Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies
ISSN 1710-8268
https://thecjbs.org/
Number 19, 2024

Animal Ethics are Environmental Ethics in Tibetan Buddhism

Colin H. Simonds

University of Alberta

Animal Ethics are Environmental Ethics in Tibetan Buddhism

Colin H. Simonds
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Abstract

This article takes up the question of whether animal liberation and environmental ethics are compatible projects in Tibetan Buddhist philosophical contexts. It begins by surveying the compatibility debate in Western philosophy before addressing the view that Buddhist ethics can support an animal ethic but lacks the resources for constructing an environmental ethic. Ultimately, this article argues that while the Buddhist concern for alleviating *duḥkha* does indeed lend itself to an animal ethic, its emphasis on *pratītyasamutpāda* necessitates that this concern translates into care for the nonsentient aspects of the environment. As such, animal ethics *are* environmental ethics in Tibetan Buddhism.

Introduction: Shabkar and the Fledglings

In recent years, the life and teachings of the non-sectarian yogi Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol[1] have become a major focus of those working on Buddhist approaches to animal and environmental ethics. As the most vocal proponent for the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals in Tibetan Buddhism's long history, his many texts have been translated,[2] analyzed,[3] and built upon[4] in an effort to understand how an ecumenical Tibetan Buddhism might respond to contemporary issues in our more-than-human world. One narrative in particular has been scrutinized by several scholars in an attempt to tease out the ethical limits of Shabkar's ethic. In his famous autobiography, the yogi from Amdo recounts a story of him saving baby birds from a preying eagle and writes:

> When I was living at Tsonying, I noticed an eagle that, each spring day, caught three or four of the thousands of baby waterfowl that couldn't fly yet. The eagle tore out and devoured their hearts while they were still alive. Feeling intense pity, each year during those two spring months, I tried to protect the small waterfowl from the eagle. They soon understood that I was protecting them and would

[1] Tib. zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, c. 1781-1851.

[2] Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol, *Food of Bodhisattvas: Buddhist Teachings on Abstaining from Meat*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2008); Rachel H. Pang, "Songs against Meat by the Yogi Shabkar," in *The Faults of Meat: Tibetan Buddhist Writings on Vegetarianism*, ed. Geoffrey Barstow (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019).

[3] Jacob Dirnberger, "An Ecology of Transformation: The Experience of Nature and the Nature of Experience in the Songs of Shabkar" (MA thesis, University of Colorado Boulder, 2013); Geoffrey Barstow, Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[4] Colin H. Simonds, "Expanding Sentience: Tibetan Buddhism and the Possibility of Plant, Bacteria, and AI Sentience," *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 18 (2023).

> come and gather near me on the shore of the island. Whenever the eagle approached, they cried out miserably.
>
> One day I ran after the eagle wielding a slingshot; when the eagle saw me it faltered and fell into the water. It lay there flapping in the water, exhausted and it began to sink, looking right at me. I felt sorry for it, hauled it out of the water, and put it on the shore. When it had dried a little. I tied the slingshot around its neck and scolded it, saying, "When you're killing little birds, you're quite brave, aren't you? I tapped it several times on its beak and claws with a twig, and just left it there for a while, then freed it. It didn't come back for some time.
>
> One day the eagle came back and caught a fledgling. I rushed after it and when it landed on a boulder, I hit it with a stone from my slingshot, almost killing it. It flew off, leaving the baby bird sprawled on its back. I thought the little bird's heart had already been torn out, but when I picked it up, I saw it had just lost consciousness out of fear. Upon reviving, it looked at me and then scampered back into the water. Protecting them in this manner during those two years, I saved several thousand small birds.[5]

Rachel Pang notes how this wordy account is a case where Shabkar uses narrative to urge readers to treat animals with care and is a prime example of how Shabkar both practiced and advocated for animal ethics.[6] Others, however, read this account as a prime example of the limitations of Tibetan Buddhism for constructing an environmental ethic.

---

[5] Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol, *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin,* trans. Matthieu Ricard, Jakob Leschly, Erik Schmidt, Marilyn Silverstone, and Lodrö. Ed. Constance Wilkinson (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2001), 139.

[6] Rachel H. Pang, "Taking Animals Seriously: Shabkar's Narrative Argument for Vegetarianism and the Ethical Treatment of Animals," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 29 (2022).

In his monograph *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* Daniel Capper comments on this story by noting how Shabkar's protection of these fledgling birds "provides a nice window into Buddhist animal-welfare sentiments" but nonetheless "lacks a systematic understanding of the natural world."[7] In Capper's analysis, there is a stark difference between animal ethics and environmental ethics, and Shabkar's account falls solely in the former ethical category. He writes that "this story involves sentimental compassion for baby animals but limited compassion for eagles," "the entities that died for the sake of the fledglings' diet," "or for the water or minerals that fed those entities."[8] Capper therefore concludes that the "Buddhist ethic of compassion," demonstrated in Shabkar's account, "does not make for a complete, viable environmental ethic" and "is constrained in [its] application to ecosystems."[9] But is this the case? Is a Buddhist ethic of the more-than-human world, as exemplified in the story of Shabkar, only to be read as an animal ethic? And, more broadly speaking, are animal ethics and environmental ethics indeed mutually exclusive in Tibetan Buddhist contexts?

This article will take up these questions and ultimately assert that, in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, animal ethics *are* environmental ethics and that the unique approach to moral theory found across the Tibetan Buddhist tradition can allow us to bridge the gap between these two fields. To do so, it will first survey the ongoing debate as to whether animal ethics and environmental ethics are compatible to identify the major tensions in such a project and assess some of the ways previous scholars have relieved these tensions. Then, it will articulate the unique, inclusive, particularist approach to the more-than-human world found in Tibetan Buddhism and argue that a concern for non-sentient phenomena in the natural world

---

[7] Daniel Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer: Buddhism and the Natural World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 180.

[8] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer*, 180.

[9] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer*, 180.

emerges *from* the more specific moral concern for sentient beings. Finally, this understanding of Tibetan Buddhist environmental ethics will be used to think through Shabkar's above account and speculate about the ecological potentials of his animal ethic. Ultimately, this article will demonstrate the powerful adaptability of the Tibetan Buddhist environmental ethic and provide a new avenue for thinking about the differing priorities of animal and environmental ethics.

