1 Animals in Myth and Religion

The stories of myth and religion reflect in part the cultural, social, political, and economic realities of the type of society in which they arise. The form of the society plays a significant role in moulding the consciousness of the people. We would thus expect rather different tales to emerge from hunter-gatherer, agricultural, and pastoral societies, and from expansionist urban state empires, such as those of the Maya, the Aztecs, and the Incas. Differing myths and differing religious parables are, in part, the consequences of differing everyday life experiences.

The ways in which animals are viewed and treated in a given society are thus influenced significantly by the practical realities of the human-animal economic relationship in that society. For example, we may acknowledge that in traditional Hindu India eating the cow was unacceptable in part because milk for consumption, calves for their labour, and cow dung for fuel and house-flooor construction were deemed more valuable than beef. If the Indian caste system, climate, and soil ensured there was inadequate fodder for an abundance of cattle, then the societal rules, expressed through religious edicts, must accord priorities. This should not persuade us, however, to ignore the fact that Brahmins and others refrained not only from the eating of beef but of all animal flesh. And such practices arose from the respect accorded to all living beings, primarily through the doctrine of reincarnation, which emphasized the kinship of all creatures. Indeed, while vegetarians are a decided minority in India, they are, by and large, deeply respected for their practices by those who are not themselves vegetarian. Economically driven societal organization is by no means all there is to a culture.

In some aboriginal societies, especially where the success of the traditional hunt was less than assured, animals were “worshipped,” in the sense that they were prayed to, in order to induce their relatives, or their re-incarnate selves emerged corporeally from the universal spirit, to return on a future occasion to ensure a continuing supply of animal food. Thus the
“worship” was primarily for the benefit of the worshipper rather than any indication of adoration for the worshipped. Nonetheless, we should not fail to recognize that the skills, courage, strength, ingenuity, and fortitude of the prey, and of other animals which were not prey, induced an authentic respect for the animal realm. Animals faced the same trials and tribulations as humans and were entitled to a sympathetic appreciation in their perilous life journey.2

In the pastoral lands of the Bible we encounter injunctions to treat domesticated food animals with diligent care and concern. They will then be healthier and more productive animals, and will thereby improve the quality of human life. Caring for them is thus in part instrumental to human ends. But animals were recognized as different from human-devised instruments, such as the hoe and the plough. They were creatures of God, and as such were entitled to more than efficient treatment for human purposes. God permitted their consumption, at least after the Flood, but required that they be treated with a greater consideration than unconscious artifacts. They were breathing beings, not inanimate objects, and were thus entitled to a degree of moral consideration.3

It would then be unwarranted to imagine self-serving prudential considerations as the perennial determinants of human attitudes to animals. And that is true for aboriginal myths as well as Oriental and Western religions,4 even though the particulars of each are decidedly different as a consequence of the widely differing everyday experiences occasioned by the multiplicity of societal and technological forms. To take but one example, the Talmud instructs the Jews to refrain from inflicting pain on any living creature.5 Not only does that injunction reflect a general recognition of the entitlement of animals, whether domesticated, feral, or wild, to live free from human cruelty, but it can be seen to be a moral requirement at odds with the immediate self-interests of the predominant pastoralists and occasional hunters themselves. Animals are entitled to a significant degree of respect as the sentient beings they are, even though that entitlement constitutes a decided interference with human self-regarding convenience. If we must always look to the historical context to understand the particulars of the human-animal relationship, we must also look beyond it to understand the universal respectful elements of the human soul. All myths and religions extend consideration for the well-being of animals beyond merely self-serving prudential consideration, even though they always include those prudential considerations, and even though the interests of the adherents always exceed those of the animals. As Leo Tolstoy wrote with his customary wisdom, aplomb, and exaggeration, “religions differ in their external forms but are all the same in their basic principles.”6 Overdrawn perhaps, but the basic precept is fundamentally sound.

In the final analysis, human thoughts, sympathies, and inclinations are far more alike than dissimilar, however different the societies humans
inhabit, and however different the forms through which the societal values are transmitted. The human is an animal who shares his human animality, his needs and basic values, with all his fellow humans. The culture may determine how the fundamental needs and values are pursued but does not determine what they are. These common human orientations encourage us to identify with the animals we encounter in myth, parable, fable, and story. And when we identify with those animals it is only a step to respect them for the beings they are and to feel a compassion for them in their travails.

In the selections that follow, the reader will find that however much societal forces impose themselves harmfully on animals, and however much some myths and tales distort animal reality, a natural compassion and respect for other species underlies the explicit or implicit imperatives imparted through myth and religion. And yet, in our cynical and secular age, it is commonplace to witness the derision of myth and religion. Myth is what its name is seen to imply: fable masquerading as reason. Religion is seen as an outdated superstition whose tenets have been undermined by science and philosophy. But we should listen carefully to that old saw that stories — and myth and religion are in an important sense stories — are lies which tell the truth.7 Certainly they consist in part of parables and allegories, if not lies. Myth and religion, we may say, are philosophy by other, sometimes subtler, means.

Myth and religion teach us a manner of interpreting our experiences. They form, or at least inform, our values; stimulate our emotions; advise us how to act prudently and justly; and tell us who is equipped to undertake what action in what circumstances. They serve to infuse the human spirit and weld the societal bond. And they raise to the level of consciousness the permanent memories of the human soul. Evolution has selected us for practical tasks, not for the refinements of abstract thought.8 Philosophy is not evolutionarily adaptive. Hence few are good at it. And those who are good at it are often led astray by the implications of their insightful but customarily, and almost necessarily, incomplete abstract intellectual schema. Myth and religion offer, as an at least sometimes wiser alternative, practical advice, often presented in the form of parables, tailored to the requirements of the society in which they arise.9 Jean-Jacques Rousseau advised his philosophically over-optimistic Enlightenment colleagues that “a thinking man is a depraved being.”10 The intellect, Rousseau observed, has the capacity to lead us away from truths which intuitive feelings and early societal traditions readily impart.

Unfortunately, one of the difficulties of reporting oral myths is that there is no satisfactory way of determining how faithful are their current forms to their originals, or even whether there is an “original.” Just as there are quite significant differences in the interpretation of the relationship of humans to animals between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2,11 written by different
persons perhaps centuries apart, so too there are different versions of aboriginal myths. As sagely said by !Unn/Obe, a Ju/Hoan woman of southern Africa, “Yes, of course, some people tell stories one way, some another. Perhaps it is because people sometimes separate for a while and go on telling stories. But in all these stories about the old times, people use different words and nouns for the same things. There are many different ways to talk. Different people just have different minds.” Different versions of the same stories, while containing significant similarities, will have variations that alter the message, sometimes slightly, sometimes rather more substantially. And just as Western philosophy altered over the centuries to incorporate the effects of newly emerging social and economic classes, increased secular education, and new technological capabilities, so too new aboriginal experiences in changing social, economic, and political conditions will have influenced their myths to incorporate a relevant response to those new conditions. Without a written record we lack the evidence to know what is old and what is new. And, as with the differences between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, so too with aboriginal accounts, we do not know which versions more closely reflect the early mind of a people.

A part of the problem is that we have grounds for distrust when the myths are reported by those with an ideological axe to grind. A century and more ago the forms in which those myths were presented sometimes showed a lack of understanding of, and sympathy for, aboriginal culture. By contrast, since the middle of the nineteenth century, and most especially in recent decades, those myths have sometimes been manipulated to read as a telling critique of Western mores, particularly as a wiser alternative to Western environmental degradation. Thus, for example, the form in which the famous nineteenth-century environmentalist speech of Chief Seattle of the Duwamish is customarily reported is a 1970s invention of an American film director, bearing very little resemblance to early reports of that speech, which are not themselves without grounds for suspicion. The version now customarily encountered corresponds far more to modern Western environmentalist ideals than to Amerindian forms of thought and expression. What we are offered is a distortion of the reality. If one wants to understand the import of aboriginal myth one must endeavour to be faithful to traditional forms of thought. Accordingly, several appealing legends have been omitted from this volume because I could not feel confident of their authenticity. Aboriginal myths contain both beauty and wisdom; they do not need to be distorted.

