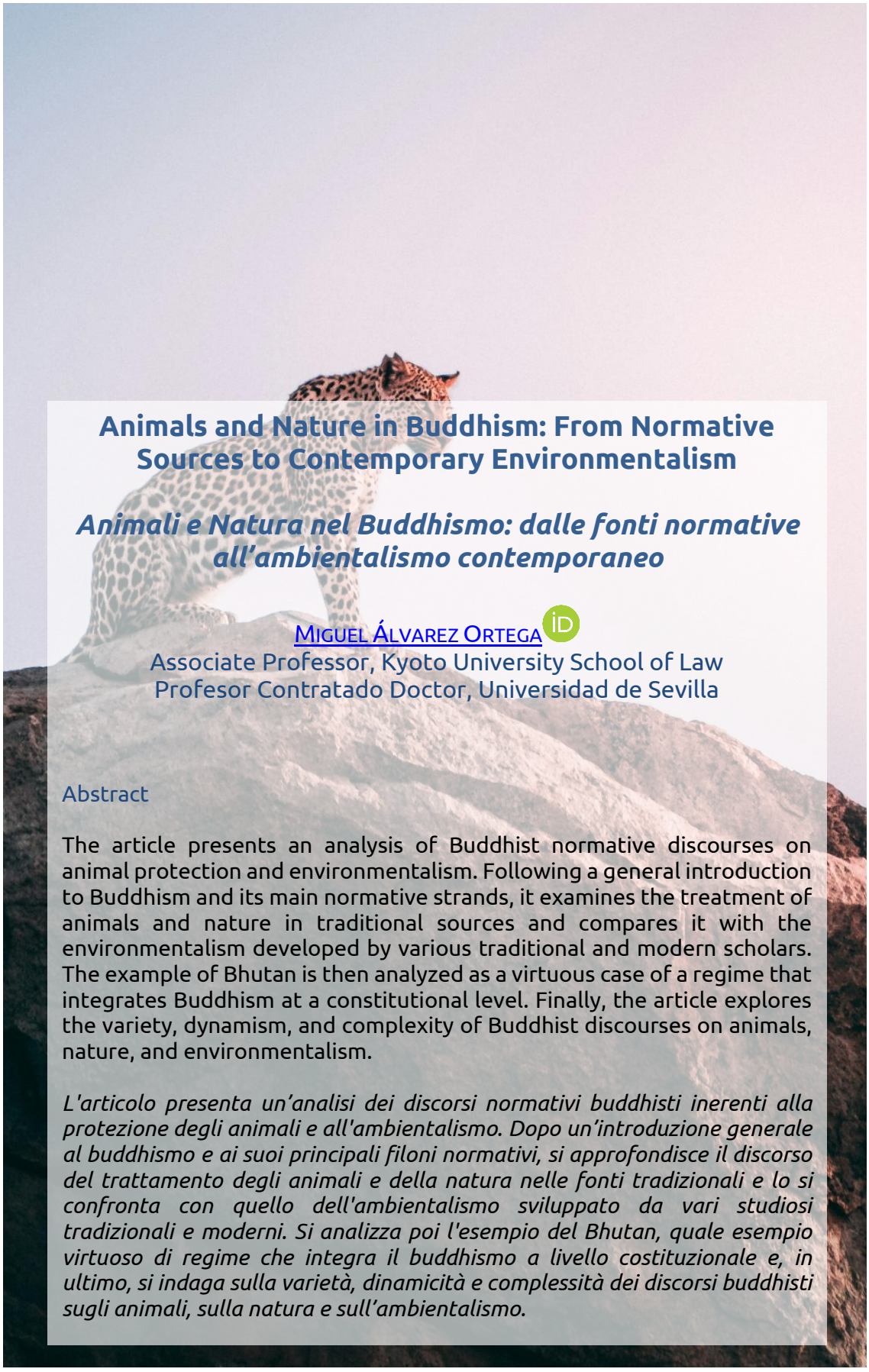
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Animals and Nature in Buddhism: From Normative Sources to Contemporary Environmentalism

Animali e Natura nel Buddhismo: dalle fonti normative all'ambientalismo contemporaneo

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Abstract

The article presents an analysis of Buddhist normative discourses on animal protection and environmentalism. Following a general introduction to Buddhism and its main normative strands, it examines the treatment of animals and nature in traditional sources and compares it with the environmentalism developed by various traditional and modern scholars. The example of Bhutan is then analyzed as a virtuous case of a regime that integrates Buddhism at a constitutional level. Finally, the article explores the variety, dynamism, and complexity of Buddhist discourses on animals, nature, and environmentalism.

L'articolo presenta un'analisi dei discorsi normativi buddhisti inerenti alla protezione degli animali e all'ambientalismo. Dopo un'introduzione generale al buddhismo e ai suoi principali filoni normativi, si approfondisce il discorso del trattamento degli animali e della natura nelle fonti tradizionali e lo si confronta con quello dell'ambientalismo sviluppato da vari studiosi tradizionali e moderni. Si analizza poi l'esempio del Bhutan, quale esempio virtuoso di regime che integra il buddhismo a livello costituzionale e, in ultimo, si indaga sulla varietà, dinamicità e complessità dei discorsi buddhisti sugli animali, sulla natura e sull'ambientalismo.

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Keywords: Buddhism; animals; nature; environmentalism

Summary: 1. Introduction. – 2. Buddhism: Western reception, history, and features. – 3. Normative Spheres in Buddhism. – 4. Animals and Nature in Buddhist Normative Sources. – 5. Animals and Environmentalism in Contemporary Buddhist Scholarship. – 6. An Implementation Case: The Kingdom of Bhutan. – 7. Concluding remarks.

