakṣinā*). The cow was compared to the goddesses such as *Prṣṇi*, *Aditi* and *Ushās*. Rain was regarded as nothing other than the milk pouring from the udder of a cow. It is therefore not surprising that in the early Vedic period, the cow was killed for sacrifice as the main offering (*havis*), because it was seen to have such resemblance; and this earthly “good” might well be sufficient to please the gods who would, for their part of the bargain, return rain and calves a plenty.⁸ The cow, owing to her apparent intelligence, patience, and acquiescence, was adjudged as among the best sacrificial animal (*yājñīya pasu*). As Laurie Patton noted:

...as many Vedic hymns and later ritual texts... indicate, sacrifice of an animal into the fire was part of the ecological balance in the ancient Vedic world; the killing and distribution of the animal was part of a larger understanding of human harmony with natural forces.⁹

The *ṚgVedic* people then regarded animals as an integral part of their agrarian and pastoral culture. The deification of animals, apart from the sacrificial theology, probably also indicated a gesture towards animistic beliefs among the indigenous and non-Aryan groups in the region. So it wasn't that there was total, unconditional prohibition of the consumption of animal flesh, whether from the sacrificial offerings or from other sources.¹⁰ Male calves and bulls were regularly eaten in ancient India. Any cattle that

⁸ *ṚgVeda* (RV) I.16.114.10; RV X.169.3/II.7.5., X.91.14.

⁹ Laurie Patton, “Nature Romanticism and Sacrifice in *Ṛgvedic* Interpretations,” in *Hinduism and Ecology*, eds. Chris Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Cambridge: Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 43.

¹⁰ For an argument that the “holy cow” was neither sacredly regarded nor prohibited for consumption as part of the regular diet of the early Hindus, from *ṚgVedic* times (barring a few lines underwriting the prohibition in the *Arthaveda*), see the controversial account by D. N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (New Delhi: Matrix Books, 2004).

naturally died could be eaten, its meat dried and sold.

The lesson to be gleaned here is that how, historically speaking, the killing of animals and their distribution otherwise was part of a larger hermeneutic of the harmony of the human life-world with the natural forces; what it might mean to re-disperse the natural world in the process of rejuvenation; what it might mean to hasten the processes of life and death; and how the tropes of harmony with nature *and* sacrifice could well converge, in short, toward a kind of redistributive justice in the context of the natural environment.¹¹

Ecology in the *Purāṇas*

Apart from registering the unity of all sentient (*chetana*) and non-sentient (*achetana*) beings, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* informs us that gods, men, animals, reptiles, and birds, are but the various forms of the creator Brahma since these have emerged from his limbs. Mention is also made of the need to safeguard the interests and needs for times yet to be: *bhaviṣya*. It is interesting that such a feature-regarding comparison is made long back in the *Purāṇa*. And so the argument by the best inference goes a fair way towards supporting an ecological perspectivism that is not confined contingently to the interests and needs of the current generation, but factors in the predictable depletion of resources exacerbated by the excesses (e.g. exponential) growth of the population burdensomely on Mother Earth, which more than likely will prove detrimental, if not catastrophic, to the needs and interests of the future generations (*bhaviṣyaloka*), to which they have equal entitlement. This is not only a mark of good ecology, but also of decent moral philosophy.

***Purāṇic* Reasoning on Animal Health-care**

Early Indians took great care in keeping the animal environment clean. *Garuda Purāṇa* prescribes the following medicinal herbs for keeping the

¹¹ Ibid.

elephants healthy: myrobalans (*Terminalia chebula*), *haritaki* (*Chewbulix myrobalan*) and *brahati*. Pastes of several medicinal herbs are recommended for curing several ailments of elephants. Ashoka, the Buddhist Emperor, much later likewise built hospices and veterinarian units for ailing animals.

In the *Arthashastras*, heinous and gratuitous acts against animals are punishable – in respect to their neglect, over-use, abuse, stealing, letting run amok, even negligence by veterinarians, etc. – in the interest of maintaining eco-balance. Nevertheless, the meat of female cows no longer able to give milk was permitted for consumption.

Animals and the Concept of Non-violence (*ahimsā*)

The common ethos emerging through the reflections of *Purāṇas*, *Arthasāstras*, and the epics appears to be this: it is part of the *dharma* of the *rājaniti* that the king and his ministries maximize protection and maintenance of all beings and species that belongs to the earth (*bhauma*). Still, any cattle that naturally died could be eaten and its skin and flesh dried and sold.