As societal belief systems change to accommodate new eventualities, the prevailing stories are adjusted to meet the contingencies of the new circumstances. Thus when Christianity was adopted as the official religion of Rome, and then spread across Europe, it retained a number of earlier myths, yet Christianized, or denominationalized, and localized them. Thus were the holly, the maypole, and the Christmas tree incorporated
into the Christian myth to hinder a psychological discord between the traditional and the new. One popular story was that after the Christian slave Androcles removed a thorn from the paw of a lion in distress, the pair became fast friends. Later Androcles was forced to engage a lion in combat in the Roman amphitheatre. The king of the beasts recognized his benefactor and greeted him with kindness. In Western Europe the story was transformed into a Catholic St. Jerome and the lion,\textsuperscript{14} in Eastern Europe to an Orthodox St. Sergey and the bear.\textsuperscript{15} The underlying moral message was that saintly persons would be compassionate to other species. As the Christian world later commercialized, then industrialized, different aspects of the Christian tradition were emphasized to encourage congruence between economic and religious imperatives. Just as with the Christian tradition, then, we can be confident that as societal circumstances altered in other societies, so their myths will have been adjusted to meet the needs of the changing popular consciousness and the permanent spirit of the people, although the changes will have been less than those that occurred in the West. All this should encourage us to be careful in the interpretation of any particular myth and what it means to society. And the further removed from contemporary consciousness and experience the myth is, the more circumspect we need to be.

We should not assume that treating animals well in myth or religion means that they were well treated in fact – in whatever culture. A medieval father may well have related the story of St. Jerome and the lion to the children of an evening before participating at a cockfight the next morning, more or less sanctioned by the clergy and held on Church property\textsuperscript{16} – though the priests themselves were forbidden to attend by their bishops. Just as we recognize the New Testament exhortations to peace and altruism\textsuperscript{17} as ideals rather than as a description of Christian practice, so too we must understand the moral implications of myth, fables, and stories as expressions of ideals. Nonetheless, we should also understand that the myth is often telling us how honourable people in fact behave, or are expected to behave. And given the greater congruence between myth and the everyday experience of aboriginal societies, we may expect their myths to come rather closer to practice than does Western religion to current Western norms. Nonetheless, throughout the vicissitudes of history and culture, we will be encouraged to find that there is something common to all experience: an awareness that when humans are at their best, and there are no countervailing pressures, they care for their fellow creatures.

In the first chapter the reader will find more commentary about the meaning of selected passages than in subsequent chapters. As we approach our own era, the quotations speak increasingly for themselves. In the earlier chapters, however, we are treating forms of thought and modes of expression that are no longer, or never have been, customary to the modern Western mind. The meanings of the more recent contributors to
animal respect are more or less clear; the thoughts and ideals of those who
are culturally or temporally distant from us are frequently opaque and
require exposition. In the later chapters, the commentary is intended,
ye and large, to do little more than to place the ideas in their immediate
historical, political, or social contexts, and to indicate the relationship
between those ideas.

Amerindian Legends
I have selected two Cheyenne myths to represent the Amerindian way of
life and thought, though there are significant variations in myths among
Amerindian nations. One of the advantages of choosing Cheyenne myths
is that they were collected at the Cheyenne Agency in Oklahoma in 1899
by representatives of the American Museum of Natural History. While
there remains the perennial problem of expressing the self-identifying
ideas of one culture in the language of another, and while we can feel con-

dent that experience of European culture in general, and of European
oppression of the Natives in particular, affected the substance of the myths
to some degree, at least we can be sure the myths have not been altered
in the last century to accommodate the experiences of new technology,
changed societal norms, and the re-orientations engendered by the con-

The Creation Myth of the Cheyenne
In the beginning the Great Medicine created the earth, and the waters upon the
earth, and the sun, moon, and stars. Then he made a beautiful country to spring
up in the far north. There were no winters, with ice and snow and bitter cold. It was
always spring; wild fruits and berries grew everywhere, and great trees shaded the
streams of clear water that flowed through the land.

In this beautiful country the Great Medicine put animals, birds, insects, and fish
of all kinds. Then he created human beings to live with the other creatures. Every
animal, big and small, every bird, big and small, every fish, and every insect could
talk to the people and understand them. The people could understand each other, for they had a common language and lived in friendship. They went naked and fed on honey and wild fruits; they were never hungry. They wandered everywhere among the wild animals, and when night came and they were weary, they lay down on the cool grass and slept. During the days they talked with the other animals, for they were all friends.

The Great Spirit created three kinds of human beings: first, those who had hair all over their bodies; second, white men who had hair all over their heads and faces and on their legs; third, red men who had very long hair on their heads only. The hairy people were strong and active. The white people with the long beards were in a class with the wolf, for both were the trickiest and most cunning creatures in that beautiful world. The red people were good runners, agile and swift, whom the Great Medicine taught to catch and eat fish at a time when none of the other people knew about eating meat.

After a while the hairy people left the north country and went south, where all the land was barren. Then the red people prepared to follow the hairy people into the south. Before they left the beautiful land, however, the Great Medicine called them together. On this occasion, the first time the red people had all assembled in one place, the Great Medicine blessed them and gave them some medicine spirit to awaken their dormant minds. From that time on they seemed to possess intelligence and knew what to do. The Great Medicine singled out one of the men and told him to teach people to band together, so that they all could work and clothe their naked bodies with skins of panther and bear and deer. The Great Medicine gave them the power to hew and shape flint and other stones into any shape they wanted ... into arrow- and spear-heads and into cups, pots, and axes ... The hairy people remained naked but the red people clothed themselves because the Great Medicine had told them to ...

After the red men had lived in the south for some time, the Great Medicine told them to return north, for the barren southland was going to be flooded. When they went back to that beautiful northern land, they found that the white-skinned and long-bearded people and some of the wild animals were gone. They were no longer able to talk to the animals, but this time they controlled all other creatures, and they taught the panther, the bear, and similar beasts to catch game for them. They increased in numbers and became tall and strong and active.

After several migrations, floods, and other ecological disasters:

The people returned to the south and lived as well as they could, in some years better, in others worse. After many hundreds of years, just before the winter season came, the earth shook, and the high hills sent forth fire and smoke. During that winter there were great floods. The people had to dress in furs and live in caves, for the winter was long and cold. It destroyed all the trees, though when spring came there was a new growth. The red men suffered much and were almost famished when the Great Medicine took pity on them. He gave them corn to plant and buffalo for meat, and from that time there were no more floods and no more famines.
The people continued to live in the south, and they grew and increased. There were many different bands with different languages, for the red men were never united after the second flood.

The descendants of the original Cheyenne had men among them who were magicians and with supernatural wisdom. They charmed not only their own people, but also the animals that they lived on. No matter how fierce or wild the beast, it became so tame that people could go up to it and handle it. The magic knowledge was handed down from the original Cheyenne who came from the far north ... ("Great Medicine Makes a Beautiful Country")

The Cheyenne creation myth is one of the most illuminating legends from among the many thousands of aboriginal legends collected from around the world. The myth compilers Erdoes and Ortiz describe it as "this remarkable tale" in which "is stored the memory of much that has happened to the Cheyenne over many hundreds of years." But it is much more than that too. It represents a universal history of humankind. The particulars may be different but, in essence, the human story is the same everywhere. And it is a story that includes the central elements of the human-animal relationship.

The similarity of the Cheyenne creation myth to many other stories of societal origins from around the world is astonishing. Many, perhaps all, peoples claim a special relationship between themselves and their Creator. Many view the site and conditions of their earliest communal memory as a paradise – a prelapsarian Eden – a place of primal perfection where humans, animals, and environment exist in idyllic harmony, where humans and animals speak to and understand each other, and are friends. There is no need of shelter or clothing.