1. Introduction.

This paper presents an approach to Buddhist normative discourses on animal protection and environmentalism. To do so, I will first introduce Buddhism as a tradition, dealing with its main features, history, and reception in the West (2) and providing a comprehensive account of its different normative strands (3). This will allow us to tackle the specific treatment of animals and nature in traditional sources (4) and compare it with the discourses on environmentalism presently developed by both traditional and modern scholars (5). The country of Bhutan will be addressed as an example of a regime which embraces Buddhism at the constitutional level and has been internationally recognised for its environmental agenda and accomplishments (6).

The concluding thesis I would like to explore is that, in contrast to simplifying and essentialising idealisations, Buddhist discourses on animals, nature, and environmentalism constitute a complex and rich tapestry prompted by diversity, internal and external tensions, and potentialities (7).

2. Buddhism: Western reception, history, and features.

From the affable, televised image of the Dalai Lama to the evocative references of beat generation writers to a wide range of commercial uses of iconographic elements in chill-out venues and New Age paraphernalia, Buddhism is not just a part but a significant contributor to the popular culture of the globalised world. Its influence is felt across continents and cultures. This globalised nature of Buddhism is a relatively recent development. While contact between the West and Buddhist traditions can be traced back to the ancient world, it was markedly partial, unsystematic, and discontinuous until the nineteenth century. The Greek-Buddhist interface of Gandara (), responsible for the Hellenistic-inspired sculptures of a Buddha in robes and a hair bun, did not result in a Western spread of his teachings.[1] At the same time, the missionary enterprise carried out between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Asia, especially by the Portuguese and Spanish, would form a new context of rapprochement, although in general, it would not generate either a

[1] See J Boardman, *The Diffusion of Classical Art in Antiquity*, vol 42 (Princeton University Press 2023) 109-144; DS Lopez (ed.), *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (The University of Chicago Press 2005) 26-27.

popularization of the religion in Europe or a weighty academic corpus, mainly due to a lack of capacity to read and study the texts.[2]

By the mid-19th century, the Western colonial presence in Asia enabled and prompted a multilateral absorption of Buddhism. This reception was undertaken by a diverse group of scholars and thinkers, including philologists and historians of religions, like E. Burnouf and T.W. Rhys Davids;[3] Modernist spiritualists, like P. Carus and D. T. Suzuki; [4] and German intellectuals like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.[5] This complex scenario allowed the formation of a scholarly corpus dedicated to Buddhist notions and sources, as well as a matrix for a practical approach to the tradition as an allegedly non-religious and scientific spirituality. Thus, today, we find a rich tapestry of exposures and approaches to Buddhism as a specialized academic field of study, a religious and spiritual practice (with both traditional and modern takes), and the object of interest of global pop culture, from famous actors to clothing merchandising.

Despite this seeming familiarity, Buddhism is still not typically part of the regular Western educational background, so it may be worth providing a contextualising description, which may be skipped by those already versed in the tradition. Under the generic label of 'Buddhism,' there is a set of religious and philosophical traditions that extend throughout much of Asia, from Sri Lanka to Japan, through the Himalayas and Southeast Asia. The common origin of these traditions is found in the teachings imparted in North India by Siddhārta Gautama (Pāli: Siddhattha Gotama) between the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.[6]

According to tradition, Siddhārta belonged to a ruling family of the Śākya republic. After experiencing the dissatisfactions and displeasures of a hedonistic and materialistic life, at the age of 30, he decided to undertake a path of extreme renunciation in which he also did not find an answer to his concerns. Finally, during a session of spiritual practice in which he seeks a balance or middle ground between self-indulgence and self-mortification, he reaches the state of enlightenment known as *nibbana* (Pāli) or nirvana (Westernization of the Sanskrit *nirvāṇa*), ceasing his suffering and attaining wisdom. He thus becomes the Buddha, literally, 'the one who has awakened.[7] And so begins a process of propagation of his teachings, of his discovered

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[2] According to Urs App, the first contact with Buddhist texts would not take place in India but in 16th century Japan, while the first sūtra translated into a European language would be the Chinese version of the Sūtra of the 42 Sections (四十二章經, sì shí èr zhāng jīng). U App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2011) 8-9.

[3] E Bender, JW de Jong, 'A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America' (1978) 98 Journal of the American Oriental Society 350, 40 ff.; J Snodgrass, 'Defining Modern Buddhism: Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids and the Pāli Text Society' (2007) 27 Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 186, 186–202.

[4] DL McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford University Press 2008) 93–102; DL McMahan, 'Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism' 72 897, 909 ff.

[5] P Abelsen, 'Schopenhauer and Buddhism' (1993) 43 Philosophy East and West 255, 255–278; BA Elman, 'Nietzsche and Buddhism' (1983) 44 Journal of the History of Ideas 671, 680 ff.

[6] On the issue of dating the Buddha, see LS Cousins, 'The Dating of the Historical Buddha: A Review Article' (1996) 6 Journal of the Royal Asiatic society 57, 57–63; HW Schumann, *The Historical Buddha: The Times, Life, and Teachings of the Founder of Buddhism*, vol 51 (Motilal Banarsidass Publ 2004).

[7] For the traditional account, see C Willemen and Numata center for Buddhist translation and research staff, *Buddhacarita: In Praise of Buddha's Acts: (Taishō Volume 4, Number 192)* (Calif: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research 2009).

truths, known as 'Buddha-dharma' or simply 'Dharma,' a comprehensive Indian term. Buddhism is thus constructed in dialogue with the Hindu schools and, despite the secularising characterisations seen today (scientific spirituality) and the complexity of the elements it contains, it is still a 'religion': It admits the Hindu pantheon of deities, attributes supernatural properties to the Buddha and the enlightened beings, believes in reincarnation in six different worlds (including that of demons and hungry ghosts), and develops a monastic body whose functions include the practice of rituals.[8]