Animal Ethics and Environmental Ethics in Western Philosophical Contexts

In general, there are two positions to take on whether or not animal ethics and environmental ethics are philosophically compatible (which I will call the compatibility thesis): a positive affirmation that they indeed are consonant philosophies, and a negative argument for their dissonance. At the advent of this debate, the dominant position was the latter. J. Baird Callicott established the initial contours of the debate with his 1980 article "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair" and fervently argued that animal liberation and environmental ethics (construed as a Leopoldian land ethic[10]) are fundamentally incompatible. In his words, Callicott seeks to "distinguish sharply environmental ethics from the animal liberation/rights movement both in theory and practical application and to

[10] Callicott's articulation of environmental ethics draws from the work of conservationist and writer Aldo Leopold. In *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, Leopold draws the boundaries of his environmental ethic, writing: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" and "is wrong when it tends otherwise." This ethic is holistic and prioritizes the needs of the ecological community over the needs of individual beings within the ecological community and thus allows for hunting, the rearing of animals for food, and so-called pest control measures, bringing it into great tension with the priorities of animal liberation. See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 224-225.

suggest, thereupon, that there is an underrepresented but very important, point of view respecting the problem of the moral status of nonhuman animals."[11] This bifurcation between the ethical approaches lies in how moral standing is distributed to nonhuman entities *differently* in each philosophical tradition. Callicott reads the animal liberation approach as amounting to an extension of moral humanism or humane moralism which "has consistently located moral value in individuals and set out certain metaphysical reasons for including some individuals and excluding others."[12] By contrast, his Leopoldian environmental ethic "locates ultimate value in the 'biotic community' and assigns differential moral value to the constitutive individuals relatively to that standard."[13] Thus, animal ethics and environmental ethics are incompatible because of their differing modes of valuation. The former prioritizes the wellbeing of individual nonhuman animals whereas the latter prioritizes the integrity of an ecological whole, and these necessarily come into conflict when analyzing issues of overpopulation, invasive species, meat consumption, and so forth. Ethics are therefore a "triangular affair" such that standard anthropocentric ethics, animal ethics, and environmental ethics are seen as mutually exclusive and at odds with one another.

This rejection of the compatibility thesis was furthered in Mark Sagoff's 1984 article "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce," where we find perhaps the strongest denunciation of a possible alliance between animal ethics and environmental ethics. Without equivocation, he writes "environmentalists cannot be animal

[11] J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair," *Environmental Ethics* 2, no. 4 (1980): 336-337.

[12] Callicott, "Animal Liberation," 337.

[13] Callicott, "Animal Liberation," 337.

liberationists" and "animal liberationists cannot be environmentalists."[14] His reasoning for this claim aligns closely with Callicott's. He writes:

> The environmentalist would sacrifice the lives of individual creatures to preserve the authenticity, integrity and complexity of ecological systems. The liberationist—if the reduction of animal misery is taken seriously as a goal—must be willing, in principle, to sacrifice the authenticity, integrity and complexity of ecosystems to protect the rights, or guard the lives, of animals.[15]

Interestingly, Sagoff is not arguing *against* animal liberation (as Callicott's article might be read as doing) but is arguing that animal ethics cannot form the basis of environmental thought. He "does not deny that human beings are cruel to animals, that they ought not to be, that this cruelty should be stopped and that sermons to this effect are entirely appropriate and necessary," but *does* deny that "these sermons have anything to do with environmentalism or provide a basis for an environmental ethic."[16] Thus, writing in a legal context, Sagoff concludes that "a humanitarian ethic—an appreciation not of nature, but of the welfare of animals—will not help us to understand or to justify an environmental ethic," nor will it "provide necessary or valid foundations for environmental law."[17]

The first major pushback to these views came from Mary Anne Warren in her article "The Rights of the Nonhuman World," which directly addresses and responds to Callicott's earlier work. She recognizes the source of incompatibility that Callicott points out, but nonetheless holds that "a harmonious marriage between these two approaches is

---

[14] Mark Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (1984), 304.

[15] Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 304.

[16] Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 301-302.

[17] Sagoff, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 306-307.

possible provided that each side is prepared to make certain compromises."[18] She sketches this compromise thusly:

> In brief, the animal liberationists must recognize that although animals do have significant moral rights, these rights are not precisely the same as those of human beings; and that part of the difference is that the rights of animals may sometimes be overridden, for example, for environmental or utilitarian reasons, in situations where it would not be morally acceptable to override human rights for similar reasons. For their part, the environmentalists must recognize that while it may be acceptable, as a legal or rhetorical tactic, to speak of the rights of trees or mountains, the logical foundations of such rights are quite different from those of the rights of human and other sentient beings.[19]

In Warren's view, animal ethics and environmental ethics are therefore distinct enterprises. However, rather than be seen as incompatible, Warren argues that they are in fact *complementary*. She writes:

> Each helps to remedy some of the apparent defects of the other. The animal liberation theory, for instance, does not in itself explain why we ought to protect not only *individual* animals, but also threatened *species* of plants as well as animals. The land ethic, on the other hand, fails to explain why it is wrong to inflict needless suffering or death even upon domestic animals, which may play little or no role in the maintenance of natural ecosystems, or only a negative role.[20]

---

[18] Mary Anne Warren, "The Rights of the Nonhuman World," in *Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Robert Elliot and Arran Gare (New York: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 110.

[19] Warren, "The Rights of the Nonhuman World," 110.

[20] Warren, "The Rights of the Nonhuman World," 129-130.

In this case, while animal ethics may not be commensurate with environmental ethics, they are not only compatible but are necessary interlocutors. Both have gaps in their theory and their practice which the other can meaningfully address. For this reason, Warren concludes that "only by *combining* the environmentalist and animal rights perspectives can we take account of the full range of moral considerations which ought to guide our interactions with the nonhuman world."[21]

In an interesting turn of events, Callicott was swayed by Warren's arguments and amended his position in an article titled "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again." He affirms that "Warren recommends [...] a wholly reasonable ethical eclecticism" before articulating his own compatibility thesis. In Callicott's later piece, he recognizes that while "animal welfare ethicists and environmental ethicists have overlapping concerns,"[22] if we wish to truly establish a "lasting alliance" between these two ethical trajectories then we "require the development of a moral theory that embraces both programs and that provides a framework for the adjudication of the very real conflicts between human welfare, animal welfare, and ecological integrity."[23] To this end, Callicott argues that Mary Midgely's conception of an animal ethic based on social relations with nonhuman animals[24] and Leopold's land ethic "share a common, fundamentally Humean understanding of ethics as grounded in altruistic feelings."[25] He writes that both animal liberation and environmental ethics "share a common ethical bridge between the human and nonhuman domains in the concept of community" and that by combining

---

[21] Warren, "The Rights of the Nonhuman World," 131. Empasis added.

[22] J. Baird Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again," *Between the Species* 4, no. 3 (1988), 163.

[23] Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 164.

[24] See Mary Midgely, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983).

[25] Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 166.

