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The Anagarika Sugatananda

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY
Kandy 1964 Ceylon

Bodhi Leaves No. B. 23

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In an article on evolutionary ethics, Sir John Arthur Thomson, Regius Professor of Natural History, Aberdeen University, makes the striking observation that 'Animals may not be ethical, but they are often virtuous.'

If this opinion had been expressed by a Buddhist writer it might have met with scepticism from those who hold 'commonsense' practical views on the nature of animals. Perhaps with even more incredulity from those whose religion teaches them to regard man as a special creation, the only being with a 'soul' and therefore the only one capable of noble and disinterested action. Scientific evidence that man differs from the animals in the quality of his faculties, but not in essential kind, has not yet broken down the age-old religious idea of man's god-bestowed uniqueness and superiority. In the minds of most people there is still an unbridgeable gulf

between the animal world and the human. It is a view that is both convenient and flattering to *homo sapiens*, and so will die hard, if it dies at all, in the popular mind. To be quite fair to theistic religious ideas, the anthropocentric bias is just as strong among people who are pleased to call themselves rationalists as it is among the religiously orthodox.

But Prof. Thomson's verdict is that of an unbiased scientific observer and student of behaviour, and must command respect. Furthermore, most open-minded people who have been in close contact with animals would endorse it. The full implication of his statement lies in the distinction between the 'ethical' and the 'virtuous', a distinction which is not always understood. Ethical conduct is that which follows a code of moral rules and is aware, to some extent, of an intelligible principle underlying them. It is the result of a course of training in social values, many of which are artificial in the sense that they have no connection with any standards but the purely relative and adventitious ones that govern communal life. Virtue, on the other hand, is

rooted more deeply. It expresses itself in instinctive and unanalysable conduct; its values are personal and seem to flow from levels of awareness that behaviouristic soundings cannot plumb. This is the source from which spring ethically uncalled-for acts of kindness, self-abnegation and heroism, prompted by a primal and spontaneous urge of love.

It is not an ethical sense that makes the female animal defend her young with her life, or a dog remain with its unconscious master in a burning house rather than save itself. When, as Prof. Thomson points out, animals 'are devoted to their offspring, sympathetic to their kindred, affectionate to their mates, self-subordinating in their community, courageous beyond praise', it is not because they are morally aware or morally trained, but because they possess another quality, which can only be called virtue. To be ethical is man's prerogative because it requires a developed reasoning faculty; but since virtue of the kind found in animals takes no account of rewards or punishments it is in a certain sense a higher quality than mere morality. Moral conduct may

be based on nothing more than fear of society's disapproval and retaliation, or the expectation of reprisals from a punitive god. In morality there may be selfishness; in virtue is none.

No one is benefited by extravagant claims made for him, and what has been said is not intended to deny that for the most part animals are rapacious and cruel It cannot be otherwise when they live under the inexorable compulsions of the law of survival. But what of man, who has been called the most dangerous and destructive of animals? Would the majority of human beings be much better than animals, if all restraints of fear were removed? Are not most of man's moral rules only devices for holding society together in the interests of mutual security? Is not man the only being who kills unnecessarily, for mere amusement?

But just as there are vast differences between one man and another in nature and conduct, so there are between animals. Anyone who has taken pleasure in feeding monkeys in a wild state will have noticed that there is usually one old

male who tyrannizes over the females and their young, greedily snatching more than he needs himself rather than let the weaker members share the food. That does not mean that all monkeys are egoistic bullies; it only shows that they share more characteristics in common with man than do most other animals. A few years ago it was reported from India that a monkey had jumped into a swollen river and saved a human baby from drowning, at great peril to its own life. The incident is noteworthy because it concerns a wild animal; such actions by domesticated animals are so frequent that they often pass unnoticed. It suggests a special relationship between wild animals and those human beings who live at peace with them; perhaps a rudimentary sense of gratitude or even a dim idea of the need for mutual help against the hostile forces of nature. Monkeys are treated with kindness by the Indian villager, and all the higher animals are well able to distinguish between friendliness and enmity. At least, that is how it used to be in India; but now one wonders sadly whether respect for Hanuman-ji will be able to prevail over the demand for polio vaccine.

