

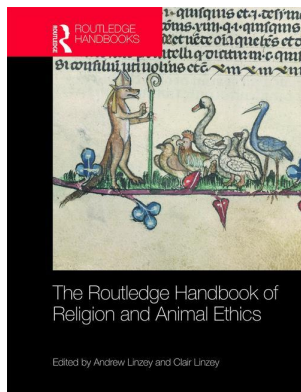
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.93

On: 18 Oct 2019

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics

Andrew Linzey, Clair Linzey

Buddhism

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429489846-4>

Alex Bruce

Published online on: 04 Oct 2018

How to cite :- Alex Bruce. 04 Oct 2018, *Buddhism from: The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics* Routledge

Accessed on: 18 Oct 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429489846-4>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

3

BUDDHISM

Paradox and Practice – Morally Relevant Distinctions in the Buddhist Characterization of Animals

Alex Bruce

Introduction

Within the Christian and Buddhist spiritual traditions, the status of animals is subordinated to that of human beings. It has been that way since the start, and although the intervening millennia have done little to soften that characterization of animals, contemporary Christian theologians are working to recover the place of animals within the scope of God's created order. Andrew Linzey, for example, rightly notes that despite its "poor record" on animals, Christian theology also can provide strong foundations for a characterization of animals where they "do not have value just in relation to us, but to their Creator."¹ However, despite characterizing animals as inferior to humans, the Buddhist tradition did not then move from a premise of subordination to a conclusion of permissible exploitation of animals in the way that Western societies did.

The "morally relevant distinction" between humans and animals that has been accepted by the Christian West – and that appears to have justified the differential treatment of animals – was never accepted by the Buddhist tradition. Consequently, within traditional Buddhist societies the desire for and rise of animal rights movements (as understood in the modern sense) advocating the end of animal exploitation never developed.²

How and why did this apparent "subordination without exploitation" paradox in the Buddhist characterization of animals develop? How does the Buddhist tradition explain and hold in creative tension the relative subordinate status of animals on the one hand and its insistence that all sentient beings have the potential for enlightenment on the other?

This chapter seeks answers to these questions. It does so by exploring responses to several interrelated issues. It begins by tracing the origin and consequences of the morally relevant distinction between humans and animals currently drawn by Western societies that justifies their subordination and exploitation. It locates the origins of that morally relevant distinction in the Aristotelian conception that because animals are incapable of higher reasoning abilities, they occupy a lower place on the *scala naturae* (Great Chain of Being). However, this historical investigation also suggests that Aristotle's views do not then *necessarily* support the conclusion that because they lack higher reasoning abilities, animals may be exploited to satisfy human wants and needs.

The chapter then explores the Buddhist conception of animals. It notes that like Western philosophy, Buddhism also regards animals as lacking the capacity for higher rational thought and thus considers a human rebirth to be optimal for progression in spiritual practice. However, drawing on both primary sources in the sutras and commentary on them, this discussion also demonstrates how the relatively unfortunate status of animals, lacking in higher rational abilities, does not then form a sufficient morally relevant distinction for justifying the exploitation of them.

This is because Buddhist Abhidharma texts and epistemological material would characterize the “mind” that engages in higher rational thought (and that was so important to Aristotle) as simply the coarse level of a very subtle mind that continues to take rebirth within a karmically determined universe. Within this universe, animals and humans share an existential solidarity in seeking happiness and avoiding suffering in the endless cycles of rebirth. For Buddhists, because the very subtle mind may take rebirth in human or animal form, it is inconceivable that animals should be exploited to satisfy the wants and needs of humans, and thus Buddhists often engage in animal liberation practices. The lack of higher rational capacity in animals is therefore not a sufficient morally relevant distinction justifying their exploitation.

Accordingly, Buddhists are able to maintain the apparently contradictory view that although animals occupy a lower position than humans in the universal hierarchy, they should not then be exploited to satisfy human wants and needs.

Origin of the West’s “Morally Relevant Distinction” between Humans and Animals

How and why did Western, Christian societies form the view that animals are lesser creatures than humans and, as such, can be characterized as commodities to satisfy human wants and needs? The starting point for any analysis of animal rights or interests and the characterization of animals in contemporary Western society can be traced to the influence of Aristotle. Nobel laureate philosopher Bertrand Russell acknowledges that “throughout modern times, practically every advance in science, in logic or in philosophy has had to be made in the teeth of opposition from Aristotle.”³

Aristotle Denies Reason to Animals

Aristotle was a student of Plato and went on to become tutor to Alexander the Great.⁴ “Aristotelianism” is the term given to the school of philosophical thought associated with Aristotle and “amounts to the largest surviving philosophical *oeuvre* from classical antiquity and the most important and influential.”⁵