All of these conditions are met in the Cheyenne myth. But we encounter them equally elsewhere, and not only in the tales of other Amerindian nations. In Japan natsukashii refers to an ideal earlier time that was conflict free, and to a yearning to return to the site of natural harmony. The Pitjantjara Aborigines of Australia revere tjukurpa – a dream-time of mystical past harmonies. We find similar legends among the Bassari of West Africa and the Makritare of the Orinoco, and in ancient India and China. In the eighth-century-BC writings of Hesiod in Pre-socratic Greece we meet the first written idea of a Golden Age, a prior era of perfect peace revered in oral myth which did not brook the slaughter of our fellow creatures. The theme was repeated by Empedocles, Plutarch, Porphyry, Virgil, and Tacitus among others. It was then taken up again in Boethius's sixth-century-AD The Consolation of Philosophy, in Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Former Age" in the fourteenth century, and hinted at in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales when he writes of "those far off days when all birds and animals could speak and sing." In the early seventeenth century Shakespeare addressed it in The Tempest and in the eighteenth
century the mythical Golden Age was a common theme of the poets and essay writers. 27

Most strikingly, we find a similar image not only in the Eden of Genesis but in the peaceable kingdom ideal of Isaiah 11 where “the wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid” and in Romans 8 where “the whole creation ... [which] has been groaning in labour pains ... might be freed from its slavery to corruption.” 28 The early memories and ideals of humankind demonstrate some remarkable similarities with regard to our relationship to our original environment and our desire to recapture its innocence; and they are not yet entirely lost in the development of a civilization that removes us so far from them. A number of books and pamphlets advocating a vegetarian diet at the turn of the nineteenth century were based around them. 29 The societal tension between original nature and contemporary culture pervades all societies, though not all in the same degree.

In the Cheyenne creation myth the age of perfect environmental peace is destroyed by natural disasters. (One assumes, both from the context and for the sake of consistency with other myths, that the initial move south at the behest of the Great Medicine [called the Great Power in other versions] was a consequence of an early natural disaster not spelled out in the myth. Later catastrophes, most of which are not reproduced here, are explicit in the myth). Again, the cross-cultural similarities are remarkable. The flood story is found among the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Hindus, Greeks, and others, 30 including other Amerindian nations. 31 Indeed, all societies will, one presumes, have retained a cultural memory of the floods occasioned by the end of the last Ice Age. These natural disasters are usually seen to prompt an altered human relationship to nature and to other species. It is notable that in the Cheyenne myth the wolf is as despised as the white man, and as despised as its traditional European counterpart too, as indicated not only by the fairy tale of The Three Little Pigs but by the philosopher Immanuel Kant who tells us that when we observe how great is the care animals give to their young it is difficult for us to be cruel in thought to them – and then adds: “even to a wolf.” 32 Not all animals, or people, are equal for either the Europeans or the Cheyenne.

Having lived in peaceful harmony with the environment in “the state of nature,” including with animals which would later become harmful to humans and human interests, so the myths indicate, humans were constrained to become carnivores – indeed, paradoxically, the Cheyenne express a cultural pride in having become the first human carnivores. They began to use animal skins for clothing and tent coverings, to cut down trees to provide fuel for fires and the framework for homes, and to live a life of reason rather than of nature or instinct – the Great Medicine gave the Cheyenne “medicine spirit to awaken their dormant minds. From that time on they seemed to possess intelligence.” In Genesis too (9:3), it is
only after the Flood that God grants the Jews the right to eat animals, presumably because the environmental changes occasioned by the Flood have rendered a vegetarian lifestyle impractical. And it is only after eating of the tree of knowledge that humans become creatures of rational thought. Whether there was such a vegetarian and environmentally harmonious period in early human history is still hotly contested; but what is clear is that the development of such myths indicates that many peoples felt that hunting and eating animals were activities which required a moral justification – or at least a permit from the Great Power. There is no need for a justification for behaviour that is considered in and of itself admirable, or even otherwise acceptable. Certainly, it is notable that after the floods humans no longer conversed with the animals but were their masters – the Cheyenne “controlled all other creatures” and in Genesis the animals “are placed in your hands.” Once animal society was egalitarian, now it is hierarchical. Human culture and original nature are inextricably at odds, ensuring that there will be an ongoing tension between cultural aspirations and primordial ideals.

The message of so many traditions, exemplified by the Cheyenne creation myth, is of a now unattainable ideal in which humans, animals, and nature lived as one. The changes brought about, at least metaphorically, by the natural catastrophes have rendered that ideal impractical, or so the myths indicate. Thus, metaphorically, one was “no longer able to talk to the animals” – that is, human and animal interests were no longer in accord. Nonetheless, the initial harmony remained as an ideal to be approximated to the extent that the new circumstances would allow. Even those animals that now had to be killed were entitled to respect, especially for the sacrifice they had to make to permit humans to live.

While the Cheyenne creation myth is important for what it tells us about the Cheyenne attitude to animals and nature, it is also far more than that. It represents the human condition. It epitomizes the circumstances all humans have faced, and continue to face, with regard to the human-animal nexus. To understand the tensions that have underlain the attitudes toward our fellow animals throughout human history there is perhaps no better starting point than this Cheyenne creation legend.

*The Cheyenne Legend of the Origins of the Buffalo Hunt*

The buffalo formerly ate man. The magpie and the hawk were on the side of the people, for neither ate the other or the people. These two birds flew away from a council between animals and man. They determined that a race would be held, the winners to eat the losers.

The course was long, round a mountain. The swiftest buffalo was a cow called Nelka, “swift head.” She believed she would win and entered the race. On the other hand, the people were afraid because of the long distance. They were trying to get medicine to overcome the fatigue.
All the birds painted themselves for the race, and since that time they have all been brightly covered. Even the water turtle put red paint around his eyes. The magpie painted himself white on head, shoulders and tail. At last all were ready for the race, and stood in a row for the start.

They ran and ran, making loud noises in place of singing to help themselves run faster. All small birds, turtles, rabbits, coyotes, wolves, flies, ants, insects, and snakes were soon left far behind. When they approached the mountain the buffalo-cow was ahead; then came the magpie, hawk and the people; the rest were strung out along the way. The dust rose so quickly that nothing could be seen.

All around the mountain the buffalo-cow led the race, but the two birds knew they could win, and merely kept up with her until they neared the finish line, which was back to the starting place. Then both birds whooshed by her and won the race for man. As they flew the course, they had seen fallen animals and birds all over the place, who had run themselves to death, turning the ground and rocks red from blood.

The buffalo then told their young to hide from the people, who were going out to hunt them; and also told them to take some human flesh with them for the last time. The young buffaloes did this, and stuck that meat in front of their chests, beneath the throat. Therefore, the people did not eat that part of the buffalo, saying it is part human flesh.

From that day forward the Cheyenne began to hunt buffalo. Since all the friendly animals were on the people’s side, they are not eaten by people, but they do wear and use their beautiful feathers for adornments.

Another version adds that when coyote, who was on the side of the buffalo, finished the race, the magpie, who even beat the hawk, said to coyote, “We will not eat you, but only use your skin.” (“How the Buffalo Hunt Began”)33

The initial dictum of “How the Buffalo Hunt Began” is that the human killing of animals for food is not a primordially natural behaviour but requires a justification, and a justification is duly offered. The point is made that nonhuman animals are not in harmony with each other either. Nature has become in part a realm of conflict – it was not so prior to the natural disasters – and in part a realm of continued symbiosis, of continued mutual aid. There is an acknowledgment that humans are in some respects the inferiors of other creatures, possessing the speed of neither the buffalo nor the birds. In fact, if the Cheyenne are not to be the continued prey of the buffalo, which are superior in strength as well as speed, they require the assistance of other species that are “on the side of the people.”

Of course, bison are ruminants not carnivores, and hence were never predators, but for the Cheyenne, given the potential superiority implied by the bison’s strength, speed, and size, their failure to devour humans required an explanation. So too did the variety of animal and rock colouration. Given the lack of biological, evolutionary, and geological explanation, legends must be developed to allow the people to accommodate
the unexplained with their understanding. Indeed, it is a remarkable testi-
mony to the similarity and continuity of human minds that even once
scientific explanation was at hand, the Western public was still enthralled
by alternative mythological explanations of natural phenomena. Rudyard
Kipling’s Just So Stories (1902) of “How the Whale got his Throat,” “How
the Camel got his Hump,” “How the Rhinoceros got his Skin,” and “How
the Leopard got his Spots,”34 for example, were no doubt read a great
deal more often than Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species, even though the
Origin sold out its 1,250 copies on the first day of publication in 1859.
One does not have to believe in the purported facts of myths, legends,
and stories for them to be of value to the minds of a people – whether in
the former British Empire or among the Cheyenne.