Midgely's notion of mixed community with Leopold's notion of the biotic community we can arrive at a holistic "metahuman moral community" which can serve as "the basis of a unified animal-environmental ethical theory."[26]

In each of these evaluations of the compatibility thesis, animal ethics and environmental ethics are seen as distinct modes of ethics irrespective of their compatibility. However, Dale Jamieson rejects this bifurcation and, in a 1999 article titled "Animal Ethics are Environmental Ethics," argues that, contrary to Callicott and Sagoff, animal liberation necessarily results in a concern for the nonsentient environment. Central to his argument is that "a deep green ethic does not require strange views about value" such as the value of collectives like species, ecosystems, and mineral formations having "mind-independent" or "inherent" value.[27] Instead, Jamieson argues that "an animal liberationist ethic, rooted in traditional views of value and obligation, can take nonsentient nature seriously."[28] To do so, he critiques one of the fundamental claims of normative environmental ethics, writing "were there no sentient beings there would be no values but it doesn't follow from this that only sentient beings are valuable."[29] In Jamieson's ethic, there is a necessary distinction between primary and derivative value. He writes that "creatures who can suffer, take pleasure in their experiences, and whose lives go better or worse from their own point of view are of primary value," and that nonsentient factors (like those found in the environment) which can affect this primary value must also have a derivative value.[30] Importantly, however, Jamieson notes that "the distinction between primary and derivative value

[26] Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 166.

[27] Dale Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Values* 7, no. 1 (1998).

[28] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 46.

[29] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 47.

[30] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 49.

is not a distinction in degree of value, but rather in the ways different entities can be valuable."[31] He writes, "although nonsentient entities are not of primary value, their value can be very great and urgent," and can even "trump the value of sentient entities."[32] As a result of this method of valuation, Jamieson argues that animal liberation ethicists and environmental ethicists hold many of the same normative views because of how

> many of our most important issues involve serious threats to both humans and animals as well as to the nonsentient environment; because animal liberationists can value nature as a home for sentient beings; and because animal liberationists can embrace environmental values as intensely as environmental ethicists, though they see them as derivative rather than primary values.[33]

There is thus a theoretical convergence as well as a "convergence at the practical and political level"[34] such that, in Jamieson's formulation, animal ethics should be read *as* environmental ethics.

Animal Ethics as Environmental Ethics in Tibetan Buddhism

We therefore return to the following questions: Are animal ethics and environmental ethics mutually exclusive categories? Are they compatible? Or are they one and the same? Given the title of the paper, one may assume that Jamieson's vision is the one that I endorse, and this astute reader would indeed be correct. This, however, is not due to his arguments alone, but rather to how his position is so clearly reflected in the Tibetan Buddhist ethical approach to the more-than-human world. While

[31] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 47.
[32] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 47.
[33] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 51.
[34] Jamieson, "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic," 52.

the concepts I will analyze and employ in my argument are found in all Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions, I will restrict my discussion to Tibetan Buddhism for one significant reason: its limited ascription of sentience to the natural world. Major thinkers in East Asian traditions like Kūkai and Saigyō extended sentience and the possibility of Buddhahood to vegetal life,[35] and others like Dōgen went so far as to claim the same for non-living entities like rocks and waters.[36] These extensions create quite different systems of valuation in our approach to the more-than-human world that misalign with the way phenomena like plants, animals, and non-living nature have been mobilized in Western philosophical contexts. Contrastingly, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition largely parallels Western philosophical thought in its understanding of the sentient capacity of plants, animals, rocks, and waters. While I find the possibility of plant sentience defendable and have explored its implications in Tibetan Buddhist contexts elsewhere,[37] using this shared, limited view of sentience to enter the debate over the compatibility of animal liberation and environmental ethics can allow for a more productive dialogue between Buddhist and Western ethics.

If we begin from Buddhist principles and articulate a Tibetan Buddhist ethic of the more-than-human world on its own terms then we can see how an environmental ethic emerges quite naturally out of a narrower concern for sentient beings. While the Tibetan Buddhist tradition centers alleviating the *duḥkha*[38] of sentient beings as its primary ethical and

---

[35] Akira Masaki, "Spirituality of Japanese Buddhism considered from enlightenment of nonsentient beings," *International Journal of Educational Research* 115 (2022); William Lafleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature: Part I," *History of Religions* 13, no. 2 (1973).

[36] Graham Parkes, "Dōgen's 'Mountains and Waters as Sūtras' (Sansui-kyō)," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, ed. William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[37] Simonds, "Expanding Sentience."

[38] Tib. *sdug bsngal*.

soteriological goal, its strict adherence to an ontology of *pratītyasamutpāda*[39] extends its ethical purview to nonsentient nature. Further, the nonabsolutist quality of ethical decision-making codified in the notion of *upāya*[40] allows an adherent to Tibetan Buddhism to approach moral problems with nuance and flexibility. Each of these points will be unpacked to show how, in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, we should read animal ethics *as* environmental ethics. First, however, we must address those who have argued otherwise.

Scholars who might disagree with this extension of Buddhism's sentience-focused ethics to the nonsentient environment have historically followed two separate but related lines of argument: the impossibility of Buddhist environmental ethics altogether, and the classification of Buddhist ethics as exclusively an animal ethic. Regarding the former, there are those who have critiqued the eco-Buddhist project on the grounds of its incommensurability with canonical Buddhist ideals of *nirvāṇa*,[41] the negative environmental history of Buddhist Asia,[42] and Buddhist notions like *pratītyasamutpāda* not lending themselves to constructive ecological thought.[43] Many of these critical positions have been challenged by others in the field,[44] and elsewhere I have responded directly to

[39] Tib. *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*.

[40] Tib. *thabs*.

[41] Ian Harris, "Causation and Telos: The Problem of Buddhist Environmental Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994): 45–56; Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991).

[42] Johan Elverskog, *The Buddha's Footprint: An Environmental History of Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

[43] Ian Harris, "Buddhism" in *Attitudes to Nature*, ed. Jean Holm and John Bowker (New York: Pinter Publishers 1994); Ian Harris, "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern: Some Methodological Problems Considered," in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[44] Nan Kathy Lin, "Buddhist Environmentalism as Seen through Religious Change," *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022).

these positions to defend the possibility of a Buddhist environmental ethics.[45] For example, Ian Harris and Capper allege that the Buddhist notion of interdependence (which is commonly evoked in eco-Buddhist discourse) is actually *anti*-environmentalist. Harris writes that "if all depends on all then the black rhino depends on the hydrogen bomb, the rain forest on the waste dump,"[46] and Capper echoes this claim, writing: "if we must value everything because everything is interconnected [...] then we must protect ocean radioactivity as well as dolphins, atmospheric carbon as well as parrots, and anthrax as well as human probiotics."[47] They therefore claim that the flattened *ontology* of interdependence leads to a flattening of all ethical *value.* However, I note how in the Buddhist context, interdependence is inextricable from the reality of *duḥkha*. Divorcing interdependence from its embedded context and ignoring the way it is understood to compel compassionate action in light of the Buddhist goal of alleviating all suffering from all sentient beings is inappropriate, and together the ideas of interdependence and *duḥkha* can indeed be used to construct a robust, authentic Buddhist environmental ethic.[48] Regardless, it is clear that these scholars would be deeply skeptical about the claim that animal ethics are environmental ethics in the Tibetan Buddhist context because of how they view Buddhist environmental ethics as itself a flawed project.