It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which Aristotle’s works have shaped contemporary Western civilization, and it is generally accepted that it is Aristotelianism that has “exercised the deeper and more lasting historical influence on Western thought.”⁶

Aristotle’s writings about animals are puzzling and have generated divergent views about what he really thought about them. Aristotle wrote several books devoted to the study of animals in which his admiration and affection for all forms of animals are obvious.⁷

His texts on animals can be divided into two groups: (1) zoological/biological texts explicitly devoted to the study of animals⁸ and (2) political/ethical texts in which animals are mentioned but are not the explicit subject of the texts.⁹ Based on a reading of these texts, the standard Aristotelian view of animals that remains to this day is constructed. An example of that standard view is presented by Steven Wise in his text *Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals*: “ancient philosophers claimed that all nonhuman animals had been designed and placed on this earth just for human beings.”¹⁰

This view is reinforced through selective reading of parts of Aristotle's works, particularly sections of *The Politics*, where Aristotle writes,

Plants exist for the sake of animals and brute beasts for the sake of humans – tame ones for the use he can make of them as well as for the food they provide; and as for wild animals, most though not all can be used for food or are useful in other ways: clothing and instruments can be made out of them. If nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all of them for the sake of man.¹¹

In an earlier passage in *The Politics*, Aristotle claims that human slaves are living property and that slavery is a natural phenomenon because one group must rule over another.¹²

Stephen Newmeyer explains that when this earlier passage concerning slavery is then read with the one about animals just cited here, the basics of Aristotle's teleology are revealed, where all natural things are located in a graduated scale and designed toward some end (*telos*).¹³ The inevitable conclusion from Aristotle's teleology is that "just as it is natural for one man to rule over another, so it is natural for humans to rule over animals, for they are intended for man's use in the same way that some humans are intended for the use of other humans."¹⁴ According to Gary Steiner, the "bald assertion that animals exist entirely for the sake of human beings . . . has done much to cement Aristotle's reputation as a hard-line speciesist."¹⁵ Aristotle's reputation as a "hard-line speciesist" continues over two thousand years after his death.

Aristotle's writings concerning animals raise three important questions: First, how does Aristotle reach his conclusions about animals? Second, given the variety of Aristotle's writings about animals, is it accurate to reduce his belief about animals to the standard view expressed here? (In other words, has Aristotle been framed?) And third, whatever the answer to these questions, what do Aristotle's views have to do with the earlier discussion about the creation of morally relevant distinctions justifying the differential and exploitative treatment of animals?

Aristotle Causes a Crisis

In recent years scholars have initiated a *ressourcement* in recovering and evaluating the texts of ancient philosophers concerning animals. One of those scholars, Richard Sorabji, commences his text by stating his intention to show that "a crisis was provoked when Aristotle denied reason (*logos*) to animals."¹⁶

Entire treatises have been devoted to exhaustively exploring the crisis referred to by Sorabji, and it is well beyond the scope of this article to offer an evaluation of that scholarship.¹⁷ However, it is appropriate to set out Aristotle's basic philosophical framework in relation to animals in order to answer the questions posed previously.

Before Aristotle, philosophers such as Hippocrates, Pythagoras, and Plato, collectively referred to as "pre-Socratic" thinkers, did not draw the hard-line distinction between humans and animals that contemporary Western society draws.¹⁸ For these pre-Socratic philosophers, the awareness with which humans and animals go about their actions is the result of certain faculties of the soul, but these philosophers "do not see human *reason* as the sign of an essential distinction, between animals and humans."¹⁹

Aristotle overturned this view by arguing that awareness *must be* a function of reason, and though he admitted that animals have sensation (feelings), he denied them the capacity for reasoning that enables humans to search for and participate in the good life and in community or politics.²⁰

For Aristotle, therefore, the physical movements of humans and the activities they engage in are the result of reason directing the will. However, although animals do possess some awareness in the form of sense perception, Aristotle explains their movements and reactions to the environment without the need to impute reason.²¹

Two important consequences follow from these views. First, Aristotle appears to be creating a natural hierarchy in which plants differ from animals and animals differ from humans *in substance*. For Aristotle, the substantial difference between animals and humans is the lack of reasoning ability in the former. Second, Aristotle seems to be saying that animals thus may be exploited by humans since the lower may be exploited by the higher: “what is by nature superior should govern what is inferior. Non-human creatures are entirely without reason and it is only proper that they should be used for human purposes.”²²

These conclusions and the hierarchical ordering of plants, animals, and humans found in Aristotle’s work have led some scholars to suggest that Aristotle created what is sometimes called a *scala naturae* or “Great Chain of Being.”²³ The *scala naturae* suggests there is a linear progression of organisms from the simple to the more complex. According to some scholars, although there is some form of continuity between species, animals are essentially at a lower “level” than humans and thus are available for use by humans.²⁴