The rule that a small part of the buffalo must not be eaten serves as a
reminder that in an ideal world there would be no conflict between the
interests of the human and those of the buffalo. It serves too as a reminder
that buffalo and humans are fellow animals, that eating a fellow animal is
in small measure akin to cannibalism – hence the human flesh at the
buffalo’s throat – however much buffalo and human interests have now
come to diverge, and however much flesh-eating is now acknowledged to
be a justifiable practice.

The norm has its counterpart in Genesis 9:4 where, after the Jews were
informed they may now consume meat, they were also told “you must not
eat flesh with life, that is to say, blood in it.” Blood was deemed the essence
of life that may not be consumed. As with the Cheyenne, the Jews under-
stood thereby that flesh-eating was not to be taken lightly, that humans
and animals shared the spark of life in common, and that meat consum-
ption was a right granted by the Creator in special circumstances, not a nat-
ural human right derived from human primordial nature.35

The Cheyenne buffalo hunt legend also offers an explanation of why
even the young buffalo may be difficult to hunt. The buffalo parents have
explained to their offspring the purpose of the hunters. The Cheyenne
must thus learn the ways of the buffalo to hunt them not only successfully
but also respectfully, for they have a human element within them.

Despite the conflicts of interest between predator and prey, there were
still friendly animals and birds, those that did not need to be hunted for
their meat or their hides. In these instances the symbiotic human-animal
relationship of the time of conflict-free paradise remained in principle, but
evertheless there is an acknowledgment that this relationship no longer
existed in fact, for the “beautiful feathers” of the birds were taken for
human decoration. To be sure, in the Cheyenne legend “Eagle War Feath-
ers”36 it is the eagles themselves who suggest their feathers be plucked to
provide martial ornament. In fact, of course, the eagles did no such thing.
But it was important to encourage among the Cheyenne a recognition of
their obligations to their allies. Any deviation must be in compliance with
the will of the friendly animals themselves. While this may be viewed as
no more than a rationalization of Cheyenne self-interest – since, in fact,
the eagles would object strenuously to being deprived of their protective
feathers – it should also be recognized as an acknowledgment that the
interests of other animals matter and that when we behave as our better
selves we act in accordance with that principle.

It is notable that it is not the Cheyenne who have deemed it acceptable
that the coyote be hunted for the hide alone, thus using only a part of the
slaughtered animal. It is the magpie, the winner of the race on behalf of
the Cheyenne, who punished the coyote for being “on the side of the
buffalo.” Nature is not itself at one, but is divided in enmity between the
animals supporting the Cheyenne and those supporting the buffalo. The
Cheyenne are thus not at odds with animated nature itself, only with a
part of it, and that part, so the myth tells us, has only itself to blame. Again,
the consistency with Western myth is striking. When Ovid accounts for
the origins of Western flesh-eating in *Metamorphoses* he informs us the
blame is laid on the pigs and the goats themselves. The pig: “is thought to
have been the first victim to meet a well-deserved fate, because it rooted
out the seeds with its upturned snout, and destroyed the hope of harvest.
Then the goat, they say was sacrificed at Bachus’ altars, as a punishment
for having gnawed his vines. Both had themselves to blame.”37

Cheyenne potential guilt differs from Western potential guilt for the
use of only a part of the animal in that, according to the myth, it is one
of the coyote’s fellow nonhuman animals who has legitimized the hunting
for the fur alone. The killing of our fellow creatures has been necessitated
by the vicissitudes of our environmental history – the climate no longer
permits humans to go naked – but it is deemed acceptable because other
animals, not the Cheyenne themselves, so the myth says, have deemed it
appropriate. Respect for nature remains, but the conflicts between humans
and some animals have diminished, if not eradicated, the original mutual
friendship. The essential message remains: animals are worthy of our re-
spect, and we are obligated to many of them for their assistance in this life
of conflict, filled with the demands of competing interests, among which
human-animal competing interests are significant.

Thus the Cheyenne tales of creation and the beginning of the buffalo
hunt provide a description of the moral context – the conflict between
nature and culture, between sentiment and reality, between Eden and
Arcadia, between primordiality and civilization – in which the human
understanding of our responsibility to our fellow animals is played out.

**Tales of the African Bushman**

In reading aboriginal legends we will look in vain for explicit ethical pro-
nouncements on our appropriate relationship to other species. The dis-
course of myth is not of that genre and if we do find explicit ethical
pronouncements included we can be confident they have been interpolated by a modern commentator with a point to make. Attitudes to animals can nonetheless be recognized as implicit within the traditional tales. And, of course, there are thousands of such tales to choose from. I have made the selections on the basis of how representative they are while trying to include examples of the different forms in which the stories are told.

The great French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote with regard to aboriginal society “Animals are good to think [with].” People think their thoughts in substantial part through animal analogy stressing on the one hand our similarities, and on the other our differences, to other species. In *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society* the anthropologist Mathias Guenther has shown that African Bushmen epitomize that tradition of thinking. Some of their myths stress human-animal similarities with a corresponding respect for other species, others emphasize the particulars of a species which differentiates them from humans and colours attitudes toward them. The first story demonstrates in its entrancingly sonorous musical form that, whatever other differences there may be between humans and animals, in the final analysis all are equal in their mortality – a message also stressed in Ecclesiastes 3: “the fate of the human and the fate of the animal is the same: as the one dies, so the other dies.” Death is to be regretted and, for the Bushmen, it is the moon’s immortality that is envied. The moon is speaking:

I die, I live; living, I come again;
I become a new moon.
Man dies; man, indeed, dies; dying he leaves his wife.
When I die, I return, living.
The gemsbock. The gemsbock dies, the gemsbock dies altogether.
   The hartebeest. The hartebeest dies, the hartebeest dies, altogether.
The she-ostrich. It dies, it indeed dies.
The kudu. The kudu indeed dies, and dying, it goes away.
The springbok. The springbok dies, and dying, it goes away forever,
Myself, I die; living again, I come back.
The korhaan [bustard]. The korhaan dies; the korhaan, dying, goes away.
The cat does [die]; it dies. The cat goes away, dying.
The jackal. The jackal dies; dying, the jackal goes away.
The lynx goes away, dying.
The hyena. The hyena dies, it goes away, dying, dying.
The eland dies. The eland dies and dying, it leaves.
Myself I die. Living again, I come back.
People see me; people say: “Look, the Moon does indeed lie here;
   it is grown, it is a Full Moon.”
Things which are flesh must indeed die ...

("Xam youth /Alkunta")
All animals are alike in their mortality, and it is a matter of regret.

In the second myth the emphasis is on the distinction between predator and prey species, somewhat reminiscent of the Cheyenne “How the Buffalo Hunt Began,” and on how each behaves according to unalterable species characteristics, which must be respected, as must the role of gender. Life for all, including humankind, is ordained by intrinsic nature, not by the will.

Then the anteater [woman] says: “Springbok stand! The Lynx will kill you, for you are a springbok that eats grass ... Lynx stand! You eat springbok. Springbok stand! The lynx will catch you for you are a springbok ...”

Then the hyena marries the female hyena, for the hyena feels that he is a hyena, who eats people. He therefore puts his children into a burrow, because he has married a female hyena. He brings to the hyena children, to the burrow, an ostrich. The hyena children then eat the ostrich ... Then the jackal becomes a jackal. He marries a female jackal, for he is a beast of prey. Once he was a man ...

Then the silver-backed jackal marries a she-jackal. He puts the children into a hollow. For the strandwolf puts the strandwolf children into a hollow. For the strandwolf feels to marry a shestrandwolf who lives in a hollow.

Then the aardwolf marries a she-aardwolf and because he realized that she lives in a cave he puts the aardwolf children into a cave. (/Kabbo, /Xam Bushman, Mowbray, Cape Province, 1871)12

In the final Bushman story we can recognize the complexity of myth in that, in contrast to the prey-predator distinction alone, the hare is singled out for special treatment. The hare plays the same role as the serpent in Genesis 3: “the snake was the most subtle of all the wild animals ... the snake tempted me,” said Eve. For the Bushman it is the hare who is the beguiler, the deceiver, and the cause of human downfall. He deceives the moon, and in return all are condemned to death.

When I told the hare about it – knowing that his mother was not dead but only asleep – the hare said no, his mother did not sleep, but his mother had really died. It was this that I became angry about, thinking that the hare might say: “Yes, my mother is asleep ... She lies sleeping; she will arise presently.”