Regarding the Human-animal relationship Prof. Thomson also has something to say, and his words have a special significance for Buddhists.

He writes that although there is no warrant for calling animals moral agents, for the reasons we have seen, 'a few highly-endowed types, such as dog and horse, which have become man's partners, may have some glimpse of the practical meaning of responsibility', and that there are cases in which possibly 'ideas are beginning to emerge'. That there is the possibility of such ideas being formed in the animal mind, and that they can be encouraged and cultivated, is nothing strange to Buddhist thought. The evolution of personality is as much a certainty as the evolution of biological types, and since it is concerned with the mind it is often much more rapid.

Buddhism takes into full account the animal's latent capacity for affection, heroism and self-sacrifice. There is in Buddhism more sense of kinship with the animal world, a more intimate feeling of community with all that lives, than is found in Western religious thought. And this is not a matter of sentiment, but is rooted in the total Buddhist concept of life. It is an essential part of a grand and all-embracing philosophy which neglects no aspect of experience, but extends

the concept of personal evolution to all forms of sentient life. The Buddhist does not have to ask, despairingly: '*Why* did God create obnoxious things like cobras, scorpions, tigers and *microbacterium tuberculosis?*' The kitten on the lap and the uninvited cobra in the bed are all part of a world which, while it is not the best of all possible worlds, could not be different, since its creator is Craving. The universe was not brought into existence solely for man, his convenience and enjoyment. The place man occupies in it is one he has created for himself, and he has to share it with other beings, all of them motivated by their own laws of being (*dhammatā*) and will to live.

So in the Buddhist texts animals are always treated with great sympathy and understanding. Some animals indeed, such as the elephant, the horse and the Nāga, the noble serpent, are used as personifications of great qualities. The Buddha Himself is *Sākya-siṁha*, the Lion of the Sākya clan. His Teaching is the Lion's Roar, which confounds the upholders of false views.

* * *

The stories of animals in the canonical books and commentaries are often very faithful to the nature of the beats they deal with. Thus the

noble horse, Kanthaka, pined away and died when its master, Siddhattha, renounced the world to attain Buddhahood. That story has the ring of historical truth. In a latter episode an elephant, Parileyyaka, and an intelligent monkey were the Enlightened One's companions when He retired to the forest to get away from quarrelling bhikkhus. The incident calls to mind Walt Whitman's poem: 'Sometimes I think that I could live with animals . . .' It records one occasion, at least, when the Buddha Himself found brute society more congenial than human. The story goes that the troublesome monks found themselves abandoned by their lay supporters when their bad conduct had caused the Teacher to leave them, and the lack of food and necessities quickly brought them to their senses. The Buddha, meanwhile, was being kept supplied with all He needed in the way of fruits and drink by the devoted animals. If the reader finds the story hard to believe, he may take it as allegorical. In either way its meaning is clear enough, for bhikkhus as much as for laymen.

Then there was the case of the elephant,

Dhanapālaka, which suffered from homesickness in captivity and refused food for love of its mother.

The Buddha immortalized it in the stanza:

Dhanapālako nāma kuñjaro
Katukappabhedano dunnivārayo
Baddho kabalaṁ na bhuñjati
Sumarati nāgavanassa kuñjaro.

"The elephant Dhanapālaka, in rut and uncontrollable, eats nothing in captivity, but longs for the elephant-forest."

(Dhammapada, v. 324)

Also from the Dhammapada Commentary is the tale of Ghosaka, a child who was laid on the ground to be trampled on successively by elephants and draught-oxen, but was saved by the compassionate beasts walking round instead of over him. The suckling of this child by a she-goat is reminiscent of other stories, such as that of Romulus and Remus, suckled by a wolf, and Orson, by a bear. These are accounted legendary, but there have been well-attested cases in recent

times of human children being nurtured and raised by animals. It is known to have happened in India and Ceylon.