The consequence of this *scala naturae* for the status of animals is captured by Ryder:

Aristotle did not deny that men and women were animals, but placed them (as the most rational of animals) at the head of a natural hierarchy and proposed that the less rational exist to serve the purposes of the more rational. Even slaves, although human and capable of feeling pleasure and pain were considered to be less rational and, therefore, open to justifiable exploitation by the more rational.²⁵

It is this second conclusion – that animals are available for exploitation by humans – that is controversial. I do not believe that Aristotle’s writings about animals are so unequivocal that this conclusion of permissible exploitation follows. In fact, there is a body of contemporary scholarship that questions this apparently inevitable conclusion.

Rehabilitating Aristotle?

Other scholars agree that although Aristotle did create this hierarchical taxonomy (classification) of organisms, he did not create a *scala naturae* intended to support the *exploitation* of animals by humans. Scholars such as Martha Nussbaum suggest, “Aristotle does rank lives but he does not hold in general that one species exists for the sake of another. Each species’ nature (or characteristic form of life) is its end.”²⁶ This last sentence contains an important observation. In his writings on animals, Aristotle regarded all instances of life as being ends in themselves because he believed that all living creatures were organized to both maintain themselves and flourish in ways that were appropriate to each creature.²⁷ For this reason, each animal is an end in himself or herself and not merely a means to someone else’s end, a line of thinking that anticipates the writing of German philosopher Immanuel Kant.

However, other scholars argue that Aristotle did intend to create a hierarchy of creation, but that the *reasoning* used by Aristotle to create it and hence the *implications* drawn from that reasoning have been misrepresented.²⁸

If Aristotle did suggest a form of hierarchy, or “Great Chain” of living creatures, but did not then go on to suggest that creatures lower on that chain could be exploited by humans who were higher on the chain, what did he mean? Perhaps influenced by notions of class structure

and the theory of evolution, scholars have tended to impute value judgments to Aristotle's works concerning animals in ways that privilege humans as "superior" while relegating animals to an "inferior" status. Gary Steiner notes the natural conclusion drawn from Aristotle:

If Aristotle denies reason and belief to animals, then this statement about a natural hierarchy in which animals stand below human beings might appear to follow quite directly: in virtue of our rational capacity, we humans stand above all non-rational beings in the hierarchy of nature, and these non-rational beings exist simply to satisfy our needs and desires.²⁹

In fact, a closer reading of Aristotle's works concerning nature generally and animals particularly suggests that he thought of nature in terms of units of increasing complexity rather than in terms of "better" or "worse."³⁰ Imputing value judgments to Aristotle's natural taxonomy opens the way for the exploitation of those entities lower down on the scale of being. However, I believe further scholarship into an overlooked issue will expose the weakness of this reasoning.

An Overlooked Issue?

Orthodox scholarship concerning Aristotle's previously discussed writings on animals quickly moves from statements in *The Politics* about the subordinate status of animals to the right possessed by humans to use and exploit those animals.

The movement from the premise of animal inferiority to the conclusion of permissible exploitation generally rests on an interpretation of Book I, chapter 5, of *The Politics*, in which Aristotle seeks to demonstrate that slavery is part of a universal pattern.³¹ That conclusion is summarized by Ernest Barker in his translation of *The Politics*:

There is a principle of rule and subordination in nature at large: it appears in the realm of animate creation. By virtue of that principle, the soul rules the body; and by virtue of it the master, who possess the rational faculty of the soul, rules the slave, who possesses only bodily powers and the faculty of understanding the directions given by another's reason.³²

Because animals lack rational capacity, a relationship of justice between animals and humans is impossible, a view Aristotle later affirms in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in discussing affections in various degrees of friendships.³³ Absent, however, are reasons given for the conclusion that because slaves, women, and animals exist in these inferior relationships (to white Greek men), they may therefore be *exploited*.

Likewise, there is an absence in the wider literature investigating this apparently assumed conclusion. It is not within the scope of this chapter to deconstruct Aristotle's reasoning on this point and to offer a normative alternative. However, textual support is hinted at in a passage in *The Politics* where Aristotle suggests that it is better for both slaves and animals to be benevolently ruled over by their masters than to suffer in the wild world beyond the master's household.³⁴

If Aristotle's views about animals are to be rehabilitated for the twenty-first century, then it would be useful for scholarship to explore this little-developed notion of benevolence and care. Future scholarship might then build upon Martha Nussbaum's observation that a frequently overlooked aspect of Aristotle's work on animals is his teleological vision for animals.³⁵ Nussbaum argues that far from advocating the exploitation of animals, Aristotle actually "articulates a notion of flourishing for animals [and] regards each animal as an end in itself, each as the

measure of its own type of flourishing.”³⁶ These views find much support in Buddhist philosophy. Accordingly, how might Buddhist philosophers respond to Aristotle’s reasoning and its subsequent appropriation and interpretation by Western society?