More pertinent to the topic at hand is the critique that Buddhism resembles an animal ethic rather than an environmental ethic. Those who make this critique regard animal ethics and environmental ethics as mutually exclusive categories and view Buddhist ethics as lending itself

---

[45] Colin H. Simonds, "The Trouble of Rocks and Waters: On the (Im)Possibility of a Buddhist Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 45, no. 3 (2023).

[46] Ian Harris, "Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of EcoBuddhism," *Religion* 25, no. 3 (1995): 205.

[47] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* 8.

[48] Simonds "Trouble of Rocks and Waters," 235.

exclusively to the former. The clearest articulation of this position is in Capper's aforementioned book *Roaming Free Like a Deer* where he surveys the Buddhist world to find instances wherein "nonhuman entities are relationally experienced as persons in their own right, with respect accorded to their specific agency through linguistic, ritual, or other interactions."[49] While there are several examples of how personhood is ascribed to rocks, waters, and other nonsentient phenomena in East Asian contexts, he nonetheless sees Buddhism as paying much more attention to nonhuman animals than to the nonsentient elements of the environment. Capper's conclusion makes this clear and is worth quoting at length:

> The compassionate concern for animals that sponsors Buddhist actions for animal welfare, however, also imposes a limit on the tradition in terms of supporting a sustainable biosphere, given that this attitude cannot, as it is, result in a viable environmental ethic that attends to the complexities of ecosystems with many preying individuals. For most Buddhists, notions of reincarnation result in the targeting of compassion toward animals but not toward plants, minerals, or water, resulting in a limited biocentric orientation as a complementary addition to Buddhism's erstwhile anthropocentrism. This limited biocentric attitude substantially lacks the ecocentric elements required by a full environmental ethic, which must recognize that plant, mineral, and water resources, too, need to be valued in order to create ecosystem health, as the environmentalist Arne Naess has written.[50]

In this passage, Capper makes three main claims: that Buddhism sponsors compassionate action for animals but not the environment, that Buddhism does not value plant, mineral, and water resources, and that Buddhism cannot attend to the complexities of ecosystems with many

[49] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* 25.

[50] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer*, 217-218.

preying individuals. Rephrased in the language of the animal liberation and environmental ethics debate, Capper argues that Buddhism is to be considered an animal ethic instead of an environmental ethic, that it does not value nonsentient aspects of the environment, and that there is a fundamental conflict between its emphasis on individual beings' welfare and notions of collective wellbeing like the land ethic or a sustainable biosphere. I disagree and instead propose that the Buddhist concern for sentient beings that Capper rightly points out provides not only a sufficient but a *strong* basis for a Buddhist environmental ethic. In order to make this clear, we must therefore look at what constitutes a Tibetan Buddhist ethical approach to the more-than-human world.

The first principle on which all Buddhist ethics are built is *duḥkha*, often translated as "suffering." However, this translation does not do justice to the semantic range of the term. *Duḥkha* refers to the stress, unease, malaise, and dissatisfaction that underlies all phenomenal experience.[51] *Duḥkha* can thus exhibit as gross *duḥkha* as in when one stubs one's toe, subtle *duḥkha* like knowing that the happiness you feel while eating a delicious grapefruit is impermanent and will come to an end, or very subtle *duḥkha* which arises from our mind's constant clinging to impermanent, interdependent phenomena as permanent, independent entities. As the first of the Four Noble Truths,[52] the Tibetan tradition sees *duḥkha* as the foundational issue that all its practice and philosophy are directed towards. Because *duḥkha* exists, we have the Buddhist soteriological tradition and its related ideological and practical structures. *Duḥkha* is also

[51] For discussions of *duḥkha* in Tibetan primary texts, see Patrul Rinpoche, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), 78-92; Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation: The Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*, trans. Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche, ed. Ani K. Trinlay Chödron (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1998), 95-109; Tsongkhapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Volume One*, trans. Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, ed. Joshua W.C. Cutler and Guy Newland (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000), 265-313.
[52] Tib. *'phags pa'i bden pa bzhi*.

where we find the basis for Buddhist ethics. Regardless of how western scholars have interpreted Buddhist ethics, *duḥkha* and its alleviation have always been recognized as the central moral issue of the tradition. Thus, in articulating a Buddhist approach to the more-than-human world, this point needs to be expanded upon.

The most important aspect of *duḥkha* in terms of the more-than-human world is that it is a problem relegated to sentient beings. *Duḥkha* is a phenomenological experience that happens in one's mind. Interestingly, the Tibetan term for "sentient being" is *sems can*, which literally translates to "mind-possessor." Therefore, Buddhist ethics are necessarily concerned with sentient beings. Further, in the Mahāyāna[53] tradition of Tibet, the goal of Buddhist practice is to liberate *all* sentient beings from *all duḥkha*. This means that, at a foundational level, Buddhist ethics are primarily concerned with the wellbeing of animals, insects, and other beings which have the capacity for pain and pleasure over nonsentient nature. Capper therefore is not incorrect when he says that Buddhist ethics promote a "compassionate concern for animals that sponsors Buddhist actions for animal welfare."[54] It absolutely does lend itself to the construction of an animal ethical ideal, even if the lived historical positions on the consumption of meat and the relative ontological status of nonhuman animals fell below the threshold of what we might call a sufficient animal ethic today.[55] Nonetheless, should we wish to investigate what a Buddhist

---

[53] Tib. *theg pa chen po*.

[54] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* 217.

[55] I see this difference between what historically *was* the case and what *can* be the case in Tibetan Buddhist animal ethics as an example of the ever-present distinction between "lived" and "ideal" religious traditions. The most comprehensive look at these historical lived positions in the Tibetan context can be found in Barstow's *Food of Sinful Demons*. While overall Barstow shows how vegetarianism existed throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism, he also provides some of the reasons and rationales for the *reluctance* to adopt a vegetarian position, and the cases he forwards likewise show this

ethic might look like if directed towards the more-than-human world today, the Buddhist emphasis on *duḥkha* provides a solid foundation for an animal ethic. The *duḥkha* of all sentient beings (both human and nonhuman) is the principal problem of Buddhist ethics which necessitates at least some kind of animal ethic.

Where this animal ethic can become an environmental ethic is in the second major principle on which Buddhist ethics are built: *pratītyasamutpāda.* This term has been translated various ways depending on the tradition and context, but it broadly means dependent origination, interdependent arising, interdependence, or interbeing.[56] These last two terms are more closely associated with East Asian interpretations of the term, while dependent origination and interdependent arising reflect the Tibetan rendering of *pratītyasamutpāda*, *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*, more accurately. Nonetheless, each of these terms reflects an ontological view wherein all phenomena are thoroughly relative in a causal sense. *Pratītyasamutpāda* can therefore be read as the conventional corollary of another Buddhist ontological position: *śūnyatā.*[57] *Śūnyatā* translates to emptiness and refers to the lack of inherent, independent existence of all

---

lack of a sufficient animal ethic. However, as the present article shows, this historical fact does not preclude the ability to *construct* a robust animal ethic from Buddhist sources.

