

SOAS Centre for Jaina Studies

# 14th Jaina Studies Symposium

Biodiversity Conservation and Animal Rights:  
Religious and Philosophical Perspectives

## **Book of Abstracts**

**Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why: Ignoring and Redecorating Nature and Specious Speciesism**

Marc Bekoff (University of Colorado)

Nonhuman animals (animals) experience a wide range of emotions, are highly cooperative, demonstrate what can be called moral behavior, and care very much about what happens to them. However, all too frequently we ignore who other animals are and what they want and need in conservation and other projects. In my presentation I will talk about the emotional lives of animals, wild justice (moral sentiments), and how we need to take into account the well-being of individuals when doing research and undertaking conservation projects that involve intruding into their lives and redecorating their homes. Frequently, in these sorts of exercises, individuals are traded off for the good of their own or other species with passing lip-service given to individual well-being. In addition, some still refer to species as being 'higher' and 'lower' and this sort of speciesist talk has no place in serious discussions of animal behavior or animal well-being. A new and growing field called 'compassionate conservation' can be used to guide us when we interact with other animals both in captivity and in the wild. People interested in animal protection in which individuals are valued must work closely with those whose interests focus more on populations, species, and ecosystems. A guiding principle and global moral imperative should be 'first do no harm'. We can all do better when interacting with other animals because we are constantly making difficult and challenging decisions about who lives and who dies. The real world requires us to make these sorts of choices and the time has come to move out of our comfort zones, think out of the box, and expand our compassion footprint. Perhaps some on-going projects will need to be put on hold or terminated and some planned projects shelved because we can't possibly do everything we need to do for animals and their homes. There simply aren't enough people to do the work or enough money and time to right all the wrongs. We owe it to the animals and to future generations who will inherit the world we leave in our wake to make it a more compassionate place for all beings, nonhuman and human animals alike.

**Animals in Early India: Stories from the Upaniṣads, the Jātakas, the Pañcatantra, and Jaina Narratives**

Christopher Chapple (Loyola Marymount University)

This paper will explore key animal stories from Indian literature. These fall into two basic genres: animals as animals and animals as past or future humans. In the former group, the actions of animals serve as moral reminders of how to improve human behavior. In the second genre, meritorious animals may earn human birth and spiritual attainments, while humans, due to deleterious activity, may earn animal birth. We will begin with an exploration of the wisdom of animals in the Satyakāma Jabala story of the *Upaniṣads*, examine select tales from the *Jātakas* and *Pañcatantra*, and look at some of the moral lessons taught by animals in Jaina literature. The paper will conclude with some constructive reflections on how these fables might still prove instructive in the contemporary context.

**Imaging the Divine: How is Humanity the Reason for Creation, and what is Humanity?**

Stephen R.L.Clark (University of Liverpool)

Xenophanes of Colophon insisted in the late 6th century BCE that "if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle" - and inferred that these images would all be false. How can an incarnational theology answer this challenge? And how can it be reasonable to think that our minds can in any sense find a model of the whole universe? Is it reasonable to expect there to be other 'human-like' intelligences elsewhere, or should we rather expect that bacterial, eusocial or other common terrestrial forms are also commoner in the universe at large? Should we be looking elsewhere than 'human-like intelligence' both as an image of the creative principle and of the ideal to which piety should guide us? And what would be the implications of that search both for Christian incarnational theology and for scientific humanism?

### **Reflections on the Global Environmental Crisis from Confucian and Ecological Perspectives**

Lu Feng (Tsinghua University, Beijing)

1. The global environmental crisis is one of the symptoms of modernity. In other words, it is a crisis of modern western civilization. Modernity and modern western civilization cannot be separated from the whole western tradition of culture or civilization.

2. I take culture and civilization as roughly synonymous. I would like to use John C. Mowen and Michael S. Minor's definition of culture. Accordingly, I think a culture or a civilization has basically three dimensions: 1 material objects (of a society), 2 institutions, 3 ideas and values. Using this method of analysis of culture (or cultural analysis) might lead to a clear understanding of why modern western civilization has caused the global ecological crisis.