The Buddhist Conception of Animals

After his experience of enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, spent the next forty or so years traveling throughout the Indian subcontinent, teaching his insights, called “the Dharma,” to all those who would listen. Then, as now, India was predominantly Hindu in religious orientation, but the Buddha “saw how superstitious folk, steeped in ignorance, slaughtered animals in worship of their gods.”³⁷ Animal sacrifice was a common element of ancient religious practice across the world, and in response, the Buddha said, “Of Life, which all can take but none can give, life which all creatures love and strive to keep, wonderful, dear and pleasant unto each, even to the meanest.”³⁸ The Buddha was clearly compassionate toward animals, and he was brutally realistic in recognizing the suffering they experienced on a daily basis: “I could speak on in many a way about the realm of the animals, and yet not be able to express in words how dreadful the sufferings there (in the animal realm) are.”³⁹ Animals therefore share a solidarity with humans in their experience of suffering in the realm of their existence.

Buddhist cosmology posits the existence of six “realms” that may be inhabited by sentient beings: (1) hell realm, (2) animal realm, (3) hungry ghost realm, (4) human realm, (5) asura realm, and (6) god realm.⁴⁰ All inhabitants of these existential states of existence, whether embodied or disembodied, share the experience of suffering, even if that suffering is quite subtle.

Similarly, all sentient beings in the six realms share the search for happiness and the avoidance of suffering (Sanskrit: *dukkha*). They all share the experience of aging, sickness, and death and then rebirth propelled by their accumulated karma. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, these common experiences are represented iconographically by the “Wheel of Life” (Sanskrit: *Bhavachakra*; Tibetan: རྗེད་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ། [srid pai’khor lo]), through which all sentient beings circle endlessly within *samsara* under the control of death.

However, despite this existential solidarity, animals are considered to suffer terribly in comparison to humans, and thus, animals find it difficult if not impossible to engage in the cultivation of virtue, wisdom, and compassion, which are the causes for liberation and enlightenment: “animals clearly have much less of a capacity for choice than humans, and if they are virtuous, for example less greedy, or generous, this is more an expression of their existing character, or a response to an encouraging human example, than any deliberate desire for moral development.”⁴¹

In these circumstances, animals are thought to be largely motivated by instinct or reflex to engage in negative behavior, producing karma that results in more suffering. Therefore, all Buddhist traditions propose that optimal spiritual progress can be made from a human rebirth. This is reflected time and again in the Buddhist religious texts. For example, in his *Lam Rim Chenmo* (Tibetan: ལམ་རིམ་ཆེན་མོ།), *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, the celebrated Tibetan Buddhist monk and scholar Lama Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) urges Buddhists to repeatedly meditate on the suffering of animals as a way of cultivating awareness of their “precious human rebirth.”⁴²

Buddhist Morally Relevant Distinctions

Buddhists therefore distinguish between animals and humans on the basis of their capacity to engage in spiritual practice: “humans are ‘superior’ primarily in terms of their capacities for moral action and spiritual development.”⁴³ This distinction is suspiciously similar to the Aristotelian

view that animals differ from humans in their lack of rational capacity. It might be argued that since moral action and spiritual development depend on the exercise of choice of action in body, speech, and mind within the context of a karmically influenced universe, Buddhism *does* posit the absence of rational capacity in animals as a morally relevant distinction.

There are two reasons that this suspicion is oversimplified. First, it is true that Buddhist philosophy considers the possession of rational capacity a significant advantage; however, the mere possession of such capacity is no guarantee of spiritual progression. It is the use of rational abilities to cultivate wisdom and compassion that is determinative. There is ample evidence of animals behaving in ethically superior ways to some humans!

Second, even if this similarity to the Aristotelian view is accepted, the Buddhist tradition did not then regard the disadvantageous capacities of animals as a sufficient morally relevant distinction justifying their *exploitation* for human wants and needs: “the natural expression of such ‘superiority’ is not an exploitative attitude, but one of kindness to lesser beings, an ideal of *noblesse oblige*.”⁴⁴

An Absence of Exploitation

Practitioners in both the Theravada and Mahayana schools of Buddhism, whether monastic or laypersons, undertake to abide by the “Five Precepts.” The first of these is to abstain from killing and to cultivate the opposite: respect for all life.⁴⁵