[56] For discussion on *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* in Tibetan primary texts, see Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, trans. Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 503-513; Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche, *Gateway to Knowledge: The Treatise Entitled The Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita, Volume One*, trans. Erik Pema Kunsang (Boudhanath: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997), 51-60; Wangchuk Dorje, The Ninth Karmapa, *The Karmapa's Middle Way: Feast for the Fortunate*, trans. Tyler Dewar, ed. Andy Karr (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008), 143-158; 185-202. See also Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 24-55; David L. McMahan, "A Brief History of Interdependence," in *The Making of Modern Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149-182.

[57] Tib. *stong pa nyid*.

phenomena. However, this is not a pure negation of existence. Instead, phenomena exist in complete dependence on all other phenomena. Because things are thoroughly relative, they lack inherent existence. And because no thing exists independently, all phenomena arise in dependence on one another. This presentation is obviously a simplified rendering of the nuanced Madhyamaka Buddhist position, and tens of thousands of pages have been spent arguing about how this philosophical position should be interpreted and applied, but this simplified understanding is sufficient for theorizing a Tibetan Buddhist ethic of the more-than-human world.

When *duḥkha* is understood in the context of *pratītyasamutpāda,* we can begin to see how a Buddhist animal ethic necessitates a concern for nonsentient nature in Buddhist settings. If Buddhist philosophy asserted that phenomena are independent of one another then one might be able to address *duḥkha* as an isolated experience of sentient beings and ignore nonsentient phenomena altogether. But this is of course not the case. Since all phenomena are dependently arisen, the ecological stability of the nonsentient river affects the fish, waterfowl, and land mammals that rely on its cleanliness for food, habitat, and hydration. This reliance means that nonsentient nature *must* be valued because of how it supports the flourishing of or contributes to the *duḥkha* of sentient beings. One must care for the river because if it gets polluted or becomes too acidic, this adulteration will create more *duḥkha* in sentient beings, and this extension of value would apply to all nonsentient phenomena in both wild and domestic spaces. Therefore, in the Tibetan Buddhist context where *duḥkha* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are intimately connected in both practice and philosophy, animal ethics give rise to environmental ethics.

To use the language of Jamieson, we can see how a derivative value for the nonsentient environment can quite easily emerge out of the primary value of sentient beings. *Duḥkha* forms the basis for Tibetan

Buddhism's primary valuation of sentient beings, but *pratītyasamutpāda* necessitates a derivative valuation of nonsentient nature. To reiterate, Jamieson writes that "were there no sentient beings there would be no values but it doesn't follow from this that only sentient beings are valuable,"[58] and I have defended this exact position in Buddhist contexts elsewhere.[59] To briefly restate this position for this current argument, if all sentient beings were free of *duḥkha* and left *saṃsāra*[60] altogether then it would not matter what happens to lakes, mountains, or soils. These nonsentient features of the environment would no longer hold any bearing on the *duḥkha* of sentient beings and would therefore no longer possess derivative value. However, if even a single sentient being is living on Earth, then a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner would be obliged to care for the nonsentient environmental supports of that being's flourishing.

Interestingly, this kind of valuation can also be seen in the practice instructions of some of the most important teachers across the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. When it comes to the meditative cultivation of lovingkindness,[61] one of the *brahmavihārās*[62] or the foundational conative modes, most texts will teach that one should direct one's meditative aspiration towards individual sentient beings. For example, in Tsongkhapa's[63] *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path,*[64] he clearly states that "the object of love is living beings who do not have happiness" and that the actual practice is thinking "may they be happy" and "I will cause

[58] Jamieson, "Animals Ethics are Environmental Ethics," 47.

[59] Simonds, "Trouble of Rocks and Waters," 234-235.

[60] Tib. *'khor ba*.

[61] Tib. *byams pa.*

[62] Tib. *tshad med bzhi*.

[63] Tib. *tsong kha pa*, c. 1357-1419. The founder of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.

[64] Tib. *lam rim chen mo*.

them to be happy."[65] However, other texts will extend the scope of loving-kindness beyond individual sentient beings. Longchenpa's[66] *Finding Rest in the Nature of Mind*[67] instructs the reader:

> Reflecting first on one being then on all sentient beings, meditate until [your lovingkindness] touches the ends of the world.[68]

Whether this final culmination of lovingkindness touching the ends of the world is inclusive of nonsentient phenomena is somewhat ambiguous in Longchenpa's verse, but Gampopa's[69] *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*[70] is unambiguous in its extension of lovingkindness beyond sentient beings. It states:

> There are three categories:
> Lovingkindness directed at sentient beings,
> Lovingkindness directed at phenomena, and
> Lovingkindness without direction.[71]

---

[65] Tsong-kha-pa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: Volume Two*, trans. Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, ed. Joshua W.C. Cutler and Guy Newland (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2004), 42.

[66] Tib. *klong chen pa*, c. 1308-1364. One of the major systematisers of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

[67] Tib. *sems nyid ngal gso*.

[68] Tib. *snyam du gcig nas 'gro ba kun gyi bar / phyogs mtha' gtugs par de snyed bsgom par bya*. Sourced from: *klong chen pa,* "rdzogs pa chen po sems nyid ngal gso" in *rdzogs pa chen po ngal gso skor gsum dang rang grol skor gsum bcas pod gsum*, vol. 1 (n.p. 1999), 56.

[69] Tib. *sgam po pa*, c. 1079-1153. The systematiser of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

[70] Tib. *dam chos yid bzhin nor bu rin po che'i rgyan*.

[71] Tib. *de la dang po dbye ba ni gsum ste / sems can la dmigs pa'byams pa dang / chos la dmigs pa'i byams pa dang / dmigs pa med pa'i byams pa'o.* Sourced from: sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen, *dam chos yid bzhin gyi nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan* (n.p., n.d.), 109A.

It is entirely possible to interpret Longchenpa's instructions in a general sense wherein the purpose is simply to expand the object of lovingkindness outwards infinitely and indiscriminately, but Gampopa's addition of "phenomena" (Tib. *chos*; Skt. *dharma*) as a specific object of lovingkindness *before* the development of lovingkindness without direction is unique and specific. Gampopa's framing of this practice is that one should first develop lovingkindness for sentient beings before extending this conative mode towards nonsentient phenomena and, finally, impartially to all. We can therefore see how a concern for nonsentient phenomena can emerge *from* a concern for sentient beings in Gampopa's approach to Tibetan Buddhism. To effectively cause others to be happy, we need to develop a mind of lovingkindness not only to these individual sentient beings but to *all phenomena* because of their mutual implication in *pratītyasamutpāda.* Otherwise, the extension of lovingkindness to all phenomena[72] would be ineffectual and unnecessary. There is therefore historical precedent for nonsentient nature holding derivative value not only in theory, but in practice. Gampopa's instruction on lovingkindness demonstrates how a primary valuation of sentient beings can compel an attitude of care towards derivative values like nonsentient aspects of nature and, ideally, culminates in an impartial attitude of love and care towards beings, systems, and communities at every level. While Tsongkhapa's iteration of lovingkindness meditation may be seen as simply conducive to animal ethical ends, Gampopa's extension of lovingkindness towards nonsentient phenomena compels us to care for nonhuman animals *through* the care for their environment.