Generally speaking, the whole of modern civilization is anti-ecological, and the global ecological crisis is caused by the global expansion of modern civilization. From a point of view of ecology, we can conclude definitively that modern civilization with 'mass production, mass consumption, and mass waste' is unsustainable.

3. By means of a comparison to ancient Chinese civilization, we can come to a clearer understanding of why modern civilization is unsustainable. For many liberals, including today's Chinese liberals, ancient China was unenlightened, and the ancient Chinese, including those called sages, were all stupid. But from the point of view of ecology, we can find that ancient Chinese civilization was quite sustainable. It continued for over 5,000 years, and had reached a population of nearly 40 million by its last dynasty.

Scholars embracing modernity will certainly mock me, saying that people cannot live happily mainly by means of agricultural products, that only when people live in the way of 'mass production, mass consumption, and mass waste', can they be happy. But I will never agree with them. Here I want to point out that agricultural technology to facilitate the photosynthesis of plants without using machines, chemical fertilizer and pesticides is surely a kind of ecological and humanistic technology. Products produced by this kind of technology are the very goods which nature allows human being to consume.

An interpretation of Confucianism's function in the whole of ancient Chinese civilization supports this argument. Because ancient Chinese civilization remained an agricultural civilization, it was sustained for a long time. The argument can also be taken as a reflection on the global ecological crisis from a perspective of Confucianism.

4. Since 1919, the Chinese have been trying their best to learn from the West, and since 1978, modernization, and also westernization to some degree, has been accelerated with the growing of the market economy system. Today, there are more and more cars, trains, airplanes, and factories in China. In cities, nearly every family has televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, air-conditioners, etc. Cities are getting increasingly larger, and more and more cities and towns have appeared. But the environment is polluted very heavily and the health of eco-systems is getting increasingly worse. It is called 'development', and it is the development of westernization. But this kind of development is definitely unsustainable.

Fortunately, some people in China have realized that we can no longer continue this as a means to development, and since 2007 the leaders of CCP have begun to call on people to construct eco-civilizations. Actually ancient Chinese civilization was a kind of eco-civilization. We cannot go back to ancient eco-civilization, of course. But we can learn a lot from our ancestors when we try to construct a new eco-civilization in the future. A new eco-civilization will also inherit some good elements from modern western civilization.

### **Rethinking Animism: The Jaina Doctrine of Non-Violence from the Perspective of Comparative Ethics**

Peter Flügel (SOAS)

Combined with human self-interest, the most pertinent motives for protecting living entities from unrestrained destruction are still derived from religious and philosophical animism, embracing not only humans but also animals and often plants and other entities. Animistic worldviews are frequently associated with theories of rebirth and reincarnation which can be ethicised in one way or another. One of the most comprehensive ethicised theories of animism ever conceived is the classical Jaina soul-body dualism, which postulates that not only humans, animals and plants, but also the elements fire, water, air and earth are animated by individual life-giving spiritual substances, ātman or jīva, which are endowed with consciousness and will-power. Souls or selves are conceived as immortal substances which trapped themselves in their respective incarnations as a consequence of committing injury, hiṃsā, to other sentient entities. Since it is assumed that violent acts rebound on the embodied soul in form of karmic particles which constitute physical bodies by attaching themselves to the soul like grains of dust, only non-violent action and finally non-action will in the long term assure the purification of the soul. In this version of animism, the self-oriented desire for salvation is predicated on the protection of life. Classical Jainism is not interested in the protection of the environment per se. Jain non-violence is motivated primarily by soteriological self-interest. Even if stripped from some now implausible metaphysical and cosmological ballast, which may seem outdated in the light of modern scientific discoveries, the question remains which elements of Jain doctrine and historical experience represent globally important intellectual and cultural resources which are potentially universally acceptable and may serve as elements for a future globalized environmental ethics. The paper will revisit the dilemma of ethical pluralism in reinvestigating the question to what extent the Jain value of non-violence stripped from some of its specific Indic cultural elements could serve as one of the bedrocks for a universal minimal ethic of the future that could re-motivate human beings to pursue less destructive ways of life.