The good nature of animals is the subject of several Jātaka stories, the best known being that of the hare in the moon (*Sasa-Jātaka*) and the story of the heroic monkey-leader who saved his tribe by making his own body part of a bridge for them to cross the Ganges. (*Mahākapi Jātaka*). In both cases the animal-hero is said to have been the Bodhisatta in a previous birth. Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular emphasises that the Bodhisattvas (Skt. form of Bodhisatta) manifest themselves in the animal world just as in the human. This is pictorially represented in the Tibetan Wheel of Life, which has the Twelve Nidānas of Dependent Origination around its rim, while inside are shown six major divisions of Saṁsāric existence: the Purgatories, the world of unhappy spirits, of angry spirits (Asuras), of radiant spirits (Devas), of humans and of animals. In each of them a Bodhisattva is depicted teaching the Law.

Among the less well-known of the Jātaka

tales there are many others that give prominent place to animals. Among them there is the Chadanta Jātaka, in which the Bodhisatta appears as a six-tusked elephant; the Saccaṁkira Jātaka, which contrasts the gratitude shown by a snake, a rat and a parrot with the base ingratitude of a prince; and the curious tale of the Mahākusala Jātaka, where a parrot cut of gratitude to the tree that sheltered it refuses to leave the tree when Sakka causes it to wither, as a test of the bird's constancy. There is even an elephantine version of Androcles and the lion, in which a tusker gives itself and its offspring in service to some carpenters out of gratitude for the removal of a thorn from its foot. The theme of animal gratitude runs very strongly through all these tales. They are obviously intended to teach humans the importance of this high virtue, in which men show themselves all too often inferior to the brutes.

Whether we choose to take these last examples literally, as events that occurred in previous world-cycles when animals had more human characteristics than they have now, or as

folk-tales of the *Pañcatantra* type, is immaterial. Their function is to teach moral lessons by allegory. But they are also important as illustrating the position that animals occupy side by side with men in the Buddhist world-view. By and large the Jātakas do not exalt animals unduly, for every tale of animal gratitude or affection can be balanced by another, showing less worthy traits which animals and men have in common. There is at least one, however, which satirises a a peculiary human trait—hypocrisy. In the Vaka Jātaka a wolf, having no food, decides to observe the Uposatha fast. But on seeing a goat the pious wolf at once decides to keep the fast on some other occasion.

If the story were not intended to be satirical it would be an injustice to wolves. Whatever other vices it may have, no animal degrades itself with sham piety, either to impress its fellows or to make spiritual capital out of an involuntary deprivation. For better or worse, animals live true to their own nature. Pretentious sanctimoniousness is not one of their characteristics.

It is worth remarking as a curious fact of history that even in the West animals have been regarded as morally-responsible beings, although this has seldom worked to their advantage. It brought them within the punitive scope of the law without giving them any corresponding rights. For example, Plato, in *The Laws*, prescribed that 'If a beast of burden or any other animal shall kill anyone, except while the animal is competing in the public games, the relatives of the deceased shall prosecute it for murder.' Moses, too, legislated for animals, as we find in Exodus xxi, 28: 'And if an ox gore a man or woman to death, the ox shall be surely stoned'. But he was also considerate enough to prohibit the muzzling of an ox that was trampling out the grain. In western Europe there was a legal custom of bringing animals up for trial, which survived until quite recent times. Such proceedings against animal offenders were brought in both the civil and ecclesiastical courts. The animals were provided with counsel, were summoned to appear, and were duly tried with all the formalities of the law. Extenuating circumstances in their favour were solemnly taken into account,

and their sentences were sometimes commuted on the grounds of youth, exiguity of body, or previous good character. As late as 1750 a she-ass was condemned to death in France, but was pardoned because of her otherwise good reputation. Some interesting evidence of this European attitude towards animals can be found in *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals*, by E. P. Evans (1906) and in *Des Jugements . . . contre less Animaux'*, by Léon Ménabréa (1846). It does not appear, however, that animals were ever given legal right to prosecute human beings. Man's capacity for feeling moral concern has always been limited. Even today there are countries in which the law gives animals no protection, and many others where only a partial recognition is given to their rights.