Thus, it is clear that when *duḥkha* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are taken together Capper's contention that Buddhism does not value plant, water, and mineral resources holds neither philosophically nor practically. These nonsentient aspects of nature have a great degree of value when it

[72] Tib. *chos*.

comes to Tibetan Buddhism's central ethical problem of alleviating the *duḥkha* of sentient beings, even if this value is best construed as derivative rather than primary. We can therefore say with confidence that animal ethics *are* environmental ethics in Tibetan Buddhist contexts. The final critique to be addressed regarding the merits of a Buddhist environmental ethic is therefore the problem of predation. Capper writes that, regarding "the compassionate concern for animals that sponsors Buddhist actions for animal welfare [...] this attitude cannot, as it is, result in a viable environmental ethic that attends to the complexities of ecosystems with many preying individuals."[73] This concern might also be written in the terms of the animal liberation and environmental ethics debate. Broadly speaking, we might question whether the Buddhist concern for the welfare of individual sentient beings prevents us from addressing both inter-animal conflicts in ecosystems and the tension between the individual nonhuman animal and the communal environment. Or, if animal ethics *are* environmental ethics in Tibetan Buddhism, how might we weigh the competing interests coming from animal ethics and environmental ethics?

Elsewhere, I have addressed the problem raised by predation from a Buddhist perspective by noting how Buddhist ethics are largely nonabsolutist.[74] Rather than rely on a single set of rules for addressing each ethical dilemma as a Kantian or utilitarian ethicist might do, the Buddhist ethical tradition offers a nonuniversal approach to ethical development and ethical action. Many scholars have articulated this nonabsolutism from a number of angles including Peter Harvey's gradualism,[75] Barbra

[73] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* 217-218.

[74] Simonds, "Trouble of Rocks and Waters," 238-239.

[75] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

Clayton's ethical contextualism,[76] William Edelglass's moral pluralism,[77] or my own defense of moral phenomenology.[78] In ecological contexts, I have also argued elsewhere that the nonabsolutist quality of Buddhist ethics lends itself to a characterization of Buddhist environmental ethics as an ecological ethic of care.[79] Regardless, what separates these nonabsolutist Buddhist approaches from more universalist Western approaches to ethical decision-making is the Buddhist tradition's emphasis on *upāya* or skillful means. This ideal posits that the *bodhisattva* on the mission to liberate all sentient beings from all *duḥkha* is permitted to do even what is not allowed if doing so will result in the alleviation of *duḥkha.* Classical examples of *upāya* are Buddhists lying,[80] doing sex work,[81] and even killing in exceptional cases.[82]

Applied to the context of animal liberation and environmental ethics, this idea would allow the Tibetan Buddhist practitioner to respond to an issue like overpopulation or invasive species with nuance. To refrain

---

[76] Barbra Clayton, "Buddha's Maritime Nature: A Case Study in Shambhala Buddhist Environmentalism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013).

[77] William Edelglass, "Moral Pluralism, Skillful Means, and Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2006).

[78] Colin H. Simonds, "Buddhist Ethics as Moral Phenomenology: A Defense and Development of the Theory," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 28, (2021).

[79] Colin H. Simonds, "Toward a Buddhist Ecological Ethic of Care," *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023).

[80] Wherein a father lies to get his sons out of a burning house, thinking "The house is already in flames from this huge fire. If I and my sons do not get out at once, we are certain to be burned. I must now invent some expedient means that will make it possible for the children to escape harm." *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 56-59.

[81] "Deliberately transforming into sex workers / For the purpose of attracting the lustful, / Having drawn them with the hook of desire, / The bodhisattva establishes them in the Buddha's primordial wisdom." Sourced from: zhi ba lha, *bslab pa kun las btus pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa* (Lha sa: ser gtsug nang bstan dpe rnying 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang, 2009), 419.

[82] Mark Tatz, *The Skill in Means (Upāyakauśalya) Sūtra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994).

from taking life is the first of the Buddhist precepts, but eradicating an invasive vine or killing several deer so that hundreds do not starve may be appropriate in certain situations. In other situations, they may not be. To give a milder example, forcibly relocating an invasive mammal to its native ecosystem would surely cause a lot of *duḥkha* in its capture, transport, and readjustment to its new surroundings, but causing that *duḥkha* may be necessary to preserve ecosystem dynamics which, if disrupted, would cause great amounts of *duḥkha* for a great number of beings. Speaking abstractly about universal rules for either the problem of predation or broader tensions between animal and environmental ethics "wrenches an ethical problem out of its embedded context,"[83] to borrow the language of ecofeminist Marti Kheel, and this abstraction ignores the myriad emotional relationships, communities, and relational exchanges between beings which can contribute to the exacerbation or alleviation of *duḥkha.* If *duḥkha* was taken as an individualized phenomenon, then perhaps we might arrive at some universal principles to apply to every situation, but it is not. *Duḥkha* is an interdependent phenomenon, and we therefore need to approach ethical situations skillfully, with *upāya*, from this Tibetan Buddhist perspective. Jamieson's contention that the value of nonsentient entities can be "very great and urgent" and can even "trump the value of sentient entities" thus appears to hold quite well in the Tibetan Buddhist context.[84] Derivatively valued entities like watersheds, coral reefs, and rainforest ecologies that affect the wellbeing of innumerable beings may hold more ethical value than the *duḥkha* of a single banana slug, ant colony, or grey squirrel and therefore may hold more gravity in our decision-making. But these decisions would have to be made

[83] Marti Kheel, "From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 255.

[84] Jamieson, "Animal Ethics are Environmental Ethics," 47.

according to the social, ecological, and material contexts of the given situation.