The first teaching of Siddhārtha contains the fundamental principles of the Buddhist path and is identified with the 'four noble truths' that focus on the experience of suffering (*dukkha*) as a part of human life.[9] The notion of 'suffering' employed encompasses a wide variety of manifestations-from physical pain to deprivation of objects of desire are caused by thirsty craving (*taṇhā*) conditioned by ignorance (*avijjā*), which manifests as emotional attachment (*lobha, rāga*), hatred or aversion (*dosa*) and mental obfuscation (*moha*). It is thus intended to point out that people crave or detest things due to a lack of understanding of the vacuous (suñña), dynamic, and interrelated nature of all objects and beings (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), including human beings themselves, so that the person is regarded as a dynamic and plural set of elements known as *anattā* (absence of essential soul).[10] This has led some authors to mistakenly identify a kind of nihilism that denies the individual.[11] Actually, it is generally understood that the purpose of Buddhism is not to deny the existence of the moral agent, but to present a multifactorial and dynamic image of the person as a set of interrelated elements (*kandhas*), as opposed to the essentialist and static conception common in Brahmanical thought.[12]

To put an end to suffering, it is necessary to put an end to the state of ignorance described above, which implies attaining *nibbana* (nirvana). This notion, initially taken in the West as synonymous with annihilation or even cessation of existence, implies a specific way of being in the world and, as a spiritual goal, involves ending the cycle of reincarnations in the conditioned world, the saṃsāra. Nirvana and samsara are thus two opposite ways of experiencing reality. To attain Nibbana, the Buddha describes a set of nuclear practices known as *magga*, the Buddhist eightfold path.[13]

These notions constitute a sort of shared core that will be historically developed in a plurality of sources and traditions as Buddhism expands throughout much of Asia. From certain current conventions, and following what are traditionally called 'turns of the dharma wheel,' a tripartite division is

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[8] M Southwold, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion' (1978] Man 362, 362–379.

[9] MV Ram Kumar Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism* (Discovery Publishing House 2003); C Anderson, *Pain and Its Ending: The Four Noble Truths in the Theravada Buddhist Canon* (Routledge 2013).

[10] See, among many others, A Wayman, *Dependent Origination: The Indo-Tibetan Tradition* (Reidel 1980); JL Garfield, 'Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why Did Nāgārjuna Start with Causation?' (1994] Philosophy East and West 219.

[11] WH Burns, *The Doctrine of 'Anatman' in Early Buddhism* (The University of Texas at Austin 1991).

[12] R Gethin, 'The Five Khandhas: Their Treatment in the Nikāyas and Early Abhidhamma' (1986) 14 Journal of Indian Philosophy.

[13] The eightfold noble path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*) breaks down into: 1. Right view; 2. Right intentionality; 3. Right speech; 4. Right action; 5. Right way of life; 6. Right effort; 7. Right mindfulness and awareness; 8. Right samādhi. For a clear and accessible explanation, see W Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Open Road+ Grove/Atlantic 2007) ch V.

usually presented, which would include: the Theravāda tradition or doctrine of the ancients (considered the most archaic and prevalent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia);[14] the great vehicle or Mahāyāna tradition developed from the beginning of the Christian era and spreading to North and East Asia, centred on the model of the bodhisattva (Pāli: bodhisatta), who seeks the salvation of all sentient beings;[15] and tantric Buddhism, way of the diamond or Vajrayāna (part of the Mahāyāna tradition centred on esoteric methods, whose major representative is Tibetan Buddhism). [16] The three vehicles would appear historically in succession and have their own canonical collections, known as Tipiṭakas (or Tripiṭakas; lit. 'the three baskets') because of their tripartite division into discourses (suttas, sūtras), monastic discipline (Vinaya)and epistemological and ontological elaborations (Abhidhamma,Abhidharma). Although the oldest preserved texts are in the Gāndhārī language, [17] the primary canonical corpus is identified in the impressive collection of the Canon Pāḷi, of the Theravāda tradition, of which the Pāli Text Society edition consists of 57 volumes.[18]

In terms of public space, the influence of Buddhism varied considerably according to location and time. In India, after achieving transcendent momentum during the reign of Aśoka (268-232 B.C.), it would later be pushed aside by other local traditions and driven into virtual irrelevance after the Mughal invasion;[19] however, it has continued to have a strong foothold in Sri Lanka to this day. [20] Regarding Southeast Asia and the Himalayas, Andrew Huxley has pointed out that Buddhism arrived as part of a civilizing and enlightening pack with no equivalent local competitors, which explains its unavoidable cultural centrality at all levels.[21] Thailand, Burma, and Tibet are clear examples. On the other hand, in the case of the Sinosphere, which already had its own philosophical and religious background, Buddhism would come into play in a competitive scenario, and its influence would necessarily be diverse and, at times, more peripheral. This has not prevented, for example, a secular country with a Confucian substratum, such as Japan, from having a Buddhist party with a parliamentary presence.[22]

Today, Buddhism is a global tradition with almost 500 million followers, almost half of whom are in China, and it is the majority religion in Cambodia, Thailand (where it exceeds 90%), Burma, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Laos, and

[14] R Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (Routledge 2006); K Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity* (John Wiley & Sons 2013).
[15] P Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (2nd edn., Routledge Taylor & Francis Group 2009).
[16] RM Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism. A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (Columbia University Press 2003); CK Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (Columbia University Press 2014).
[17] E Fumio, 'The Discovery of 'the Oldest Buddhist Manuscripts'' (2000) 32 The Eastern Buddhist 157.
[18] S Collins, 'On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon' (2005) 8 Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies 72.
[19] KTS Sarao, *The Decline of Buddhism in India: A Fresh Perspective* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers 2012).
[20] HR Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History* (Buddhist Publication Society 1988).
[21] A Huxley, 'How Buddhist Is Theravāda Buddhist Law?: A Survey of Legal Literature in Pāli-Land', *The Buddhist Forum* (The Institute of Buddhist Studies 1990) 42.
[22] A Palmer, *Buddhist Politics: Japan's Clean Government Party* (Springer Science & Business Media 2012).