The treatises on ethics and religion (*Dharmasātras* and *Smṛtis*), the two epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), and ancient lores (*Purāṇa*), emphasized the fourfold values of life which could be practiced in two ways, i.e., an active life in this world (*pravṛtti*) and renunciation of the world (*nivṛtti*).¹² The virtues of the second tradition perhaps led to the development of non-injury (*ahimsā*) in dharmic traditions. A more compassionate leaning paved the way for a more successful development of non-violent sacrifices in which pulses, cereals, and ghee, were substituted for animals in the sacrificial fire.¹³ The *Mahabharata* declared non-injury as the highest duty to be performed by an individual.¹⁴ The *Bhagavadgītā* provides quasi-

¹² For discussion, see works of Greg Bailey and T. S. Rukmani, “Literary Foundations for an Ecological Aesthetic: *Dharma*, Ayurveda, the Arts, and *Abhijnanaśakuntalam*,” in *Hinduism and Ecology*, eds. Chris Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Cambridge: Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 101-126.

¹³ *MBh Śāntiparvan. P.* CCLV. 24 ff. CCLVII. 4ff. CCLXI. 19; CCLXIV.17.

philosophical grounding for the values extolled in the *Mahabharata* and is more decisive in its ethical pronouncements. It is for this reason that the *Gītā* (for short) has had a profound impact on modern Hindu-Indian thought and is drawn upon obliquely in Western ethical and ecological deliberations as well.¹⁵

Several commentators, including *Śankara*, have observed that the feeling of pain is universalized so as to derive a principle of empathy and non-injury. *Śankara* characteristically commented that one who sees that what is painful and pleasant to himself is painful and pleasant to all creatures, will cause no living beings pain, and that he who is non-injurious is the foremost of yogins.¹⁶ Self-realization in the *Gītā* takes due cognizance of the moral principle of *lokasaṁgraha*, the well-being of all sentient beings. The world of living things is brought together in a process governed by moral cause-effect relationships and makes it imperative for each being within it to respect the autonomy, the interests, and destiny of the other, and ultimately, to find a way out of the cyclic implications of this process.¹⁷

Let me now move to certain contemporary narratives. I will begin with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was acutely aware that the demands generated by the need to feed and sustain human life, compounded with the growing industrialization of India, if not of the world at large, far outstripped the finite resources of nature. This might appear naïve and commonplace with the onset of the 21st century, but such pronouncements were rare as they were heretical at the turn of the 20th century. Gandhi was also adamant about the need for a rigorous ethic of non-injury in the human treatment of animals.¹⁸ More passionately on active environmental renewal projects,

¹⁴ *Sāntiparvan* CCXXXVII 17 ff.; CCLXIV . 19 ff.: *Anu Parvan* CXVI. 72: CXVII, 37-39.

¹⁵ Gandhi, 1962; Naess, 1989, p. 194; Jacobsen, 1996, pp. 231-233; Gerald J. Larson, "Conceptual Resources in South Asia for Environmental Ethics," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, eds. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 267-277.

¹⁶ *Śankara*, 1976, pp. 198-8; Bilimoria and Hutchings, 1988, 36.

¹⁷ P. Bilimoria, *op. cit.*, 17-18.

¹⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *My Socialism* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1969), 34-35.

Gandhi wrote in 1926 that for India the next step should not be destructive agriculture but the planting of plenty of fruit trees and other vegetation as these provide nourishment, stability in the soil, and attracts rainfall, as well as provide fodder for the insect and animal world. He was even worried about silk and wool extractions, and therefore proposed their replacement exclusively with *khādi* (mix of cotton and linen). The implications of such simple ecological wisdom have only just begun to dawn on technologically-suave agriculture economies. Gandhi saw vegetarianism as a moral cause, once stating that he would prefer death to consuming some beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice. He saw the life of a lamb as no less precious than that of a human being. In his little known treatise, *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*, he asserted, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”¹⁹ To Gandhi, vegetarianism was not just a religious principle, but a moral obsession that he spent much time and effort on.

We see some of Gandhi’s thinking reflected in modern-day animal liberation/rights thinking, e.g. in Peter Singer’s argument that the morality of actions should not be determined exclusively in terms of human interests, rather that since animals indisputably have the ability to feel pain and pleasure (i.e. they have sentience), it would be wrong to intentionally cause suffering in animals. This general doctrine of sentientism is meant to be a corrective to the prelapsarian specter of speciesism. One would have to be a “species-ist” to believe that animals are not as deserving of freedom from suffering and subordination brought about by human interests, as is a race of people who are subjugated by another race without justification. Of course, by the same token, one cannot be over-romantic according to this view, about the special “rights”, and so on, on the part of the “animal species”, for this would be tantamount to “reverse species-ism” (analogous to “reverse orientalism”). Rather, a non-anthropocentric and non-species-ist moral perspective is derivable from at least negative utilitarianism and