If the hare had believed the Moon we, who are people, would have come to be like the Moon; we should not die, altogether. The Moon cursed us on account of the hare’s doings, and we die, altogether. (Dia! Kwain, /Xam Bushman, Mowbray, Cape Province, 1871)13

To the Western mind, the selection of the hare to represent deception might at first sight appear puzzling. It is less so on reflection. Unlike many other prey animals, when the hare is hunted he appears lackadaisical, unconcerned, almost distracted. When approached, he shows no apparent awareness of danger, no preparation for flight, no frigid fright. At the very last moment he moves with disarming speed and dexterity, often escaping...
his predator, including his human predator, by his intricate manoeuvres. He is transformed in an instant from apparent tranquillity to energetic spontaneity. He is thus the great deceiver, the destroyer of hopes and expectations. He takes away what the hunter has decided is his. The hare is respected for his abilities, as is the serpent as the symbol of knowledge and wisdom in Genesis, but they are both demigrated for deceiving humans and bringing them great loss. Hence the Bushman has “hated the hare ever since” and the Biblical snake is told (Genesis 3:14): “Accursed be you of all animals wild and tame!” The contrast between some animals and others and between animals in different roles is a pervasive theme of all cultures, both historically and currently.

The Zebra Story of the Shona of Zimbabwe
The zebra poem of the Shona of southeast Africa is of recent vintage but reflects a traditional Shona story and traditional Shona attitudes and values. For the Shona, zebras are not only beautiful and mysterious, they also symbolize peace and goodwill. They are recognized as the owners of the land they inhabit. Those who would take and use the land, the poem suggests, are infringing on the zebra’s prerogative. It is only with the zebra’s acquiescence that land use by humans is legitimate.

Thank you, Zebra,
Adorned with your own stripes,
Iridescent and glittering creature,
Whose skin is as soft as girls’ is;
One on which the eye dwells all day, as on the solitary cow of a poor man;
Creature that makes the forests beautiful,
Weaver of lines
Who wear your skin for display,
Drawn with lines so clearly defined;
You who throw beads in patterns,
Dappled fish
Hatching around the neck of a pot;
Beauty spots cut to rise in a crescent on the forehead,
A patterned belt for the waist:
Light reflected
Dazzling the eyes.
It is its own instinct, the Zebra’s,
Adorned as if with strings of beads around the waist as women are;
Wild creature without anger or any grudge,
Lineage with a totem that is nowhere a stranger,
Line that stretches everywhere,
Owners of the land.
The Nigerian Elephant

Again, though modern in form, this Nigerian story is traditional in outlook. While the zebra represents beauty and grace, the elephant is saluted for his grandeur and power, of which the human can only stand in awe.

Elephant, opulent creature, elephant, huge as a hill even when kneeling:
Elephant, robed in honour, a demon, flapping fans of war:
Demon who splinters the tree branches, invading the forest farm:
Elephant, who disregards “I have fled to my father for refuge,”
Let alone “To my mother”;
Mountainous animal, Huge Beast, who tears a man like a garment and hangs him up on a tree:
At the sight of him people stampede to a hill of safety:
My chant is a salute to the elephant.
Ajanaku, who treads heavily:
Demon who swallows bunches of palm-fruits whole, including the spikes:
Elephant, praise-named Laaye, massive blackish-grey creature:
Elephant, who single-handed makes the dense forest tremble:
Elephant, who stands sturdy and upright, who strolls as if reluctantly:
Elephant, whom one sees and points at with all one’s fingers. The hunter’s boast at home is not repeated when he really meets the elephant,
Ajanaku, who looks backwards with difficulty like a man with a stiff neck;
Elephant, who has a head pad but carries no load,
Elephant, whose burden is the huge head he balances:
Elephant, praise-named Laaye, “O death, please stop following me,”
This is part and parcel of the elephant’s appellation.
Learn of the elephant, the waterman elephant,
Elephant, honour’s equal, elephant who constantly swings his trunk like a fly-whisk,
Elephant, whose eyes are like water-jars,
Elephant, the greatest of wanderers, whose molar teeth are as big as palm-oil pits in Ijesaland.
Elephant, lord of the forest, praise-named Oriribobo,
Elephant, whose tusks are like shafts,
One of whose tusks is a porter’s whole load, elephant, praise-named Otiko,
with the mighty neck,
Elephant, whom the hunter sometimes sees face to face, elephant, whom the hunter at other times sees from the rear,
Elephant, who carries mortars, yet walks with a swaggering gait,
Primeval leper, animal treading ponderously.46

Nature’s Law and the Aboriginal Way: An Australian Narrative

The following account of “nature’s law” comes from Big Bill Neidjie, an elder of the Bunitj clan of the Australian Kakadu people. It is a late-twentieth-century expression of aboriginal values, although, again, the
words reflect age-old values. However, their recent vintage allows us to see how Australian Aborigines distinguish between the tribal law they are exhorted to follow and their experience of the injunctions of Western law. For Australian Native peoples, indeed for Aboriginals generally, the appropriate way of life is heavily informed by tradition. Their belief is that the traditions of society reflect the wisdom of humans in their origins, especially with regard to nature and other species, as interpreted through the society’s historical experiences. Thus the law looks backward to an undeviating conception of the right way to do things, originating in what they call “the dreamtime,” a mystical Golden Age of a tribal past when all the great moral and practical questions were settled, including those of one’s appropriate relationship to animals and nature. By contrast, European law is seen as ever-evolving and trying vainly to meet the contingencies of constantly changing practical realities and cultural norms.

Western conceptions were not, however, always entirely at odds with aboriginal notions. At one time in the early West, moral questions were settled by the edicts of the Ten Commandments, which Moses received from God, and which were said to be “inscribed by the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:18). The Gospel of St. John opens: “In the beginning was the Word,” that is, the appropriate way to act was settled at creation. A traditional Christian prayer informs us that, “as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be ...” If the Western and aboriginal conceptions of law have diverged as a consequence of vastly differing historical experiences, we may still recognize a commonality that united them in a distant past.

Indeed, toward the close of the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke was still admonishing his contemporaries to respect “the wisdom of ages,” reminding them that “People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors,” and that “the sole authority” of constitutional law “is that it has existed time out of mind.”

Just as it was in the now largely forgotten Western conception of the Golden Age, an Edenic paradise, so too in the Aborigine dreamtime all of nature is kin. Shakespeare’s “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin” (Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida, 3, 3) is reminiscent of Australian aboriginal conceptions. For Bill Neidjie, all animals are alike in that humans and other species must struggle equally for survival. All are alike in that they must pursue their natural ends as the beings they are, always have been, and always will be. Knowing the difficulties we encounter in our own lives, we should respect other animals in theirs, for they face similar problems. It is thus that they are both our kin and our kindred travaillers.

Law never change ...
Always stay same.
Maybe it hard,
but proper one for all people.
Not like white European law...
Always changing
If you don’t like it, you can change.

Aboriginal law never change.
Old people tell us.
“You got to keep it.”
It always stays...

People look for food,
Animal look for food.
Lizard look, bird look,
We all same...

This ground and this earth...
Like brother and mother.

You know eagle?
Eagle our brother,
like dingo our brother.\(^{47}\)

Oriental Traditions
Just as Jews, Christians, and Muslims find a common heritage in the Old Testament, so too do Jainas, Hindus, and Buddhists pay a common homage to many early East Indian religious writings. These writings are revered in all three traditions, though each lays greater stress on certain texts that they regard as their own. Nonetheless, as we shall see, despite the considerable variety of books, there are great similarities in content—indeed, frequent repetition to the point of duplication can be found.