Mongolia.[23] It is also undeniable that Buddhism has been long experiencing a clear boom in the West, especially among the educated upper-middle classes of the left.[24]

3. Normative Spheres in Buddhism.

One of the most deeply rooted beliefs in the West regarding Buddhism relates to an alleged renunciation of life in the world that would make it a religion unconcerned with society, politics, and norms. This notion, abandoned in contemporary specialist circles, was once supported by important figures of thought, such as Max Weber or Ortega y Gasset.[25] While it is true that Buddhist soteriology focuses on individual praxis and that the bulk of its literature and philosophy is concerned with questions of an epistemological or religious nature, this does not imply the development of a normative fabric of its own, which will be classified here as: a. Generic and secular ethics, b. Kingship models, c. Monastic regulation, and d. Buddhism-inspired law.

a. *General and secular ethics*.

General morality comes into play as an essential part of the path to clear out the afflictive emotions that impede realization – ignorance, grasping, and aversion. Thus, *śīla*, i.e. Ethics, constitutes one of the spheres of cultivation along with *samadhi* (meditative concentration) and *prajña* (wisdom) within the Octuple Noble Path.[26] General morality appears as a set of requirements for the agents. The basic standard for laypeople is known as the 'five precepts' (*pañca-sīlāni*) and strongly resembles the commands stated in major religions and traditions. It is usually recited as part of a formula of spiritual adherence to the Buddhist practice known as 'taking refuge,' in which practitioners undertake the precepts to refrain from destroying living creatures, taking that which is not given, sexual misconduct, incorrect speech and intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

The existence of longer lists of precepts, along with varied contextual ethical angles and considerations, has allowed Peter Harvey to refer to 'gradualism' as a defining feature of Buddhist morality, which tries to adapt its content to the capacities and commitment of the practitioner.[27] As for the elements that build up moral judgment, according to Vélez de Cea: 'Early Buddhist ethics […] tends to integrate in its criteria of goodness three factors: motivation and content of actions (wholesomeness, blamelessness) and their consequences (harmless and happy results for oneself and others).[28]

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[23] C Hackett, BJ Grim, 'Buddhists', *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010* (Pew Research Center) 31-34.
[24] JW Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (1st edn, Oxford University Press USA 2001).
[25] M Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Univ of California Press 1978) 504, 546; J Ortega y Gasset, 'Ensimismamiento y Alteración: Meditación de La Técnica', *Obras Completas. Tomo V (1932-1940)* (Taurus 2006) 579.
[26] D Keown, *The Nature Buddhist Ethics* (Palgrave 2001) 108–109.
[27] P Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge University Press 2000) 51 ff.
[28] A Vélez de Cea, 'The Criteria of Goodness in the Pali Nikayas and the Nature of Buddhist Ethics' (2004) 11 Journal of Buddhist Ethics 123, 139.

In the case of the Mahāyāna traditions, in general, it is understood that morality takes on an all-encompassing role in the Buddhist soteriological project and expands to encompass temperance, the cultivation of virtues and moral skills, and altruism or the intention to benefit all sentient beings.61 In this way, compassion (*karuṇā*) is considered the true guiding value. At the same time, the texts offer a sort of list of 'new' precepts, known as *śikṣāpadas*, in which exceptional and contextual transgressions are accommodated under the complex notion of *upāya-kauśalya* (skillful means).[29] The model here is that of the bodhisattva, who, despite his spiritual realization, decides to remain in saṃsāra to help liberate all beings. In general, compared to the Pāli sources, the ethical developments of the Mahāyāna traditions are characterized by a greater emphasis on empathy and altruism -and thus greater social involvement- as well as by allowing for less rigid and more complex moral reasoning.

On the other hand, it is notable that academic interest in Buddhist Ethics, beyond the philosophical disquisitions on the proper way to classify it,[30] has grown exponentially in recent years, focusing on problems of normative ethics, mainly in the environmental, health, and social welfare fields.[31]

b. *Kingship models.*

In Buddhist sources, the treatment of power is plural, complex, and sometimes contradictory, particularly concerning the exercise of punishment and violence,[32] and often revolves around exemplary figures of monarchs. Thus, we find the model of the consensual monarch (*Mahāsammata*), mythically chosen to guarantee respect for the crops of others;[33] the model of the universal monarch (*Cakkavattin*) who conquers and governs the ends of the world peacefully;[34] or the model of the messianic monarch (*Metteya*), who would appear as the Buddha of the future to put an end to an era of dismal human decadence.[35] In any case, the prevailing and largely overlapping model is that of the virtuous monarch who rules according to Buddhist principles (Dhammarāja), so that the specific treatment of governance tends to be framed

[29] Keown (n 26) 145.

[30] Utilitarianism (avoidance of suffering), eudemonism (cultivation of virtues), and complex contextualism (motivation, skills, means, effects), among others, have been used as labels to describe Buddhist Ethics.

[31] Among many other examples, see C K Tucker and D William, *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds (Religions of the World and Ecology)* (Center for the Study of World Religions 1997); B. Mettanando, 'A Buddhist Model for Health Care Reform' (2007) 90 J Med Assoc Thai 2213; P Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtues Approach* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2008); SP James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics* (Routledge 2017); J Magnuson, *From Greed to Wellbeing: A Buddhist Approach to Resolving Our Economic and Financial Crises* (Policy Press 2016); D Keown, *Buddhism and Bioethics* (15th ed, Palgrave Macmillan Limited 2016); P De Silva, *Environmental Philosophy and Ethics in Buddhism* (Springer 2016).

[32] M Zimmermann, 'Only a Fool Becomes a King: Buddhist Stances on Punishment' in M Zimmermann (ed.), *Buddhism and Violence* (Publications of the Lumbini International Research Institute 2006) esp. 220-221.

[33] See the opposing takes of RS Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (4th rev. ed, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers 1996) 49 ff; S Collins, 'Discourse on What Is Primary (Aggañña-Sutta)' (1993) 21 Journal of Indian Philosophy 301, 317.

[34] See GT Halkias, 'The Enlightened Sovereign' in SM Emmanuel (ed.), *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (John Wiley & Sons 2014) 498 ff.