Therefore, kindness toward all sentient beings, including animals, is the only possible outcome of spiritual practice. Not only does this kindness benefit other sentient beings; it also benefits the practitioner by ensuring that he or she does not experience future harm as a karmic consequence of present acts of cruelty. For example, it is recorded that the Buddha encountered a group of youths beating a snake with sticks out of fear of being bitten. The Buddha’s response was to warn, “If you don’t want to be harmed, you should also not harm others; if you harm others, you will not find happiness even in your future existence.”⁴⁶

In the Mahayana schools of Buddhism, practitioners seek enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings; a motivation referred to as the “mind of enlightenment” or *Bodhichitta* (Sanskrit; Tibetan: རྣམ་ཐྱུང་གྱི་སེམས་ [byang chub kyī sems]) is the hallmark of a “Bodhisattva,” one who engages in compassionate and wise practices (referred to as the six or ten *paramitas* or “perfections”) intended to benefit all sentient beings.⁴⁷

Although not without some controversy, there is a long history in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition of practicing animal liberation as an expression of compassion for all sentient beings.⁴⁸

Answering Aristotle

Any Buddhist engagement with the Aristotelian conception of animals must proceed with care. It is not sufficient to simply claim that the philosophy is “outmoded” or “out of touch” or even “cruel.”

As Catholic philosopher James Franklin notes in response to attacks on Catholic philosophy,

it or some of those promoting it may or may not suffer from those defects, but that does not bear on whether the philosophy itself or the conclusions from it are true. Answers to them must be in the same terms – either an explanation of why the principles of that philosophy are wrong, or argument that the conclusions deduced about particular cases from those principles do not follow. A dryer task than expressing indignation, perhaps, but the only relevant way to proceed.⁴⁹

Buddhists would therefore respond to Aristotle's conception of animals by arguing that even if his premise about animals lacking higher cognitive abilities is correct, his conclusion of permissible exploitation does not follow. What is the basis of this argument?

Within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there is a branch of study devoted to epistemology and psychology called *Lo Rig* (*blo rik*; ལོ་རིག་) exploring the nature of the mind, cognition, and the mind's functions. Two important and widely studied epistemological texts are the *Pramana-samucchaya* ("Compendium of Valid Cognition") by Dignaga (fifth century CE) and a related commentary, the *Pramanavartikka* ("Commentary on Valid Perception") by Dharmakirti (seventh century CE).

These texts and related Buddhist Abhidharma literature identify, define, and clarify differences between perceptual and conceptual consciousnesses and how wisdom is developed through valid analysis and investigation. According to these texts, what might be called the Aristotelian "rational mind" is just one of several levels of consciousness that are collectively referred to as "mind." Buddhist philosophy identifies at least three levels of mind: (1) coarse, (2) subtle, and (3) very subtle, with the rational or analytic function of mind representing the coarse level. Buddhism holds that after death, the very subtle level of mind continues and takes rebirth subject to the karmic influences.⁵⁰

Because sentient beings have different levels of mind, including a very subtle mind that takes rebirth, they have the capacity to eventually perfect their mind and eventually achieve enlightenment. The fact that animals lack higher cognitive abilities in comparison to humans may hinder their ability to engage in spiritual practice, but they do have a mind that continues through rebirth and that will eventually experience enlightenment – just like humans. In these circumstances, the lack of higher cognitive ability in animals does not justify their exploitation for human wants and needs.

After all, there is no guarantee within the Buddhist system that humans will continue to take human rebirth. In fact, the Tibetan Buddhist texts suggest that since rebirth as a human is the karmic result of pure ethical conduct, and since most humans do not engage in pure ethical conduct, rebirth as an animal is more likely!⁵¹

Accordingly, the Buddha counseled against killing and eating animals. In the *Brahmajala Sutra*, he counseled, "Cultivate compassion, and set living creatures free. All sentient beings of the Six Realms are our father and mothers from former lives. If you kill then and eat them, you are killing and eating your fathers and mothers."⁵² Surprisingly, similar views were expressed by other ancient Greek philosophers who did not subscribe to the Aristotelian school.

The Buddha Shares a (Vegetarian) Meal with Pythagoras

A careful investigation of Greek philosophy reveals that it does not form a cohesive body of writing. The attention paid to Aristotle was as much a result of the recovery of his writings in the Middle Ages and their adoption by Thomas Aquinas as it was about the intellectual force of his arguments.⁵³ Aristotle was not the only ancient Greek writing about animals.

There were other Greek thinkers whose views about animals do not accord with traditional views held by Western, Christian societies. Pythagoras and Plato developed views about animals that resonate with Eastern, Buddhist philosophical views. Pythagoras developed his views independently of established religious traditions because he was teaching five hundred years before Christianity was established, and although he was roughly a contemporary of the Buddha, there is no *explicit* evidence that Pythagoras adopted Buddhist principles.