It is therefore clear that Capper is correct when he says that a "compassionate concern for animals [...] sponsors Buddhist actions for animal welfare."[85] The Buddhist goal of liberating *all* sentient beings of *all duḥkha* necessitates a kind of animal ethic that attends to the suffering and wellbeing of nonhuman animals. Where Capper is incorrect is in his assertion that this cannot "result in a viable environmental ethic."[86] When *duḥkha* is taken together with *pratītyasamutpāda* and the environment is recognized as a major causal factor of *duḥkha,* the nonsentient aspects of the environment take on a great deal of derivative value. Further, this derivative value can at times weigh more heavily in ethical decisions than the primarily valued nonhuman animals such that issues of predation, overpopulation, and so forth can be addressed as they arise in nonabsolutist ways. A Tibetan Buddhist approach to animal liberation and environmental ethics therefore supports Jamieson's articulation of animal ethics *as* environmental ethics. Callicott's and Sagoff's initial contention that animal ethics and environmental ethics are incompatible simply does not hold its own in a tradition which centers *pratītyasamutpāda* as its core ontological position. Jamieson's articulation of primary and derivative values allows us to recognize the centrality of *duḥkha* in the Tibetan Buddhist ethical tradition while nonetheless acknowledging the important role that the environment plays in *pratītyasamutpāda.* Thus, the Tibetan Buddhist approach to the more-than-human world bridges the gap between animal liberation and environmental ethics such that animal ethics *are* environmental ethics in this ethical tradition.

---

[85] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* 217-218.

[86] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer*, 217-218.

Conclusion: The Possibility of Shabkar's Environmental Ethics

In recent years, the debate about the compatibility of animal liberation and environmental ethics has resurfaced, and with it has come a revival of the earlier positions on the compatibility thesis. For example, Catia Faria and Eze Paez reject the compatibility thesis in their article "It's Splitsville: Why Animal Ethics and Environmental Ethics are Incompatible."[87] They argue that animal and environmental ethics have both incompatible criteria for moral considerability and incompatible normative views on the rights of individual sentient beings. Contrasting most who reject the compatibility thesis, they ultimately endorse animal ethics over environmental ethics. In opposition to Faria and Paez, Sydney Faught's "A Second Honeymoon: Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics" revives an affirmation of the compatibility thesis.[88] She argues that Sagoff's rejection of the compatibility thesis is a consequence of his limited reading of Singer and Callicott, and that by adopting a broader, institutional framework for human rights we can profitably extend a rights-based ethic to nonhuman animals and the environment without conflict. Rather than side with one of these two positions in this debate, this article has instead argued that animal ethics *are* environmental ethics in a similar way that Jamieson forwarded in 1999. If we begin from foundational Tibetan Buddhist philosophical principles, animal ethics and environmental ethics cannot be treated as distinct entities and therefore can neither be compatible nor incompatible. Instead, animal ethics and environmental ethics are simply two parts of a holistic ethical approach to the more-than-human world.

---

[87] Catia Faria and Eze Paez, "It's Splitsville: Why Animal Ethics and Environmental Ethics Are Incompatible," *American Behavioural Scientist* 63, no. 8 (2019).

[88] Sydney Faught, "A Second Honeymoon: Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," *Journal of Animal Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2019).

This understanding of Tibetan Buddhist ethics can allow us to better analyze Shabkar's narrative at the beginning of this article. When Capper critiques Shabkar as having "a limited understanding of the natural world" he is not entirely wrong. Shabkar did not have the language or conceptual resources to talk about the environment in the way that we do today. However, neither was he living in a time of ecological collapse. Because of this, we might say that the derivative value of nonsentient nature did not hold precedent over the primary value of the sentient beings in front of him. Even if saving the fledglings had a negative effect across the broader ecological landscape, these ecological consequences would be negligible in comparison to the *duḥkha* of the baby birds in front of him because of the stability of the ecosystem at the time. Further, Capper's contention that "this story involves sentimental compassions for baby animals but limited compassion for eagles [...] the entities that died for the sake of the fledglings' diet [...] or for the water or minerals that fed those entities"[89] can be challenged through my understanding of Buddhist animal and environmental ethics. Shabkar did not have a readily available meat-alternative to satiate the eagle nor would he have likely known that eagles are obligate carnivores, so instead he scolded the eagle and tried to teach it *dharma.* This *was* in fact an expression of compassion for the eagle, even if it does not conform to our present understanding of animal care. Similarly, compassion for water or minerals can only be understood as an extension of care for sentient beings. The consumption of these nonsentient resources by the fledglings does not directly harm these phenomena since they do not experience *duḥkha,* and in a stable ecological system would not create *duḥkha* in other sentient beings who share those resources.

If Shabkar was living in today's state of ecological emergency, it is conceivable that he might react differently to the plight of the fledglings.

[89] Capper, *Roaming Free Like a Deer,* 180.

If the birds were overpopulated to the extent that the ecosystem was on its way to collapse, perhaps allowing the apex predator of the ecosystem to intervene (as Callicott might advocate) would be the appropriate, compassionate action.[90] Contrastingly, Shabkar may solicit his monastic institutions to collect, neuter, and track the abundant bird population to limit overpopulation in a less lethal manner. Or, he might follow Jeff McMahan's call to eradicate the predator species (perhaps by limiting reproduction and feeding these obligate carnivores a nutritionally appropriate diet of meat substitutes) if doing so would not overly disrupt the ecosystem and would lessen the overall amount of gross *duḥkha.*[91] It's also entirely possible that Shabkar would approach this situation the same way he did two hundred years ago. What is important to note is that his approach to the situation would be informed by care for sentient beings and would take a contemporary understanding of ecological interdependence into account. It is clear that Shabkar exemplifies compassion for individual sentient beings and therefore exhibits what we may call a kind of animal ethics, but given our contemporary understanding of ecology, this animal ethic necessarily includes a nested environmental ethic which must be employed to fully address the causes and conditions of *duḥkha.*

Today, Tibetan Buddhist teachers from every tradition are advocating for environmental justice in the wake of a worsening climate crisis. For example, the late Chatral Rinpoche,[92] a vegetarian wandering renunciant[93] like Shabkar, wrote a prayer to avert climate change to help

[90] Callicott, "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics," 168.

[91] Jeff McMahan, "The Moral Problem of Predation," in *Philosophy Comes to Dinner: Arguments About the Ethics of Eating*, ed. by Andrew Chignell, Terence Cuneo, and Matthew C. Halteman (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[92] Tib. *bya bral rin po che*, c. 1913-2015.

[93] Tib. *'khyams po*

sentient beings,[94] and Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche[95] makes an explicit connection between animal ethics and environmental ethics when he writes, "if we can protect sentient beings by reversing global warming, this is a really fortunate thing to do. Therefore, we should definitely try to stop or reverse global warming."[96] Ultimately, we should see these calls for environmental justice not as a departure from traditional Buddhist ethics which focus on sentience but as an extension of the care for sentient beings at the heart of the Buddhist ethical project. In Tibetan Buddhism, animal ethics *are* environmental ethics and I expect to see more and more engaged Tibetan Buddhists across its many schools and lineages embody Shabkar's care for the fledglings in not only how they approach nonhuman animals but the entire more-than-human world.

Bibliography

Works in Tibetan

klong chen pa. "rDzogs pa chen po sems nyid ngal gsol." In *rDzogs pa chen po ngal gso skor gsum dang rang grol skor gsum bcas pod gsum*, *vol. 1*, 5–116. N.p., 1999. BDRC: MW23760_A4B66E.

sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen. *dam chos yid bzhin gyi nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*. N.p., n.d. BDRC: MW00KG02533.