[35] See the collective and comprehensive volume A Sponberg, H Hardacre, *Maitreya, the Future Buddha* (Cambridge University Press 1988).

in terms of the virtues, attitudes, and prudential policies that characterise a moral king.

In general, the following of Dharma imposes on the ruler a series of duties and measures centred around creating the conditions of social order.[36] Specific approaches to this model can be found in the *Jātakas*, accounts of the Buddha's past lives, where the qualities of the *dhammarāja*, including generosity, nonviolence, or justice as the cause of well-being and happiness, are recounted.[37] Sometimes, such narratives explain how the presence of a just king not only leads to the good behaviour of the subjects and makes violence unnecessary but also causes prosperity to flourish in the kingdom or fruits to grow juicy and sweet on the trees, which shows the ontological nuances of dharma.[38] These kinds of ideal qualities serve, it has been pointed out, to attempt to circumvent the problem of potentially unnecessary coercion and its possible karmic consequences [39] and find their counterpart in other descriptions of the model king in which pragmatism prevails and various applications of force by the ruler are permitted, including even capital punishment. [40] For example, the Mahāyāna sutra *Ārya-Bodhisattva-Gocara* contains concrete instructions on the government where the problems of criminal law and the art of war are dealt with extensively from a practical perspective, but always avoiding cruelty in the former and considering the latter as the ultima ratio.[41]

c. *Monastic regulation*

Buddhism's primary and most relevant normative expression is usually located in the monastic regulations, codified as Vinaya, one of the three parts, as seen above, of the Buddhist canons. Derived explicitly or implicitly from the Buddha himself, its typical structure involves a twofold division known as the *Vibhang*a, whose regulative core is called the *Pāṭimokkha* (Sanskrit: *Prātimokṣa*), and the *Kandhakas*, which contain the communal acts performed by the

[36] These measures are usually of a material and welfare nature and are related to the foreseeable consequences of neglecting the duty of care, connected with conditional arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*, *pratītyasamutpāda*). Thus: 14. ´In this way, monks, money not being given to the poor, poverty flourished; because poverty flourished, theft flourished; because theft flourished, weaponry flourished; because weaponry flourished, murder flourished; because murder flourished, these beings' vitality decreased, as did their beauty; because their vitality and beauty decreased, those who lived for eighty thousand years had children who lived for (only) forty thousand» (…). S Collins, '3 - The Discourse (Containing) a Lion's Roar on the Wheel-Turning King (Cakkavatti-Shanda Sutta)' (1998) 608.

[37] The ten real virtues (*Dasa-rājādhamma*) are: generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), sacrifice (*pariccāga*), honesty (*ajjava*), temperance (*madddava*), self-control (*tapa*), non-rage (*akkodha*), non-violence (*ahimsā*), patience (*khanti*) and tolerance (*avirodha*). S Collins, 'Recipes for a Good King: Ten Virtues, Four Wrong Courses, Four Forms of Kindliness, Five Precepts', *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pāli Imaginaire* (Cambridge University Press) 460 ff.

[38] Sensu contrario, if the king does not behave properly, misfortunes occur. BG Gokhale, 'The Early Buddhist View of the State' (1969) 89 Journal of the American Oriental Society 731, 736; BG Gokhale, 'Early Buddhist Kingship' (1966) 26 The Journal of Asian Studies 15, 20.

[39] Collins (n 36) 442.

[40] BG Gokhale, 'The Early Buddhist View of the State' (1969) 89 Journal of the American Oriental Society 731, 735.

[41] L Jamspal, PG Hackett, *The Range of the Bodhisattva, A Mahāyāna Sūtra (Ārya-Bodhisattva-Gocara): The Teachings of the Nirgrantha Satyaka* (The American Institute of Buddhist Studies : Columbia University's Center for Buddhist Studies : Tibet House US 2010) 47–63.

monastic community (*saṅgha*).[42] If we turn, for example, to the *Pāṭimokkha* Theravadin, we find 227 rules (for monks) covering a wide range of topics varying from essential problems for coexistence, such as homicide or the provocation of schisms, to minor issues, such as the making of habits. The rules are organised into eight sections according mainly to the sanction envisaged, which may consist of the need for confession, being made available or various degrees of ostracism.[43] The Vinaya has its own normative characteristics derived from both Buddhist philosophy and its peculiar addressees, which explain the marginality of the coercive use of force.[44] Specialists also allude to a desire for flexibility and contextual adaptation, given, among other reasons, that the Buddha himself was not only casuistic in his normative elaboration but also applied and justified exceptions and modulations for concrete cases.[45] On the other hand, one should not lose sight of the complex nature of the Vinaya, which includes both elements of training, so to speak, for the monks, along with matters of greater normative orthodoxy;[46] while the need to contextualise and not idealise its effective use in monasteries, which usually have specific internal organisational regulations, has been stressed by different scholars.[47]

d. *Buddhism-inspired Law.*

To what extent it is accurate to speak of a Buddhist legal genre in a secular, secular or generalist sense is a complex and debated question, marked naturally by the sphere of meaning attributed to Buddhism, law, and the relations between the two. Not surprisingly, the area of expertise devoted to these issues has tended to opt for the flexible and open-ended label of 'Buddhism and Law', reserving 'Buddhist Law' for Ecclesiastical or Monastic regulations.[48] If we descend to context-specific studies, in the case of South Asia, the tradition states that Aśoka converted to Buddhism after the atrocities of the Kalinga War and decided to promote and rule according to the Buddhist dharma, his edicts being considered a normative expression of these aims.[49]

In the case of Sri Lanka, Buddhism has had a continuous and relevant influence from the third century B.C. to the present day, and its current Constitution contains explicit provisions on 'the duty of the State to protect and promote the Buddha Sasana' (art. 9). The reciprocal influences, interferences and interactions between monastic and secular laws and