Nevertheless, contemporary religious scholars are beginning to uncover the "mutually formative contacts between the Greek and Indian philosophical traditions."⁵⁴ Theodor Gomperz, for

example, argues for an explicit connection between Pythagoras's thinking and Indian philosophy: "From what people or creed did the sage who was famous above all for this far-reaching 'inquiry' borrow the doctrines of metempsychosis? . . . There is a far closer agreement between Pythagorism and the Indian doctrine; not merely in their general features, but even in certain details, such as vegetarianism."⁵⁵

Pythagoras himself insisted that he could remember having lived a past life as a Trojan warrior named Euphorbus who had been killed in a siege, and it was said by his followers that Pythagoras was the only human able to remember all his past lives and experiences.⁵⁶ Accordingly, Pythagoras counseled against killing and eating animals because those animals could well be friends or relatives reborn.

In an anecdote told by the sixth-century BCE poet Xenophanes, Pythagoras saw a person cruelly whipping a little puppy and intervened: "Once he was present when a puppy was being beaten, they say, and he took pity and spoke this word: 'Stop! Do not strike it, for it is the soul of a man who is dear. I recognized it when I heard it screaming.'"⁵⁷ Like the Buddha, Pythagoras believed that because both humans and animals possessed a consciousness that transmigrated through successive incarnations, it was simply unthinkable to abuse an animal or to eat an animal's flesh. To both Pythagoras and the Buddha, the absence of higher rational capacities in animals was not a sufficient morally relevant distinction to justify their exploitation to satisfy human wants and needs.

Conclusions

Throughout history, humans have demonstrated a distressing tendency to subjugate and exploit entire classes of sentient beings considered to be of "lesser" worth or status in the sight of the dominant social ruling class – typically a patriarchal hierarchy supported by military forces. The roll call of these unfortunates includes indigenous peoples, people of color, ethnic minorities, women, children, and of course, animals.⁵⁸

At one time or another, each of these classes of sentient beings was characterized as property, available to be exploited by the stronger, ruling majority. With the passage of time, various social justice movements called attention to these more unredeemed aspects of society and initiated the gradual emancipation of slaves, women, and indigenous peoples. Animals have largely remained beyond the scope of these social reforms and to this day remain some of the most exploited sentient beings within society.⁵⁹

This discussion has demonstrated how the substratum of thought in Western societies justifying the exploitation of animals can be traced to the appropriation of a version of Aristotle's *scala naturae*. The lack of higher reasoning abilities in animals has therefore been regarded as a morally relevant distinction that is sufficient for justifying the systematic exploitation of animals in most Western societies.

However, although Buddhist philosophy also subordinates the status of animals to that of humans and also admits the lack of higher reasoning abilities in animals, it does not regard that lack as a sufficient morally relevant distinction justifying animals' exploitation. Buddhist philosophy characterizes the mind that is capable of higher rational thought as simply one "level" of mind that includes several different levels.

According to Buddhist Abhidharma literature, it is the very subtle mind that continues after bodily death and takes rebirth. Within the Buddhist universe, humans and animals are simply two forms of sentient beings among many others that continue to take rebirth over and over within a karmically determined universe. Within this universe, humans and animals share a common existential concern to avoid suffering and to experience happiness.

Therefore, according to Buddhist philosophy, as echoed in other ancient Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, the difference between humans and animals is not one of substance but simply one of degree. For Buddhists, the absence of higher rational capacity in animals is not and has never been a sufficient morally relevant distinction justifying their exploitation.

