ABSTRACT

The proper behavior of humans toward animals is a middle way between human superiority, which allows humans to do whatever they please to animals, and views requiring humans not to interfere with animals at all. Since ethics is principles for social cooperation, only a restricted class of animals—work animals and pets—can have ethical standing. In any case, eco-ethics requires us to treat animals humanely and not as objects.

INTRODUCTION

On the way to regaining our place as a species among species, our relation to our fellow animals deserves separate treatment. Some views about the relations of humans and animals which do not assume human superiority or reject it outright will be discussed. The first of these views, Buddhism, has been around for 2500 years. Another view, veganism, dates from the 1940s. The views of two contemporary philosophers will also be considered: Peter Singer argues with great force, clarity, and consistency in his Animal Liberation that we should leave animals alone (2009). Mark Rowlands attempts an entirely different justification for animal rights based on social contract theory in his Animal Rights (2009).

A few general remarks: Buddhism includes extensive justification as well as rules of action for its views on human/animal relations. But with the growth of science some Buddhist views on our relation to animals have become more faith-
based and less evidence-based. Veganism, by contrast, stipulates rules for behavior with respect to animals without much justification. Singer’s views to a great extent provide a justification for vegan rules of behavior toward animals. Singer also holds that humans should leave animals alone. He is in effect promoting another way for humans to be separate from the ecosystem. Finally, Rowland’s alternative social contract justification of animal rights turns out to be an exercise in logic chopping. A social contract by definition holds between contributing members of a society. Except in limited cases, animals are not members of society, and no subtle distinctions can make them so.

**BUDDHISM**

Buddhism is not a theistic religion. The Buddha himself thought that the existence of suffering showed that there was no omnipotent, loving God in charge of the universe. From the beginning Buddhism seems to have been concerned to stay within the realm of the natural rather than the supernatural. Thus, there is an emphasis on karma, or cause and effect, rather than supernatural emanations. And it was the Buddha himself who promulgated the doctrine of no-soul (*anatman*). This is the doctrine that there is no permanent human self, only a stream of experiences.  

However, the doctrine of no-soul seems to conflict with another Buddhist doctrine, the doctrine of reincarnation. If every sentient being is re-born as another sentient being with somehow the same identity, each sentient being harbors something permanent enough to survive death. Buddhists call these semi-permanent carryovers, *seeds*. Many Buddhists are not bothered by this seeming inconsistency, but some are. Although I am not a Buddhist, it bothers me¹ (Buddhists generally do not strive for uniformity of doctrine.).

Buddhist reincarnation as a way of survival after death has distinct advantages over the afterlife of Christianity and similar religions. Buddhist reincarnation requires no extra supernatural realm to house survivors after death.² Also, since reincarnated people return to this world, there is every reason to preserve and improve this world. In addition, Buddhism requires no fantastic stories such as Jesus and Mary ascending into Heaven. Perhaps those stories did not seem fantastic when people believed in a three-story universe, with Heaven in the sky, mortals living on earth’s surface, and death and hell underground. But as soon as people realized the earth was round and that breathable air rapidly ran out as one ascended, the ascension of Jesus and Mary seems preposterous. It would be consistent if Jesus, being God, needed no oxygen mask, but Mary would not have been so fortunate. Also, when Christians restrict the Afterlife to human beings, they affirm a very strong form of unjustified human superiority. Why can’t whales go to heaven as well?
Related Content

En Plein Air: A Mobile Learning Approach for Sustainability Education in the Wild
www.irma-international.org/article/plein-air-mobile-learning-approach/65860

“Free” Service or “Good” Service: What Attracts Users To Public Access Computing Venues?
www.irma-international.org/chapter/free-service-good-service/55827

An Empirical Study of the Adoption of an Indoor Location-Based Service: Finding Reading Rooms
www.irma-international.org/article/an-empirical-study-of-the-adoption-of-an-indoor-location-based-service/177220

Discourses in Gender and Technology: Taking a Feminist Gaze
www.irma-international.org/chapter/discourses-gender-technology/22386

Use of Social Networking Sites by People with Health Issues
www.irma-international.org/chapter/use-of-social-networking-sites-by-people-with-health-issues/173153