[42] T Bikkhu, *The Buddhist Monastic Code Vol 1: The Patimokkha Training* (Metta Forest Monastery 2007); T Bikkhu, *The Buddhist Monastic Code Vol 2: The Khandhaka Training* (Metta Forest Monastery 2007).
[43] TW Rhys Davids, 'The Pātimokkha', *Sacred Books of the East Vol 13* (Motilal Banarsidass 1996).
[44] M Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition* (Cambridge University Press 1990) 143–144.
[45] T Bikkhu (n 42) 12–26.
[46] P Kieffer-Pülz, 'What the Vinayas Can Tell Us About Law' in R Redwood French and MA Nathan (eds), *Buddhism and Law: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press 2014) 46–62.
[47] J Silk, *Managing Monks: Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism* (Oxford University Press 2008); See B Jansen, *The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet* (Paperback, University of California Press 2018).
[48] See M Álvarez Ortega, 'Buddhism and Law' in R. Payne (ed.), *Oxford Bibliographies* (Oxford University Press 2016).
[49] U Singh, 'Governing the State and the Self: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Edicts of Aśoka' (2012) 28 South Asian Studies 131, 131–145.

institutions in Sri Lanka are explored in a series of publications covering the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.[50]

In the case of Southeast Asia, since pioneer R. Lingat,[51] there exists a tendency to focus on Burma followed by the key figure of Andrew Huxley. According to the late SOAS scholar, one could speak of a 'Pāli Buddhist law', starting from the idea that the progressive Indianization of South Asia entailed a gradual development of a particular legal praxis and textual tradition (*Dhammathats*), based on the Vinaya literature and Buddhist ethics, from the 13th century until European colonisation.[52] Compared to Burma, the other countries in the area have generated fewer monographic approaches, with Thailand being the primary object of interest.[53]

Finally, in the Himalayan context, in addition to its religious centrality and strong monastic presence, it is widely assumed that Buddhism has played a central role in the Tibetan public sphere since imperial times (7th century), at least at the level of political legitimisation.[54] However, the extent to which the dharma exerted a detectable influence on drafting legal documents or legal praxis remains highly controversial. One of the leading experts on Tibetan law, D. Schuh, has argued that the alleged influence of Buddhism on Tibetan jurisprudence would only be a fictitious construct to guarantee political support;[55] the opposite view to that advocated by Rebecca French, who argues for an omnipresence of Buddhism in Tibetan law, which she refers to in 'cosmological' terms.[56] The unique case of Bhutan, a traditional Buddhist kingdom recently reformed into a modern state, has allowed for interesting reflections in both legal and constitutional terms, such as those of R. Whitecross or local scholar Sonam Kinga1,[57] with articles 2.2. and 3.3. of the Constitution, respectively stating that 'The Chhoe-sid-nyi [dharma and politics] of Bhutan shall be unified in the person of the Druk Gyalpo [King] who, as a Buddhist, shall be the upholder of the Chhoe-sid' and that 'Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance.'

[50] B Schonthal, *Buddhism, Politics and the Limits of Law: The Pyrrhic Constitutionalism of Sri Lanka* (First paperback edition, Cambridge University Press 2018).
[51] R Lingat, 'Vinaya et Droit Laïque: Etudes Sur Les Conflits de La Loi Religieuse et de La Loi Laïque Dans l'Indochine Hinayaniste' (1937) 37 Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient 415.
[52] A Huxley, 'Is Burmese Law Buddhist? Transition and Tradition' (2014) 59 Law, Society and Transition in Myanmar, Oxford: Hart Publishing 75.
[53] FE Reynolds, 'Dhamma in Dispute: The Interactions of Religion and Law in Thailand' (1994) 28 Law & Society Review 433, 433–451.
[54] F Pirie, 'Buddhist Law in Early Tibet: The Emergence of an Ideology' (2017) 3 Journal of Law and Religion 406.
[55] D Schuh, 'Recht Und Gesetz in Tibet (Law in Tibet)' in L. Liegt (ed.), *Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Csöma de Körös* (Akadémiai Kiadó 1984).
[56] RR French, *The Golden Yoke: The Legal Cosmology of Buddhist Tibet* (Snow Lion 2002).
[57] R Whitecross, 'Separating Religions and Politics? Buddhism and the Bhutanese Constitution' (Oxford University Press 2013).

4. Animals and Nature in Buddhist Normative Sources.

A specific treatment of animals and nature may observed in the described normative spheres as a concrete projection of their internal logic and varying according to the tradition and context.

Starting with the most general frame, Buddhist Ethics expert Peter Harvey has pointed out that traditional sources do not show a tendency to focus on the opposition of man versus nature but rather stress the contrast between human beings and other sentient beings in terms of agency and spiritual capability. In contrast to modern Western approaches epitomised by the Enlightenment's belief in the conquest of wild nature by man's rationality as a means of development, Buddhist sources would concentrate on the 'privileged' position of being born human. While human beings share with other sentient beings (animals, gods, demi-gods, hell-beings, and hungry ghosts) the experience of suffering and the agency to work towards its removal, they are considered the best possible birth. On the one hand, godly and demonic beings are more harshly stricken by either attachment or aversion. On the other hand, although a noticeably varying degree exists within species, animals have a more limited understanding and capacity for agency (ignorance is their poison), which makes them less suitable for ethical and spiritual development than humans. This superiority would not entail an objectifying commodification of animals, which remain capable of sentiency and suffering. Neither does it imply that nature is a blank scenario for human action. Human agency definitely has karmic consequences on the environment, with which it is embedded in the pervasive notion of interdependence. Between man and nature, there is a strong relationship and dependence, the quality of the moral attitude of people, both by itself (we saw that crops are plentiful in the kingdom of a moral king) and in its treatment of the environment, impacting the flourishing or decline of the habitat as ethical rewards and punishments. There is, thus, a need for harmonious cooperation.[58]