### **Can Christianity Become Good News for Animals?**

Andrew Linzey (University of Oxford)

For centuries, many Christians have thought that all that needs to be said about animals is that we have ‘dominion’ over them. Animals have been variously defined as ‘things’, machines, and soulless beings with no rights. But careful study of Genesis shows that far from meaning egoistical exploitation, dominion – in context – means that we are divinely commissioned to look after the world as God intended – even and especially animals. Professor Linzey argues that we need to re-envision ourselves – not as the master species – but as the servant species. Our power or dominion over animals should be interpreted in terms of Christ’s lordship over humanity, i.e. as consisting in a diaconal, serving role. In Christian terms, there can be no lordship without service. Professor Linzey charts the theological basis of this radical reappraisal with reference to the ‘instrumentalist’ tradition represented by classical Christian thinkers – from Aquinas to Luther – ending up with the bold (and much overlooked) text from the 1998 Lambeth Conference that ‘[human] servanthood to God’s creation is ... the most important responsibility facing humankind’, and that ‘we as Christians have a God given mandate to care for, look after and protect God’s creation’ (1998 resolution 1.8.b iv and v). He relates this theology to the modern discussions about animal rights, and explains how all sentient creatures can be seen to have rights because their Creator has rights to see that what is created is treated with respect. Professor Linzey concludes by pinpointing the ethical challenges that arise from this theology, including: living free of violence and cruelty, vegetarianism, experimentation, and intensive farming.

**If It Got Worse, It Can Get Better: Muslims' Attitudes Toward Animals Between the Past and the Present**

Sarra Tlili (University of Florida)

In one of his visits to Egypt, the British Orientalist Edward Lane (1801-1876) expressed his pleasure 'at observing [Egyptians'] humanity to dumb animals', only to note at a later visit that these attitudes were changing. The view that Muslims' concern for other animals has declined in the last century or so is echoed in several other sources, and can be substantiated by considerable data. In this presentation I will first illustrate this point through some comparative examples; then I will propose an explanation for the noted change. Although it is beyond the scope of the present work to account satisfactorily for this phenomenon, some social and cultural changes appear to have a bearing on it. Like other people around the world, Muslims are generally poorly informed about, say, factory farming or transportation conditions of livestock. Likewise, due to the spread of the modern, relatively secular type of education, Muslims nowadays appear to be less in touch with their tradition's teachings about animals. Furthermore, contemporary religious scholars, many of who appear to have consciously or unconsciously assimilated several ideals of modernity, tend to be less sensitive to the wellbeing of nonhuman animals than their pre-modern counterparts. Finally, legal injunctions aimed at the protection of nonhuman animals' rights and government and social institutions in charge of their implementation have disappeared.

Answers to this situation may start with the information part. If observant Muslims were better informed of the suffering inflicted on many animals, and learned more about scriptural teachings, they would be likely to reconsider many of their views and practices. Furthermore, engaging Muslim scholars in deeper discussions about animals may result in more creative and animal-sensitive approaches to traditional texts in search for solutions to modern challenges. Finally, animals would certainly benefit from the reestablishment of governmental and social institutions to oversee their treatment.

**Mahāvīra , Don Quixote, and a Brief History of Ecological Idealism**

Michael Tobias (Los Angeles)

Ancient and Medieval texts commending Jain forms of asceticism as a precursor of achieving ultimate liberation from attachments and desires, as well as reaching that unique state of omniscience characteristic of the 24 Jinas or Tirthankaras, is thematically and critically predicated upon the notion of ahimsa, non-violence (or non-interference). Mahāvīra (Vardhamana), 599-527 BCE, is most commonly cited by Jain scholars and adherents as a man whose more than 40 year odyssey best exemplifies an approach to *ahiṃsā* that lends great inspiration to all those who have sought to embrace similar ethical commitments in their own way, in their own time. The culturally-enshrined, community-driven Jain ethos of non-violence is by no means the end-all. India, ecologically speaking, is no less troubled and environmentally mired than most other regions across the planet. What true relevancy, then, do Mahāvīra and countless subsequent personalities and traditions – from Cervantes' ultimate dreamer, Don Quixote – to such original thinkers and vegetarians as poet Percy Shelley - offer today's global, environmental crises? Does the Jain position on non-violence simply echo a hollow refrain, however inspired, or provide the true rudiments of some remedial and revolutionary framework for addressing 21st century biodiversity degradation? Dr Tobias will discuss his own deeply personal connection to Jain traditions in the context of today's all-out war being waged by the human species against the earth.