There is abundant evidence of natural intelligence in animals, as well as of virtue. Research by a group of scientists at Oxford has shown that monkeys have a system of communication by sound which may be classed as a rudimentary language. Many of their 'words' have already

been listed. It may be that all animals possess a means of sound communication adapted to their limited needs and thought-processes. This appears to be the case even with fish, which rank rather low in the accepted evolutionary scale. A group of workers at the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography has obtained proof that fish, although they cannot produce 'sound' as we know it, are able to communicate with one another by means of a variety of underwater vibrations which they produce by means of the air-bladders that control their depth in the water, or by the snapping of their fins and movements of the gills. By the use of tape-recorders and underwater cameras the research group has been able to establish definitely that certain sounds produced in this way relate to specific activities and have clearly-defined meanings. The recordings have been collected for further study, and already form a quite comprehensive bio-acoustics library.

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Since the time when Darwinism reversed the dictum of Pope by suggesting that the proper

study of mankind is animals, science has made unlimited use of the subhuman order of beings for research and experiment. It cannot be denied that much knowledge of the origin and treatment of disease has been gained in this way; but all the same, no humane person can feel quite happy about the sufferings undergone by animals in experiments on living organisms. Many of these experiments have to be made with only partial anaesthesia or none at all, in order that neural reactions can be observed; and while in all civilised countries vivisection is carried out under more or less exacting legal requirements, the suffering undergone by animals for the benefit of mankind in the torture chamber of our laboratories still amounts to a man-made hell in our midst. Beside it, the swift death of the slaughterhouse becomes almost humane. The question it poses—whether man is justified in inflicting so much prolonged agony on other creatures for his own advantage—is one that even so conscientious a thinker as Schweitzer has either to by-pass or to bury uneasily under an appeal to the superior claims of humanity. But even if it is held that these claims are ethically

valid, the argument still has serious weaknesses. There are no records to show how many animals suffered, or for how long, to perfect the technique of the operation for pre-frontal lobotomy. Now it is a completely discredited operation, one of the dead-ends of science. Years of experiment on various kinds of animals went into the perfecting of penicillin and the sulfa drugs; now they are regarded with distrust, and some have been declared to be actually harmful. Even the use of certain antibiotics has to be approached with extreme caution. And recently the world received a horrifying shock from the effect on human babies of a tranquillizer prescribed for their mothers during pregnancy.

For the Buddhist, the problem is clarified by the knowledge that the innate *dukkha* of sentient life will always prevail over science: that no matter what remedies are found for specific diseases, new forms of bacteria and virus will evolve by mutation or adaptation, and so there can never be an end to the need for experiments on animals, and no ultimate good to be expected from them. Viewed in the light of *karma* and *vipāka*, there

can be only one answer to the question. Morally, man is not justified in subjecting animals to prolonged pain for his own ends. Moreover, it is not in his own best interest to do so, since he is thereby creating the karmic conditions which will eventually nullify whatever temporary benefits he may have gained. It would be far better if science, now that it has succeeded in tracing the biological processes to their physical source, were to seek for methods of controlling disease without further recourse to experiments on living creatures. That animals should be compelled to go on paying so heavy a price in order that man may have the privilege of destroying himself by nuclear warfare or commercially-contaminated food instead of succumbing to natural sickness, is too illogical a proposition to find support even in a man-centred morality. Perhaps when science is at last satisfied that it cannot eradicate disease by perpetually disturbing the balance of nature,* but can only bring about

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* I refer particularly to the modern passion for artificially sterilizing the system. The best feature of present-day toothpastes is that they do *not* do what the advertisements claim for them. If they literally did destroy all oral bacteria they would be about the most pernicious products of commercialism.

fresh tribulations, a higher science may be evolved: one that takes as its field of research the mental and spiritual origins of suffering—the *vipāka* from the past and the unwholesome *karma* that man in his ignorance is creating in the present. Then it may be found that Pope was right after all: the proper study of mankind is man.