Notes

- 1 Andrew Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God: Explorations in Animal Theology* (New York, NY: Lantern Books, 2009), xii.
- 2 In the last twenty years, a movement called “socially engaged Buddhism” has emerged, calling attention to the exploitation of animals and to women, children, the environment, and other social issues.
- 3 Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), 212.
- 4 Aristotle was born in Macedonia in 384 BCE. He studied with Plato for twenty years before becoming tutor to Alexander the Great. Aristotle established “the Lyceum,” his own enormously popular school of philosophy in Athens. After Alexander died in 323 BCE, Aristotle fled Athens ahead of rising anti-Macedonian hostility. Aristotle fled to Chalcis, the principal city on the Greek island of Euboea. Aristotle remained there until his death a year later in 322 BCE. Aristotle’s death is attributed to various causes, including self-administered poison and a stomach disease that may have been some form of cancer.
- 5 Graham Shipley, John Vanderspoel, David Mattingly, and Lin Foxhall, eds., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilisation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77.
- 6 Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin, eds., *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 242.
- 7 Aristotle, *History of Animals, On the Parts of Animals, On the Motion of Animals, On the Gait of Animals, and On the Generation of Animals*. See the Aristotle Collection, trans. A. L. Peck (London, UK: Loeb Classical Library, 1918).
- 8 Aristotle’s zoological/biological texts include the *Historia Animalium* (Inquiry into Animals), *De Partibus Animalium* (On the Parts of Animals), *De Generatione Animalium* (On the Generation of Animals), and *De Motu Animalium* (On the Motion of Animals). See Martha Nussbaum, “Aristotle,” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), 165–66.
- 9 Aristotle’s political/ethical texts mentioning animals most famously include *The Politics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *De Anima* (The Soul). See Margaret Howatson, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 57–59.
- 10 Steven Wise, *Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals* (New York, NY: Perseus, 2000), 4.
- 11 Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair (London, UK: Penguin, 1962), Book I, chapter 8, para. 1256b7, 78–79.
- 12 Aristotle, *The Politics*, 67.
- 13 Stephen Newmeyer, *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought: A Sourcebook* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 27.
- 14 Newmeyer, *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought*, 27.
- 15 Gary Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 57.
- 16 Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 7.
- 17 Martha Nussbaum, *Aristotle’s De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); James Lennox, “Aristotle’s Biology and Aristotle’s Philosophy,” in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 292.
- 18 Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, 53.
- 19 Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, 53.
- 20 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. Thomson, rev. H. Tredennick, introd. J. Barnes (London UK: Penguin, 2004), 146–47.
- 21 Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, 63.
- 22 Angus Taylor, *Animals and Ethics* (Toronto, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003), 33–34.
- 23 Charles Singer, *A Short History of Biology* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1931).
- 24 Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 55–58.

- 25 Richard Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes towards Speciesism* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 22.
- 26 Martha Nussbaum, "Animal Rights: The Need for a Theoretical Basis," *Harvard University Law Review* 114 (2001): 1517n43.
- 27 Nussbaum, "Animal Rights," 1519.
- 28 Steiner, *Anthropocentrism*, 58.
- 29 Steiner, *Anthropocentrism*, 58.
- 30 Catherine Osbourne, *Dumb Beasts and Dead Philosophers: Humanity and the Humane in Ancient Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 101–02.
- 31 Aristotle, *The Politics*, 66.
- 32 Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1958), 11.
- 33 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 219–20.
- 34 Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker, 68–69.
- 35 Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*.
- 36 Nussbaum, "Animal Rights," 1518.
- 37 Thera Piyadassi, *The Buddha's Ancient Path* (London, UK: Rider, 1964), 19.
- 38 Piyadassi, *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, 20.
- 39 "The Fool and the Wise Man," Majjhima Nikaya, quoted in Tony Page, *Buddhism and Animals* (London, UK: Biddles, 1999), 64.
- 40 *Sadgatikarika* (Verses on the Six Pathways of Rebirth), quoted in John Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 39–42.
- 41 Francis Story, "The Place of Animals in Buddhism," in *Dimensions of Buddhist Thought: Collected Essays* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publishing Service, 1976), vol. 3, 363.
- 42 Lama Tsong Khapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, ed. Josh Cutler and Guy Newland (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2000), vol. 1, 169–70.
- 43 Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150–51.
- 44 Harold Fielding-Hall, *The Soul of a People* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1902), 229.
- 45 The Five Precepts are (1) abstain from killing, (2) abstain from stealing, (3) abstain from lying, (4) abstain from sexual misconduct, and (5) abstain from intoxicants. Buddhist monastics are to be celibate. See Strong, *Experience of Buddhism*, 120–21.
- 46 Walpola Piyananda Thera, *Love in Buddhism* (Los Angeles, CA: Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, 1990), 30. Although keen observers may detect a hint of Kantian indirect duties in this statement, the Buddha principally advocated for kindness toward animals simply because they do not wish to experience suffering.
- 47 Roger Walsh, "The Ten Perfections: Qualities of the Fully Enlightened as Described in Buddhist Psychology," in *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations in Exceptional Psychological Wellbeing*, ed. Roger Walsh and Deane H. Shapiro Jr. (London, UK: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 218.
- 48 Henry Shui and Leah Stokes, "Buddhist Animal Release Practices: Historic, Environmental and Public Health Concerns," *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 2 (2008): 181.
- 49 James Franklin, "Traditional Catholic Philosophy: Baby and Bathwater," paper presented to the Aquinas Academy Jubilee, Australia, March 9, 2005, 3.
- 50 Lati Rinboche and Elizabeth Napper, *Mind in Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1981), 43.
- 51 Lama Tsong Khapa, *Great Treatise*, 162.
- 52 *Brahamajala Sutra*, first sutra in the Digha Nikaya, in Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Wisdom, 2005), 66ff.
- 53 Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Dark Ages* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003).
- 54 Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York, NY: Allworth Press, 2002), 98.
- 55 Theodor Gomperz, *The Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy* (London, UK: John Murray, 1920), 126–27.
- 56 Margaret Shipley et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilization* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 737. It should also be noted that Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, was said to have remembered all his past lives while attaining enlightenment, and in the twentieth century, the American Edgar Cayce was alleged to possess similar abilities. Likewise, practitioners and patients of hypnotic regression therapy invariably report having experienced past lives.