Within general secular ethics, the most commonly alluded reference to the treatment of animals may be found in the first precept, which in Pāḷi reads as follows: *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami (I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures).* Beyond the apparent intention to prohibit homicide, alike the core precepts of any major religion, the implications of the precept regarding animals vary according to the tradition and context, with 'right livelihood' in the eight-fold noble path excluding trade in living beings and meat.[59] Even when hunting and butchering are considered ignoble and typically low-class or outcast professions, meat consumption is not automatically and universally proscribed, and neither is vegetarianism automatically nor universally required.[60] Within Theravada Buddhism,

there is no general prohibition on eating animals unless they are locally regarded as noble, sacred or particularly unhygienic or dangerous.[61] But it is

[58] Harvey (n 27) 150-153.
[59] Rahula (n 13) 53.
[60] EW Hopkins, 'The Buddhistic Rule against Eating Meat' (1906) 27 Journal of the American Oriental Society 455, 464.
[61] S Mahanarongchai, R Marranca, 'Buddhism, Diet and Vegetarianism' (2007) 12 Thammasat review 1, 2, 3.

considered better to consume 'low' animals (those with lower agency, like fish) while it is controverted if buying meat is immoral or not for encouraging animal killing.[62] In the case of Mahāyāna Buddhism, sources show a more vigorous encouragement for vegetarianism, dwelling on arguments like the previous lives of animals (they were your mother in countless lives) or the pernicious effects on meditative practice and general health.[63] Finally, the Vajrayāna context presents the peculiarity of meat being used in certain tantric rituals, while the harsh regions where it prevails, like the Himalayas, have typically made vegetable scarcity an argument for focusing on compassionate slaughtering rather than strict meat avoidance.[64]

The regulatory constrictions seem to be higher in the case of monastic practitioners, as opposed to regular lay people, drawing both from Vinaya literature and socio-cultural expectations. Monastic Codes clearly prohibit taking the life of animals, either intentionally or unintentionally (even by unwarily dropping water on the ground); but then again, the Buddha explicitly refused to make vegetarianism mandatory for monks.[65] The reasons provided relate to trying to avoid possible monastic schisms based on the issue, considering that rejecting meat food from donors is unwholesome (since it prevents them from acquiring good karma for almsgiving) unless the monks are aware that animals were slaughtered with the very purpose of offering their flesh to them, and, interestingly, discouraging vegetarians from developing self-pride and sense of superiority based on their attachment to virtues and vows.[66] Mahāyāna sources are more prone to encourage vegetarianism for monks, while it is a robust social opinion that monasteries are places of renunciation, which would include meat avoidance. This would explain why East-Asian monasteries are practically all vegetarians.[67]

Finally, regarding the treatment of animals within kingship discourses and historical legal implementations, dharma-abiding monarchs are expected to show concern for animal suffering as an expression of the royal virtue of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) and the royal duty to cater for humans, animals, spirits, etc., and their natural habitat highlighted in specific texts.[68] At the same,

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[62] P Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics. Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge University Press 2000) 162.

[63] DS Ruegg, 'Ahimsa and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism' in S. Balasooriya (ed.), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula* (George Fraser 1980); TS Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas: Buddhist Teachings on Abstaining from Meat* (Shechen Publications 2008).

[64] G Barstow, *Food of Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet* (Columbia University Press 2017) 90 ff.

[65] A Jagaro, 'Buddhism and Vegetarianism' [1994] True Freedom <http://thaihealingalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/Buddhism_and_Vegetarianism.pdf> accessed 9 September 2024.

[66] Mahanarongchai and Marranca (n 61) 3; JJ Stewart, 'The Question of Vegetarianism and Diet in Pāli Buddhism' (2010) 17 Journal of Buddhist Ethics 99, 101; Harvey (n 27) 160.

[67] J Kieschnick, 'Buddhist Vegetarianism in China' in Roel Sterckx (ed), *Of Tripod and Palate* (Palgrave Macmillan US 2005); AA Tseng, 'Five Influential Factors for Chinese Buddhists' Vegetarianism' (2018) 22 Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology 143; NDB Hiep, S Mahathanadull, 'The Concept and Practices of Mahayana Buddhist Vegetarianism in Vietnamese Society' (2019) 12 The Journal of International Association of Buddhist Universities (JIABU) 77; RM Jaffe, '11. The Debate over Meat Eating in Japanese Buddhism' in W.M. Bodiford (ed.), *Going Forth* (University of Hawaii Press 2017).

[68] For example, the *Cakkavattisīhanāda Sutta* answers to the king that to follow the model of the universal monarch he must: 'govern by Dhamma, and arrange rightful (*dhammika*) shelter, protection and defense for your family, for the army, for your noble warrior client(-king)s, for Brahmin householders, for town-dwellers and countryfolk, for ascetics and Brahmin(-renouncer)s, for animals and birds.' Collins (n 36) 604. A later Mahāyāna discourse, *The Range of the Bodhisattva*, states: 'Your Majesty, a ruler should protect sentient

Emperor Aśoka, considered either an inspiration for or an example of the ideal Buddhist sovereign, incorporated specific provisions addressing these matters in his Pillar and Rock Edicts. Namely, he included animals alongside humans as part of his constituency; he attempted to curb animal suffering by establishing limitations on animal sacrifices and slaughtering days, hunting, and the use of meat in the royal kitchen; and prohibited the gratuitous harm of animals and their habitat. Along with such restrictive measures, the Edicts also contain positive provisions on animal protection, such as medical treatments or setting wells and trees by the roads, allegedly showing a general concern for environmental welfare.[69]

Although scholars like Ian Harris have raised doubts about the 'specifically Buddhist' character of such model references, since Hindu treatises like the *Arthasastra* would show an analogous concern for the welfare of animals,[70] the truth is that countries embracing Buddhism historically show more and clearer instances of legislative implementation. For example, pre-colonial Sri Lankan kings established different restrictions on and prohibitions of animal slaughtering,[71] and even in the complex Vajrayāna context of Tibet, there were legal practices such as the decrees for 'the Protection of Animals and the Environment', issued annually by the 5th Dalai Lama, forbidding 'the killing of all creatures, polluting water sources, depletion of forests, and consequent misuse of the land.[72]'

5. Animals and Environmentalism in Contemporary Buddhist Scholarship.

Besides this classical or historical configuration, Buddhism, a living and dynamic thought system, presents a complex contemporary scenario involving both traditional teachers or scholars (mainly of monastic character) and academic specialists with modern Western-style education.