¹⁹ See Gandhi, *My Socialism*.

underscores human responsibility to nature rather seriously, principally by including animals in the 'expanding' moral community of individuals and by not allowing human interests to subordinate the well-being of animals without justification. On this view, vegetarianism is said also to be morally compelling, for it is only out of selfish human interest, for food and feeling well, that one would have an animal killed and consumed, with relish. One might as well eat one's (or another's) pet(s).²⁰

A contemporary Gandhian ethical argument for discontinuing the slaughter and consumption of the cow (ox, bull, buffalo, or cattle) has been taken up by Maneka Gandhi (wife of the late Rajeev Gandhi, and daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi). Her strident animal rights campaign works through petitioning parliament and the legislature as well as voluntary animal rescue hospices; and one of her major targets has been the slaughterhouses, abattoirs, along the Yamuna River, and tanneries along the Ganga, which have been the major source of pollution of the waters in recent decades.

It can be surmised from the above discussions that just as Brahmanic thought was compelled by the forceful moral concept of non-injury championed by Buddhist and Jain protagonists, and moved it to a more universalistic and pragmatic stratagem, modern-day Asian philosophies (from South to S-E and East Asia) as well, may have yet to learn some more from these traditions and cultures – given their amoral animal praxis, both sacrificial and human consumption (except for pockets of Buddhist and Daoist monastic practices). The concept of *ahimsā* helped change the ancient outlook of a nomadically-driven people and brought about a rejection of the violence involved and perpetrated in Vedic sacrifices. It further helped develop the aligned aspects of non-injury in virtues, fledgling to begin with, such as the Hindu and libertarian ideals of toleration, forgiveness, and equanimity. Thus animals, trees and fauna, for their part as participating subjects, could be said to have played a significant role, directly or indirectly, in the development of Indian morality and the

²⁰ See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990).

practice of preservation of the environment around them. At some point in history Indians could consider it a moral accomplishment to live in harmonious association with fauna and flora without disturbing the eco-components of nature. Whether in real-life practice and in their polity they achieved this or not, remains in some doubt and a subject of much bitter complaint²¹, an ethics is not always measured by its success (consider the problems with utilitarianism, perhaps the most “successful” Western ethics closer to our times) but by its conceptual coherence and broadness of vision. The sentient and the non-sentient creatures and things of nature became increasingly, in the philosophical and devotional (including tantric or wildly esoteric) orientated schools in particular, a part of the microcosm that is seen to be integral to the macrocosm. The forest universities imparted teaching amidst sylvan surroundings. The denizens of forests and jungles drew minimal food from nature for their survival, thus allowing the periodical growth of forests. People who committed crime on animals were severely dealt with by stringent laws. They propounded the philosophy of unitary consciousness in all the creatures of the world and cautioned against the indiscriminate killing of these creatures that would result in their own downfall. This holistic approach grew slowly but appreciably, such that in our times there can be a Gandhi, an Albert Schweitzer (also influenced by Jaina ethics), Arne Naess, the Dalai Lama, Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Medha Patkar, Sunderlal Bahuguna, a staunch Gandhian, and a Maneka Gandhi, among others, who are able to command or claim a voice in the global movement towards environmentalism and sustainability without compromising to the globalization of industrial capital interest that remains more impersonally blind to the epistemic and real violence of their instrumental rationalism, with a single-minded pursuit of money economy, than the Vedic *rishis* and fishermen of yore, who used animals to appease

²¹ Alison M. Jaggar, “Is Globalization Good for Women?” in *Comparative Literature: Special Issue on Globalization and the Humanities*, ed. David Leiwei Li, Fall 53 (4): 298-314; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Jennifer Crawford, *The Attentive Heart* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).

the gods or provide nourishment to an immediate community.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, or the modern era, what we can learn from the wrongs and rights of the tradition (ancient, through medieval, to modern day) is this: We should like to think that human beings are intelligent and rational enough to be able to come to terms with the fact that they have certain basic duties to other species in the common eco-sphere (such as not to harm, not to disturb, not to forego trust, be willing to make restitution, be compassionate); these duties may ensue either in recognition of the rights of others or in respect for the interests and values of others (more in the Levinasian sense than that acceded by analytical or classical utilitarian ethics). While a morally stronger case can be made by basing the argument on interests and values than on the moral rights of animals, there is no reason why animal ethics need to favor one over the other. It would seem to me that a case for the respect of animals (of the kind that Paul Taylor has made as part of his case for respecting nature²²) among the faces of the other through which indeed we are, can only be strengthened by finding a mean between rights and interests. There are ample resources for this bridging in all religions, not least on a par in the South Asian traditions.

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²² Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: the Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

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