- 57 Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009), book 8, 338.
- 58 Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred* (New York: NY: Allen Lane, 2006).
- 59 Jerry Anderson, "Protection for the Powerless: Political Economy History Lessons for the Animal Welfare Movement," *Stanford Journal of Animal Law and Policy* 4 (2011): 1.

References

- Anderson, Jerry. "Protection for the Powerless: Political Economy History Lessons for the Animal Welfare Movement." *Stanford Journal of Animal Law and Policy* 4 (2011): 1.
- Aristotle. *History of Animals, On the Parts of Animals, On the Motion of Animals, On the Gait of Animals, and On the Generation of Animals: The Aristotle Collection*. Translated by A. L. Peck. United States: Loeb Classical Library, 1918.
- Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by J. Thomson, revised by H. Tredennick, and introduced by J. Barnes. London, UK: Penguin, 2004.
- Aristotle. *The Politics*. Translated by T. A. Sinclair. London, UK: Penguin, 1962.
- Aristotle. *The Politics of Aristotle*. Edited and translated by Ernest Barker. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Corse, Taylor. "Dryden's 'Vegetarian' Philosopher: Pythagoras." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 34, no. 1 (2010): 1.
- Ferguson, Niall. *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred*. New York: NY: Allen Lane, 2006.
- Fielding-Hall, Harold. *The Soul of a People*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1902.
- Franklin, James. "Traditional Catholic Philosophy: Baby and Bathwater." Paper presented to the Aquinas Academy Jubilee, Australia, March 9, 2005.
- Gill, Mary Louise, and Pierre Pellegrin, eds. *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Gomperz, Theodor. *The Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*. London, UK: John Murray, 1920.
- Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Howatson, Margaret, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. 2nd ed. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Laertius, Diogenes. *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009.
- Lennox, James. "Aristotle's Biology and Aristotle's Philosophy." In *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, edited by Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Linzey, Andrew. *Creatures of the Same God: Explorations in Animal Theology*. New York, NY: Lantern Books, 2008.
- Lovejoy, Arthur. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1936.
- Maclean, Todd. *Voices from the Past: A Classical Anthology*. London, UK: Readers Union, 1956.
- McEvelly, Thomas. *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York, NY: Allworth Press, 2002.
- Newmeyer, Stephen. *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought: A Sourcebook*. London, UK: Routledge, 2011.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Animal Rights: The Need for a Theoretical Basis." *Harvard University Law Review* 114 (2001): 1506.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Aristotle." In *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., edited by Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Osbourne, Catherine. *Dumb Beasts and Dead Philosophers: Humanity and the Humane in Ancient Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Page, Tony. *Buddhism and Animals*. London, UK: Biddles, 1999.
- Piyadassi, Thera. *The Buddha's Ancient Path*. London, UK: Rider, 1964.
- Rinboche, Lati, and Elizabeth Napper. *Mind in Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1981.
- Rubenstein, Richard E. *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Dark Ages*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003.
- Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London, UK: Allen and Unwin, 1961.
- Ryder, Richard. *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes towards Speciesism*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Shipley, Graham, John Vanderspoel, David Mattingly, and Lin Foxhall, eds. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilisation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

- Shui, Henry, and Leah Stokes. "Buddhist Animal Release Practices: Historic, Environmental and Public Health Concerns." *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 2 (2008): 181.
- Singer, Charles. *A Short History of Biology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1931.
- Sorabji, Richard. *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Steiner, Gary. *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.
- Story, Francis. "The Place of Animals in Buddhism." In *Dimensions of Buddhist Thought: Collected Essays*. Vol. 3. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publishing Service, 1976.
- Strong, John. *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008.
- Taylor, Angus. *Animals and Ethics*. Toronto, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003.
- Thera, Walpola Piyananda. *Love in Buddhism*. Los Angeles, CA: Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, 1990.
- Tsong Khapa, Lama. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. Vol. 1. Edited by Josh Cutler and Guy Newland. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2000.
- Walsh, Roger. "The Ten Perfections: Qualities of the Fully Enlightened as Described in Buddhist Psychology." In *Beyond Health and Normality: Explorations in Exceptional Psychological Well-Being*, edited by Roger Walsh and Deane H. Shapiro Jr. London, UK: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983.
- Walshe, Maurice, trans. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Wisdom, 2005.
- Wise, Steven. *Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals*. New York, NY: Perseus Books, 2000.