* * *

Buddhism shows that both animals and human beings are the products of Ignorance conjoined with Craving, and that the differences between them are the consequences of past *karma*. In this sense, though not in any other, 'all life is one'. It is one in its origin, Ignorance-Craving, and in its subjection to the universal law of causality. But every being's *karma* is separate and individual. So long as a man refuses to let himself be submerged in the herd, so long as he resists the pressures that are constantly brought to bear on him to make him share the mass mind and take on the identity of mass-activities, he is the master of his own destiny. Whatever the *karma* of others around

him may be, he need have no share in it. His *karma* is his own, distinct and individual. In this sense all life is not one, but each life, from lowest to highest in the scale, is a unique current of causal determinants. The special position of the human being rests on the fact that he alone can consciously direct his own personal current of *karma* to a higher or lower destiny. All beings are their own creators; man is also his own judge and executioner. He is also his own saviour.

Then what of the animal? Since animals are devoid of moral sense, argues the rationalist, how can they be agents of *karma*? How can they raise themselves from their low status and regain human birth?

The answer is that Buddhism views life against the background of infinity. Sasṁāra is without beginning, and there has never been a time when the round of rebirths did not exist. Consequently, the *karmic* history of every living being extends into the infinite past, and each has unexpended potential of *karma*, good and bad, which is known as *Kaṭattā-kamma*. When a

human being dies, the nature of the succeeding life-continum is determined by the morally wholesome or unwholesome mental impulse that arises in his last conscious moment, that which follows it being his *Paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*, or rebirth-linking consciousness. But where no such good or bad thought-moment arises the rebirth-linking consciousness is determined by some unexpended *karma* from a previous existence. Animals, being without moral discrimination, are more or less passive sufferers of the results of past bad *karma*. In this respect they are in the same position as morally irresponsible human beings, such as congenital idiots and imbeciles. But the fact that the animal has been unable to originate any fresh good *karma* does not exclude it from rebirth on a higher level. When the results of the *karma* which caused the animal birth are exhausted some unexpended good *karma* from a previous state of existence will have an opportunity to take over, and in this way the life-continuum is raised to the human level again.

How this comes about can be understood only when the mind is divested of all belief in a

transmigrating 'soul'. So long as there is clinging, however disguised or unconscious, to the idea of a persisting self-entity the true nature of the rebirth process cannot be grasped. It is for this reason that many people, although they maintain that 'all life is one', fail to understand or accept the Buddhist truth that life-currents oscillate between the human, the animal and many other forms. However comforting it may be to believe that beings can only ascend the spiritual ladder, and that there is no retributive fall for those who fail to make the grade, that is not the teaching of the Buddha.

It is now necessary to introduce a qualification to the statement that the higher rebirth of animals must depend upon unexpended good *karma*. Within the limitations we have noted it is certainly possible for animals to originate good *karma*, notwithstanding their lack of moral sense. As Prof. Thomson suggests, contact with human beings can encourage and develop those qualities which we recognise as virtue in the higher animals, and even bring about in them a dawning consciousness of moral values. When the

compulsions of the law of survival are removed, as in the case of animals under the protection of man, we get examples of those endearing and even noble qualities in them which have sometimes put human beings to shame, and have even caused non-Buddhists to ask themselves doubtfully whether man really is a special creation of God, and the only being worthy of salvation.

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