Eastern religious traditions have described the appropriate relationship of human to nonhuman animal far more explicitly than we find in either the aboriginal or early Western traditions. Indeed, human duties toward other species are often expressed as explicit ethical pronouncements rather than implied in parables and legends. While it is possible to find instances of animal disdain in these traditions,\(^ {48}\) as in all traditions, the greater weight is emphatically on the side of a profound ethical responsibility. Nonetheless, it is not always easy to be confident of the precise content of some of those ethical pronouncements. In part, it is because of the difficulties of translation, or because sometimes the interpreters appear to want to include in their translations what they see as the implications of the passage translated instead of being content to let the passages speak for themselves. Three translations of the same passage from the Isopanishad may serve to illustrate the problem:
1 The entire universe and everything in it, animate and inanimate, is His. Let us treat everything around us reverently, as custodians. We have no charter for dominion. All wealth is commonwealth. Let us enjoy, but neither hoard nor kill. The humble frog has as much right to live as we. (G. Naganathan)

2 This whole universe must be pervaded by a Lord -/ Whatever moves in this moving [world]./ Abandon it, and then enjoy:/ Covet not the goods of anyone at all. (R.C. Zaehner)

3 Behold the universe in the glory of God; and all that lives and moves on earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal: set not your heart on another’s possession. (Juan Mascaró)

Reading Naganathan’s version one imagines the passage to be primarily concerned with a profound compassion for the earth’s creatures, including the least of animals. Zaehner’s version suggests the passage is not concerned with our relationship to animated nature at all. And Mascaró does little more than remind us that we should recognize God’s goodness in all his creation. Clearly, there are competing, and scarcely compatible, ways of viewing the same pronouncement. One must accordingly be wary of the interpretations sometimes put on certain Indian passages. Nonetheless, we should not fail to recognize that these traditional passages, taken as a whole, show a clear and decisive recognition of human responsibilities toward animals.

The perfect devotee of the Lord is one who sees Atman [the principle of life] in all creatures as an expression of the Supreme Being and all beings as dwelling in the supreme spirit. (Bhagavatam)

Ahimsa (Non-injury), truth, non-stealing, continence and non-possession are the five major vows which are concomitant to charitra (conduct). (Yoga Shastra of Hemchandracharya)

Ahimsa – meaning avoidance from the infliction of injury or harm – is in origin a Jain principle, and the Yoga Shastra is a Jain text; but the principle was readily adopted by both Hindus and Buddhists in a pantheistic conception of God’s presence in all creatures. Ahimsa applies to the treatment of all living creatures, if not with equal force, and may be said to constitute the core of Indian ethical thought in the same manner that the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 – “So always treat others as you would like them to treat you” – is deemed the central principle of Christianity.

Ahimsa is the highest dharma [religious principle, duty, or caste requirement], self-control, gift, penance, sacrifice, power, friend, happiness, truth [and] scripture. (Mahabharata)

We bow to all beings with great reverence in the thought and knowledge that God enters into them through fractioning himself as living creatures. (Mahabharata)
Everyone in the [meat] business, the one who cuts, the one who kills, the one who sells, the one who prepares, the one who offers, the one who eats; all are killers. *(Mahabharata)*

As noted already, while only a relatively small proportion of Hindus and Buddhists are vegetarian by ethical or religious principle, such Eastern doctrines have encouraged even many meat-eaters to have a profound respect for those who eschew flesh. Yet the doctrine itself appears to be somewhat less than hard and fast, even for Brahmans. Thus, for example, in his *Hindu Ethics: A Historical and Critical Essay*, John Mackenzie has argued that the vegetarian principle was considerably weakened in practice through, for example, the Laws of Manu which he quotes as follows:

One may eat meat when it has been sprinkled with water, while Mantras were recited, when Brahmanas desire (one’s doing it), when one is engaged (in the performance of a rite) according to the law, and when one’s life is in danger.

Again:

He who eats meat, when he honours the gods and manes, commits no sin, whether he has bought it, or himself has killed (the animal), or has received it as a present from others.

Moreover, Mackenzie indicates there are limitations “to the doctrine of ahimsa” which

does not apply to the taking of lives in battle, or to the infliction of capital punishment. By qualifications such as these the force of the doctrine is very considerably weakened. The exceptions to the general principle that life should not be taken, and that the flesh of animals should not be eaten, were so many and of such diverse kinds, that we can believe it would be exceedingly difficult to determine whether a particular act was a breach of the law or not. We know that hunting and fishing continued in spite of all laws.

All true enough – as exemplified by the story from the *Bhima Swarga* (below, pp. 25-6) – and a necessary corrective to those who would exaggerate the effectiveness of the doctrine. Nonetheless, *ahimsa* is an admirable principle and stands as a symbol of the ideal to be striven for. Moreover, there are many examples in Indian philosophies of the doctrine being taken to mean what it says.

The holy first commandment runs: not harsh but kindly be – and therefore lavish mercy on the louse, the bug and the gadfly. *(Pancatantra)*

Whether it is the worm in the excrement or the beings in Indra’s heaven, their love of life is the same, their fear of death is the same. *(Pancatantra)*

All beings are fond of life: they like pleasure and hate pain, shun destruction, and like to live. To all life is dear. *(Acaranga Sutra)*
He who harms animals has not understood or renounced deeds of sin. (*Acaranga Sutra*)

May all beings look at me with a friendly eye, may I do likewise [in return], and may we look on each other with the eyes of a friend. (*Yajur Veda*)

All beings tremble before danger, all fear death. When a man considers this, he does not kill or cause to kill. (*Dhammapada*)

But although a man may wear fine clothing, if he lives peacefully; and is good, self-possessed, has faith and is pure; and if he does not hurt any living being, he is a holy Brahmin, a hermit of seclusion, a monk called a Bhikku. (*Dhammapada*)

A man is not a great man because he is a warrior and kills other men; but because he hurts not any living being he in truth is called a great man. (*Dhammapada*)

He who hurts not any living being, whether feeble or strong, who neither kills nor causes to kill – him I call a Brahmin. (*Dhammapada*)

In the long course of samsara [flux], there is not one among living beings with form who has not been mother, father, sister, son or daughter, or some relative. Being connected with the process of taking birth, one is kin to all domestic animals, birds, and beings born from the womb. (*Lankavatara Sutra*)

A bikkhu [monk] who has received ordination ought not intentionally to destroy the life of any living being down to a worm or an ant. (*Mahavagga*)

What is religion? Compassion for all things which have life. What is happiness? To animals in this world, health. What is kindness? A principle in the good. What is philosophy? An entire separation from the world. (*Hitopadesa*)

Are these flesh-eating humans who hunt the innocent deers, dwelling in forests and living on air, water, and grass, any better than curs? Why should the people who feel pain at the slightest prick of a thorn, attack the innocent animals with sharp pointed weapons? These cruel hunters destroy the life of these poor creatures for the sake of some momentary pleasure. If an animal faces danger of death he is terribly pained, then how much will he suffer when attacked with terrible weapons? (*Yogashastra*)

Every creature in this world likes happiness and dislikes unhappiness; so we should not do unto others what one does not want others to do unto him. In other words one should never commit violence to other jivas [living beings]. (*Yogashastra*)

With the three means of punishment, words, thoughts, and deeds, you shall not injure living things. (*Jaina Sutra*)

All beings hate pain; therefore one should not kill them. This is the quintessence of wisdom: not to kill anything. (*Sutrakritanga*)
All breathing, existing, living, feeling creatures should not be killed, nor treated violently, nor abused. All beings hate pain; therefore one should not kill them. This is the quintessence of wisdom: not to kill anything. (Sutrakritanga) 

(These) wise ones see the selfsame thing (sama)*

In a Brahman, wise and courteous,

As in a cow or an elephant

Nay, as in a dog or outcaste. (Bhagavad Gita) 

Nirvana that is Brahman is the lot

Of seers in whom (all) taint of imperfection is destroyed;

Their doubts dispelled, (all) self-controlled,

They take their pleasures in the weal

Of all contingent beings. (Bhagavad Gita) 

With self by Yoga integrated, (now) he sees

The self in all beings standing,

All beings in the self;

The same in everything he sees. (Bhagavad Gita) 

Who loves and worships (bhaj-) Me, embracing unity,

As abiding in all beings,

In whatever state he be,

That man of Yoga abides in me. (Bhagavad Gita) 

Let a man feel hatred for no contingent being,

Let him be friendly, compassionate.

Let him be done with thoughts of “I” and “mine,”

The same as in pleasure as in pain, long suffering ... (Bhagavad Gita) 

The following Balinese Hindu legend differs in form from the Hindu pronouncements of the mainland as well as being rather more ambivalent in its character.

[The Balinese Hindu clowns] Twalen and Mredah were so engrossed in their discussion that they almost missed an extraordinary sight: a demon was crossing the landscape of Hell in a flamboyant cart with wheels as gigantic as the demon himself.

“Look! Look! Just look at those two men pulling the cart and being whipped at the same time. God help me not to do what led them to this!” shrieked Mredah, who was a little lazy fellow. Mredah’s voice had now become so shrill that Prince Bhima could no longer ignore what his servants were saying.