[94] Kyabje Chatral Rinpoche, "A Prayer at a Time of Ecological Crisis," in *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, ed. John Stanley, David R. Loy, and Gyurme Dorje (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009).

[95] Tib. *mkhan chen khra 'gu rin po che*, b. 1933.

[96] Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, "When Snow Mountains Wear Black Hats," in *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, ed. John Stanley, David R. Loy, and Gyurme Dorje (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 107.

zhi ba lha. *bslab pa kun las btus pa'i tshig le'ur byas pa*. Lha sa: ser gtsug nang bstan dpe rnying 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang, 2009.

Works in English

Barstow, Geoffrey. *Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Callicott, J. Baird. "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair." *Environmental Ethics* 2, no. 4 (1980): 311-338.

Callicott, John Baird. "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Back Together Again." *Between the Species* 4, no. 3 (1988): 163-169.

Capper, Daniel. *Roaming Free Like a Deer: Buddhism and the Natural World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022.

Clayton, Barbra. "Buddha's Maritime Nature: A Case Study in Shambhala Buddhist Environmentalism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013): 572-591.

Dirnberger, Jacob. "An Ecology of Transformation: The Experience of Nature and the Nature of Experience in the Songs of Shabkar." MA thesis, University of Colorado Boulder, 2013.

Edelglass, William. "Moral Pluralism, Skillful Means, and Environmental Ethics." *Environmental Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2006): 8-16.

Elverskog, Johan. *The Buddha's Footprint: An Environmental History of Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.

Faria, Catia, and Eze Paez. "It's Splitsville: Why Animal Ethics and Environmental Ethics Are Incompatible." *American Behavioural Scientist* 63, no. 8 (2019): 1047-1060.

Faught, Sydney. "A Second Honeymoon: Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics." *Journal of Animal Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2019): 39-46.

Gampopa. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation: The Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*. Translated by Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche, edited by Ani K. Trinlay Chödron. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1998.

Garfield, Jay L. *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Harris, Ian. "Buddhism." In *Attitudes to Nature*, edited by Jean Holm and John Bowker, 8-27. New York: Pinter Publishers 1994.

Harris, Ian. "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern: Some Methodological Problems Considered." In *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, 377-402. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Harris, Ian. "Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of EcoBuddhism." *Religion* 25, no. 3 (1995): 199–211.

Harris, Ian. "Causation and Telos: The Problem of Buddhist Environmental Ethics." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994): 45–56.

Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche. *Gateway to Knowledge: The Treatise Entitled The Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita*, Volume One. Translated by Erik Pema Kunsang. Boudhanath: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997.

Jamieson, Dale. "Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic." *Environmental Values* 7, no. 1 (1998): 41-57.

Kheel, Marti. "From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge." In *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, 243-271. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche. "When Snow Mountains Wear Black Hats." In *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, edited by John Stanley, David R. Loy, and Gyurme Dorje, 105-111. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009.

Kyabje Chatral Rinpoche. "A Prayer at a Time of Ecological Crisis." In *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, edited by John Stanley, David R. Loy, and Gyurme Dorje, 101-104. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009.

Lafleur, William. "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature: Part I." *History of Religions* 13 no. 2 (1973): 93–128.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.

Lin, Nan Kathy. "Buddhist Environmentalism as Seen through Religious Change." *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022): 1191.

Masaki, Akira. "Spirituality of Japanese Buddhism considered from enlightenment of nonsentient beings." *International Journal of Educational Research* 115 (2022): 102019.

McMahan, David L. "A Brief History of Interdependence." In *The Making of Modern Buddhism*, 149-182. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

McMahan, Jeff. "The Moral Problem of Predation." In *Philosophy Comes to Dinner: Arguments About the Ethics of Eating*, edited by Andrew Chignell, Terence Cuneo, Matthew C. Halteman, 268–294. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Midgely, Mary. *Animals and Why They Matter*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983.

Pang, Rachel H. "Songs against Meat by the Yogi Shabkar." In *The Faults of Meat: Tibetan Buddhist Writings on Vegetarianism*, edited by Geoffrey Barstow, 211-221. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019.

Pang, Rachel H. "Taking Animals Seriously: Shabkar's Narrative Argument for Vegetarianism and the Ethical Treatment of Animals." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 29 (2022): 61-84.

Parkes, Graham. "Dōgen's 'Mountains and Waters as Sūtras' (Sansui-kyō)." In *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, edited by William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield, 83-92. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Patrul Rinpoche. *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Translated by Padmakara Translation Group. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998.

Sagoff, Mark. "Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (1984): 297-307.

Schmithausen, Lambert. *Buddhism and Nature*. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991.

Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol. *Food of Bodhisattvas: Buddhist Teachings on Abstaining from Meat*. Translated by Padmakara Translation Group. New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2008.

Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol. *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin*. Translated by Matthieu Ricard, Jakob Leschly, Erik Schmidt, Marilyn Silverstone, and Lodrö Palmo, edited by Constance Wilkinson. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2001.

Simonds, Colin H. "Buddhist Ethics as Moral Phenomenology: A Defense and Development of the Theory." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 28 (2021): 339-402.

Simonds, Colin H. "Expanding Sentience: Tibetan Buddhism and the Possibility of Plant, Bacteria, and AI Sentience." *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 18 (2023): 71-115.

Simonds, Colin H. "The Trouble of Rocks and Waters: On the (Im)Possibility of a Buddhist Environmental Ethic." *Environmental Ethics* 45, no. 3 (2023): 223-245.

Simonds, Colin H. "Toward a Buddhist Ecological Ethic of Care." *Religions* 14, no.7 (2023): 893.

Tatz, Mark. *The Skill in Means (Upāyakauśalya) Sūtra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994.

The Lotus Sutra. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Tsong-kha-pa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Volume One*. Translated by Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, edited by Joshua W.C. Cutler and Guy Newland. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000.

Tsong-kha-pa. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: Volume Two*. Translated by Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, edited by Joshua W.C. Cutler and Guy Newland. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2004.

Tsongkhapa. *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Translated by Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Wangchuk Dorje, The Ninth Karmapa. *The Karmapa's Middle Way: Feast for the Fortunate*. Translated by Tyler Dewar, edited by Andy Karr. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008.

Warren, Mary Anne. "The Rights of the Nonhuman World." In *Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Robert Elliot and Arran Gare, 109-134. New York: University of Queensland Press, 1983

Notes on the Contributor

Colin H. Simonds is presently an Assistant Lecturer of Religion at the University of Alberta. His work focuses on the Tibetan Buddhist philosophical and contemplative practices and their relevance to contemporary environmental and animal ethics. His first monograph articulates a contemplative approach to Buddhist environmental ethics and is forthcoming with SUNY Press.

Correspondence to: Colin H. Simonds.

Email: simonds@ualberta.ca

Word count

8402