**Religious Discourses about the Environment: Resources for Sustainable Development or a Modern-Day Myth?**

Emma Tomalin (University of Leeds)

Voices from religious traditions on the topic of environmentalism have been evolving since the 1960s with the birth of the modern environmental movement. Broadly, they argue that religions consider nature to be significant beyond its use value to humans (albeit in different ways, according to particular religious teachings) and that people ought not to act in ways that harm the natural environment. Thus, religious traditions are considered to provide frameworks for environmental ethics and to support the view that nature should be treated with respect. However, in addition to this we also find the argument that notions of the sacredness of the natural world have become lost in the modern era, with the emergence of capitalism and industrialization. Within this *religious environmentalist discourse*, which is found within all religious traditions, humanity is considered to have largely ‘forgotten’ the sacredness of nature and this, it is argued, needs to be rediscovered in order to address the contemporary global environmental crisis.

While much religious environmentalist literature stresses a positive correlation between religious injunctions to care for nature and environmentally friendly behaviour, there are other studies that suggest a more cautious approach. These argue instead that the links between religion and the environment tend to be romanticised and in practice we should not assume that poor people, who practice, for instance, eastern religious traditions or indigenous religions, which, it is suggested, are more amenable to ecological interpretations, are inherent environmentalists. In this paper I will examine where these *religious environmentalist discourses* are generated and by whom. Do they reflect romantic western notions of a lost ecological idyll (an ecological ‘golden age’) or do they have relevance for the poor who are struggling against floods, famines and droughts? When we find these discourses in developing contexts are they more likely to be adopted by an educated ‘middle class’, which has been influenced by western eco-centric and romantic approaches to environmentalism and sustainable development, or do they have relevance at the grass roots as well? Considering that many people in developing countries are religious and religion continues to have a social and political influence, does religion have a particular role to play in achieving sustainable development? If so, what would this entail?

**Animal Studies in the Key of Animal Rights**

Paul Waldau (Canisius College)

This presentation addresses why various notions called “animal rights” are important to Animal Studies conceived as a scholarly field, as an academic discipline, and as a course topic. ‘Animal rights’ will be addressed in both of its major senses, namely, ‘fundamental moral rights for other-than-human animals’ and ‘specific legal rights to be held by individual nonhuman animals’. Each of these notions is now prompting many students to seek out individual courses in Animal Studies. Further, each of these senses of ‘animal rights’ prompts new and established scholars to pursue academic work and publications in fields as diverse as history, religious studies, law, ecology, ethology and critical studies, all of which have contributed to the development of Animal Studies and allied efforts that go under the names anthrozoology, human-animal studies, and the animal humanities. This paper argues that Animal Studies and other, related fields cannot develop into robust forms of scholarly endeavor unless they engage forthrightly both senses of ‘animal rights’ through a multifaceted exploration of the actual realities of other-than-human animals.

**Anthropocentrism in the Guise of an All-inclusive Ethics? Buddhist Attitudes to the Natural World**

Michael Zimmermann (University of Hamburg)

People of the Western hemisphere are often surprised to hear that Buddhists in most parts of Asia are fond of eating meat, that Buddhist organizations do little to nothing to protect animals from cruel forms of stockbreeding, that they do not object to murderous long-distance transportation of livestock, and that slaughterhouses play the same unquestioned role they do in the West. The preservation of biodiversity, being a measure indicating the health of an ecosystem, has hardly entered the agenda of Buddhist organizations even if they do engage in other than spiritual activities.

Whereas the different strands of Buddhist philosophical thinking prove to have abundant potential in terms of arguing for a necessary attitudinal change regarding human beings' relation toward animals and other forms of non-human life, the often-articulated Buddhist claim of all-encompassing compassion and connectedness of everything contain the seeds of radical anthropocentrism, be it as a 'special' way out of this theoretical and undifferentiated 'equality' of all forms of life, or as a means of prohibitively limiting human behavior to traditional and unquestioned 'natural' modes of society.

The paper will discuss these issues in some more detail and try to identify potential obstacles to a well thought-out Buddhist engagement for the natural world.