“I bet that’s the punishment inflicted on those who have tortured the buffaloes and other animals for the fun of it,” Twalen guessed.

“Like catching a dragonfly and ripping off its wings, to watch its reaction,” Mredah broke in.

“That is correct,” said Bhima in his usual cool, princely tone ...

* “That,” i.e., the religious goal.
The servant-clowns witness a man about to be slain by a monster.

“What has He done?” asked Twalen, who couldn’t figure out what terrible sins the poor man must have committed. Again, only Bhima was able to shed light on the situation.

“That man slaughtered animals without caring about the prescribed ritual,” Bhima explained in his severe tone. “One should never forget that animals are human beings who have taken on other shapes and forms. After one has looked after an animal with care, then the creature should rightly give up its life for its master. But during the slaughtering, one should always repeat this mantra: “I am slaying you in order to free your soul. Do not take revenge on me.” (Bhima Swarga)\(^{83}\)

Confucianism

Confucius (K’ung Fu’tse) lived c. 551 BC to c. 479 BC.\(^{84}\) The Analects is a book of his purported sayings and views, as well as of ancient Chinese philosophical and ethical commentary in general. There is, however, considerable dispute about its authenticity. Confucius’s role is in several respects akin to that of Socrates in the Greek philosophical tradition – that of a profoundly revered thinker who wrote nothing himself and the interpretations of whose views are not entirely consistent.

Confucianism as a doctrine is a system of ethical precepts for the just governance and management of a society, the fundamentals of which are to be discovered in humanity’s unadulterated moral intuitions. The doctrine treats humans as essentially social creatures, properly concerned with their own personal, moral, and intellectual development. Stressing filial relations, Confucianism concerns itself with the moral obligations involved at various levels of human interaction, emphasizing the differences between humans and “wild animals,” which are customarily posited as the condition to be overcome. Nonetheless, a modest level of acknowledgement of our responsibilities to other species may be found within the tradition. One of the traditional stories told of Confucius concerns his support for animal sacrifice: “Tsekung wanted to do away with the ceremony of sacrificing the lamb in winter. Confucius said, ‘Ah, Sze, you love the lamb, but I love the ritual.’”\(^{85}\) While Confucius himself may have been more concerned with ritual traditions, it is clear that his disciple Tsekung recognized the worthiness of animal life.

In the traditional Chinese Book of Songs, which Confucius is said to have edited, we read: “the twittering yellow bird rests or alights on a little mound.” Confucius is reported to have commented on that line: “When the bird rests, it knows where to rest. Should a human being be inferior to a bird in knowing where to rest (or even in knowing what to dwell in)?”\(^{86}\) Confucius is acknowledging – perhaps even despairing at – the superiority of the bird’s instinct in knowing what is appropriate to it, while humans in
their ignorance will often make the wrong choice. Nonetheless, for Confucius, respect for relatives and for other species was of a decidedly different order: “Tsu-yu asked about filial piety. The master said, ‘Nowadays, one who provides for (his parents) is called filial. But even dogs and horses are provided for. If there is no reverence – what is the difference?’”87 This would appear to suggest that care and protection of animals is all well and good but they should be undertaken in a far different spirit from that of care for one’s parents.

Clearly, evidence of Confucius’s understanding of the appropriate human relationship to animals is both scanty and, in some instances, discouraging, if less than conclusive. The views of Mencius (c. 372 BC to c. 289 BC), Confucius’s most influential disciple, are more readily discernible. “The superior man feels concern for creatures, but he is not benevolent to them. He is benevolent to the people but he does not love them. He loves his parents, is benevolent to the people and feels concern for creatures.”88 Our primary duty is toward immediate kin, secondarily to people in general, and thirdly to the animal realm. Mencius does not inform us of the relative weights to be given to these different interests but indicates only that the answer must lie in our answering the call of our natural endowment, that is, our conscience or intuition. “Mencius said, “Now as for his ch’ing (true essence), a man may become good – this is what I mean when I say (man’s nature) is good. His becoming bad is not the fault of his endowment.”89

Taoism
Taoism is chiefly, at least theoretically, derived from the Tao-te-ching, a book traditionally ascribed to Lao-tse, but almost certainly of third-century-BC vintage. It advocates the tao – the way – which is essentially quietist, culminating in mystical contemplation. By the fourth century AD it had in practice become heavily influenced by Mahayana Buddhism and had adopted many of its doctrines. While Taoism has generally avoided detailed commentary on the human-animal relationship, a few Taoists (or those influenced by Taoism), notably those suffused with philosophies of Indian extraction, have expressed the strongest ethical orientations to animals, though it would be inappropriate to consider them representative of Taoism in general.

Have a compassionate heart toward all creatures ... Even insects, grass and trees you must not hurt.90

Buy captive creatures and set them free. Hold fast to vegetarianism and abstain from taking life. Whenever taking a step, always watch for ants and insects ... Help people in distress as you would a fish in a dried up rut. Free people in danger as you would a sparrow from a fine net. Benefit living creatures and human beings.91
The Biblical Tradition

It is significantly more difficult to find explicit animal-considerate passages in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, especially the latter, than in Indian scriptures. Nonetheless, several Christian writers have insisted they are there to be found. For example, in *An Essay on Humanity to Animals* of 1798, Thomas Young, Anglican priest and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, quoted passages from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Proverbs, Jonah, St. Matthew, and I Corinthians to show that God cares for the animal realm and requires us to do likewise. In her popular devout novel, *Agnes Grey* (1847), Anne Brontë interpreted both the Old and New Testaments as exhorting us to treat well of our fellow “sentient creatures.” And Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* (1862) instructs us that “duty to all living creatures” is one of the four duties of humankind according to the Gospel of St. Matthew. However, such doctrines have to be extracted painstakingly from the texts in most instances, and on some occasions with considerable ingenuity. Unlike the Eastern scriptures, only occasionally are they explicit and transparent. Indeed, some of the Biblical commentary on animals sounds like lessons in pastoral husbandry rather than general pronouncements on animal ethics.

In Ezekiel the message is that God looks after his people in the same manner that the good shepherd ought to look after his flock:

For the Lord Yahweh says this: Look, I myself shall take care of my flock and look after it. As a shepherd looks after his flock when he is with his scattered sheep, so I shall look after my sheep. I shall rescue them from wherever they have been scattered on the day of clouds and darkness. I shall bring them back from the peoples where they are; I shall gather them back from the countries and bring them back to their own land. I shall pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the inhabited parts of the country. I shall feed them in good pasturage; the highest mountains of Israel will be their grazing ground. There they will rest in good grazing grounds; they will browse in rich pastures on the mountains of Israel. I myself shall pasture my sheep. I myself shall give them rest – declares the Lord Yahweh. I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the injured and make the sick strong. I shall watch over the fat and healthy. I shall be a true shepherd to them. (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

Other Biblical passages treat God’s concern for his animal creation in a more explicit manner, indicating that earth was created as much for the benefit of wild animals and birds as for humans and their domestic flocks.

In the ravines you [God] opened up springs,
running down between the mountains,
supplying water for all the wild beasts;
the wild asses quench their thirst,
on their banks the birds of the air make their nests,
they sing among the leaves.
From your high halls you water the mountains,
satisfying the earth with the fruit of your works:
for cattle you make the grass grow,
and for the people the plants they need,
to bring forth food from the earth ...
The trees of Yahweh drink their fill,
the cedars of Lebanon which he sowed;
there the birds build their nests,
on the highest branches the stork makes its home;
for the wild goats there are the mountains, in the crags the coneys find refuge.
(Psalms 104:10-14, 16-18)

There are a few passages, all from the Old Testament, which exhort us
directly to give consideration to the animals.
If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen under its load, do not stand
back; you must go and help him with it. (Exodus 23:5)
For six days you will do your work, and on the seventh you will rest, so your ox and
your donkey may rest and the child of your slave-girl have a breathing space and
the alien too. (Exodus 23:12)
You must not plough with ox and donkey together. (Deuteronomy 22:10)
The purpose of the injunction is to prevent harm to the animals.
You must not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the corn. (Deuteronomy 25:4)
The farmer is being told that the ox must not be deprived of a portion of
the fruit of its labour. St. Paul repeats the doctrine verbatim in I Timothy
5:18.
The upright has compassion on his animals, but the heart of the wicked is ruthless.
(Proverbs 12:10)

In Isaiah, God makes it clear how he regards the harming of His crea-
tures from wanton cruelty in sacrifice.
Some slaughter a bull, some kill a human being, some sacrifice a lamb, some stran-
gle a dog, some present an offering of pig’s blood ... all these people have chosen
their own ways and take delight in their disgusting practices ... They have done
what I regard as evil, have chosen what displeases me. (Psalms 66:3-4)
The traditional King James version is even more powerful: “He that
killeth an ox is as if he slew a man.”
The benevolence of God toward His creatures is often repeated:
God had Noah in mind, and all the wild animals and all the cattle that were with
him in the ark. (Genesis 8:1)
Yahweh, your faithful love is in the heavens, your constancy reaches to the clouds, your saving justice is like towering mountains, your judgments like the mighty deep. Yahweh, you support both man and beast. (Psalms 36:5-6)

HET: Yahweh is tenderness and pity, slow to anger, full of faithful love.
TET: Yahweh is generous to all, his tenderness embraces all his creatures.
YOD: All your creatures shall thank you, Yahweh, and your faithful shall bless you. (Psalms 145:8-10)

The similarity of human and animal is stressed in Ecclesiastes, in a manner reminiscent of Bushman myth.95

For the fate of human and the fate of animal is the same: as the one dies, so the other dies; both have the selfsame breath. Human is in no way better off than the animal – since all is futile. Everything goes to the same place, everything comes from the dust, everything returns to the dust. Who knows if the human spirit mounts upward or if the animal spirit goes down to the earth? (Ecclesiastes 3:19-21)

We can also read of humanity’s need to learn from the animals, implying that there are respects in which the capacities of other species are superior to those of humanity, in a manner reminiscent of the Cheyenne legend of “How the Buffalo Hunt Began.”96 Indeed, when one makes such comparisons one can only be reminded of Wordsworth’s dictum: we have all of us one human heart.97

You have only to ask the cattle, for them to instruct you, and the birds of the sky for them to inform you.

The creeping things of the earth will give you lessons, and the fish of the sea provide you with an explanation: there is not one such creature but will know that the hand of God has arranged things like this. (Job 12:7-9)

According to Genesis, prior to the Flood, animals and humans lived without harm to each other, reminiscent of the golden age in the Cheyenne creation myth.98

“Look, to you I give all the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the surface of the earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this will be your food. And to all the wild animals, all the birds of heaven and the living creatures that creep along the ground, I give all the foliage of the plants as their food.” And so it was. (Genesis 1:29-30)

And if this was a long disappeared utopia it remained as an ideal to be regained at some point in the future.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the panther lie down with the kid, calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like the ox. The infant will play over the den of the adder; the baby will put his hand into the viper’s lair. No hurt, no harm will be done ... (Isaiah 11:6-9)
When the day of reconciliation comes:

I shall make a treaty for [the people] with the wild animals, and the birds of heaven and the creeping things of the earth; I shall break the bow and the sword and warfare, and banish them from the country, and I will let them sleep secure. (Hosea 2:20)

And St. Paul tells us:

In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed. It was not for its own purpose that creation had frustration imposed on it, but for the purpose of him who imposed it – with the intention that the whole creation might be freed from its slavery and corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God. We are all aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains. (Romans 8:18-22)

Judaism

It is recognized all too infrequently that traditional Judaic pronouncements, especially those absent from the Bible, possess a solid animal ethic. In fact, one of the principles of the Torah: Bal Taschit – do not destroy – plays a similar role in Jewish thought to that of ahimsa in Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist thought. It is based on the idea that “the earth is the Lord’s,” that everything that exists belongs to Him, and that, correspondingly, we have no right to harm anything.99 In the Talmud we read:

It is forbidden according to the law of Torah to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our duty to relieve the pain of any creature, even if it is ownerless or belongs to a non-Jew.100

When horses, drawing a cart, come to a rough road or a steep hill, and it is hard for them to draw the cart without help, it is our duty to help them, even when they belong to a non-Jew, because of the precept not to be cruel to animals, lest the owner smite them to force them to draw more than their strength permits.101

Jews must avoid plucking feathers from live geese, because it is cruel to do so.102

Rejoicing cannot occur at an animal’s expense.103

Animals are not to be penned up in stables on Shabbat.104

One who prevents an animal from eating when at work is punishable by flagellation.105

As the Holy One, blessed be He, has compassion upon man, so has He compassion upon the beasts of the field ... And for the birds of the air.106
Thou thinkest that flies, fleas, mosquitoes are superfluous, but they have their
purpose in creation as a means of a final outcome ... Of all that the Holy One,
blessed be He, created in His world, He did not create a single thing without
purpose.107

The Talmud indicates further that heaven rewards those who show con-
cern and compassion for nonhumans,108 and that one should not have an
animal unless one can feed it and care for it.109 Another Hebrew doctrine
is that “a good man does not sell his beast to a cruel person.”110

According to the Book of Enoch, a Judaic text of perhaps around AD
150, probably earlier and most certainly based on earlier sources, it was
only after the Flood that humans “began to sin against birds and beasts
and reptiles and fish, and to devour one another’s flesh and to drink the
blood.”111 If God granted the right to eat meat after the Flood, clearly
there were some who continued to regard flesh-eating as a “sin.” Early
Christians as well as Jews accepted the Book of Enoch as one of the holy
scriptures.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100), writing of the
fundamental laws of the Mosaic code, observed: “It is not lawful to pass by
any beast that is in distress, when it is fallen down under its burden, but to
endeavour to preserve it, as having a sympathy with it in its pain.”112

Islam

The primary Islamic scriptures are the Qur’an (Koran), the divine revela-
tions of Allah to Mohammed, and the Hadith, the traditional wisdoms as-
cribed to Mohammed. Together they constitute the Shariah, the source of
Islamic law. In the Qur’an Majeed we find the following pronouncements:

No kind of beast is there on earth, nor fowl that flieth with its wings, but is a folk
like you; then unto their Lord shall they be gathered.113

A more modern, and more impressive, rendering of the statement is
given as:

There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are com-
munities like you.114

Other animal sympathetic statements include:

There is no moving creature on earth but God provides for its sustenance.115

And the earth – He has assigned it to all living creatures.116

And the earth – He spread it out for all living beings, with its fruits, blossom-
bearing palms, husk-coated grains, and fragrant plants.117

And the earth – we have spread out its expanse and cast on it mountains in stable
equilibrium, and caused life of every kind to grow on it, justly weighed.118
In your own creation, as well as in the creation of all the animals pervading the earth, there are portents for those who believe.¹¹⁹

The Qur’an calls the cruel practices of those pagans who slit the ears of animals: “devilish acts.”¹²⁰

The pronouncements of the Hadith are more explicit than those of the Qur’an itself. Some scholars have, in fact, doubted the authenticity of some of the views ascribed to Mohammed in the Hadith, considering them representative of what the commentators wished Mohammed had said rather than what he did say. Yet even if such a view were valid, the purported sayings would indicate at the very least what humane Muslims believed appropriate and what they thought Mohammed himself would have espoused.

It behooves you to treat animals gently.¹²¹

Verily, there are rewards for our doing good to dumb animals.¹²²

All creatures are like a family of God; and He loves the most those who are the most beneficent to His family.¹²³

Everyone who shows clemency, even towards a mere bird under the knife, will find God’s clemency towards him on Doomsday.¹²⁴

There is a meritorious reward [Thawab] for every act of charity and kindness to every living creature.¹²⁵

A good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being.¹²⁶

There is no man who kills even a sparrow, or anything smaller, but God will question him about it.¹²⁷

Avoid the seven abominations. And kill not a living creature, which Allah has made sacrosanct, except for a justifiable reason.¹²⁸

The curse of God be upon him who exceedingly punishes any animal ... whoever has a horse and treats it well, will be treated well by God.¹²⁹

Revel as we must in these admirable injunctions and principles from aboriginal, Oriental, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim sources, let us not imagine for a moment that these precepts reflect the practical realities of societies. They do, however, reflect the fact that these principles inform the way honourable people behave and the way all are instructed, if perhaps not expected, to behave.