In traditional contexts, environmentalism is not necessarily a matter of specific study, scholarly interest, or practical concern, as the situation is highly casuistic. Factors such as the urban or remote location of monasteries, the character and relevance of national and local policies, the needs of the community, and the personality and interests of monastic heads create a wide

beings by not burning the habitat or ruining it, etc. A ruler should not vent his anger by burning cities or villages, ruining reservoirs, wrecking dwelling places, cutting down fruit trees, or destroying harvests, etc. In short, it is not right to destroy any well-prepared, well-constructed, and well-extended regions. How is this? These are sources of life used in common by many sentient beings who have not committed any faults. Also, Your Majesty, local deities dwell in these regions, in houses, temples, shrines, groves, etc. If a ruler disrupts these places, then the local deities will be furious. There are also many kinds of animals and other sentient beings existing in these regions that have not committed any faults. If a ruler destroys such regions, these living beings also will be destroyed. Therefore, a righteous ruler should not destroy sentient beings and their habitat. When a ruler does not ruin [the habitat] but protects it, in this way, by protecting it, he also benefits all sentient beings. (…) Your Majesty, a ruler should prepare suitable oblations and offer them [to these spirits]. In this way, then, a righteous ruler protects all sentient beings, chastises the wicked, creates no vice, and, because of this, greatly increases the merit of his own future life. Jamspal and Hackett (n 41) 56-57.

[69] Singh (n 49) 138–140.

[70] I Harris, 'Buddhism and Ecology' in Keown, Damien (ed), *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (Curzon 2000) 120.

[71] ARB Amerasinghe, *The Legal Heritage of Sri Lanka* (Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka 1999) 130–133.

[72] L Yangtso, 'Environmentalism in Tibet' (2019) 44 Tibet Journal 39, 40.

spectrum ranging from practically no involvement in environmental initiatives or study to very active participation in programs such as garbage recycling, water sanitation or prevention of animal cruelty and slaughtering, along with targeted scholarship and teaching. Thailand, where the Buddhist sangha plays an important social role, provides plenty of examples of such involvement.[73] I would like, however, to focus on Tibetan Buddhism, drawing from my own in-field and media research.

During the spring and summer of 2013, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews on Buddhism, Law, Politics, and Social Ethics with fifteen traditional scholars belonging to the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism in the village of Boudhanath (Kathmandu Valley, Nepal), home to one of the most sacred Vajrayāna Buddhist stupas and more than sixty monasteries. Interestingly, being presented with several contemporary ethical issues, such as gender equality, abortion, or material welfare, environmentalism was the topic that attracted the interest of the fewest informants, while the visit to monasteries would show abundant cases of garbage disposal, water treatment, and general hygiene conditions inconsistent with what we would consider environmental and healthcare awareness.[74] Almost ten years later, the COVID-19 pandemic provided the opportunity to assess the approach and discourses of Tibetan teachers catering for both a local and a global audience through social media. An almost universal feature turned out to be the clear human responsibility in the inception of the epidemic and the external appeal to comply with all the hygienic and sanitary measures established by the authorities, including social distancing, handwashing, masks and vaccinations. The physical (damage of nature), ethical (greed or other immoral behaviour), or esoteric (rage of spirits) character of such human causation was the object of varying singular stress depending on the teacher and audience, with a tendency to represent them as non-exclusive. This points to manifold narrative devices depicting human agency and its impact on animals and their habitat. Consequently, the cultivation of a peaceful mind, the practice of offerings, praying, and rituals were recommended and stressed depending on the audience, along with following the official guidelines, with the latter impacting

[73] For monastic involvement in environmental projects, see VA Sakya, 'Spiritual Connections to Nature and to Climate Change Action' (2023) 111 The Journal of the Siam Society 233, 242–243,where it is stated the monastery of Wat Chak Daeng in Bangkok is considered a community learning center on waste management engaged in study and development of waste recycling processes for all types of waste, and in training on garbage segregation via community leaders to promote waste management behavior at the household level, and to raise awareness and participation among community dwellers regarding environmental issues and waste management.' ; TR Jackson, 'Deep Ecology in Action: A Cross-Cultural Series of Case Studies on the Conservation Efforts of Monks and Religious Leaders in India, Mongolia, and Thailand' (PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburgh 2009) 40-49; RE Talcoth, 'Buddhist Monks and Environmental Issues in Thailand' (PhD Thesis, Chulalongkorn University 2010); for academic debates with traditional Theravada teachers see D Mitchell, W Skudlarek, *Green Monasticism* (Lantern Books 2010).

[74] 'Both a Sakya and a Nyingma scholar referred to a notion of the dual environment (*khor yug*) as outer (nature) and inner (body and mind) entities that need to be purified and protected to grant a profitable human life, whereas a Gelug Rinpoche pointed out that the preoccupation with nature as a support for human existence was already present in vinaya regulations, such as in the precepts dealing with water pollution.' M Álvarez Ortega, 'Traditional Tibetan Buddhist Scholars on Dharma, Law, Politics, and Social Ethics: Philosophical Discussions in Boudhanath (Nepal)' (2018) 4 Buddhism, Law, and Society 1, 23–24.

monastic management in terms of hygiene, waste treatment, and prophylaxis.[75]

The pandemic was also an occasion for the further visibilisation of Tibetan lamas with an already global reach, the most popular of whom is arguably the Dalai Lama. His Holiness drew attention to the pandemic taking place in an already challenging scenario prompted by extreme climate change and wars, reminded about the Buddhist understanding of the world in terms of interdependence and appealed to a 'universal responsibility' which, beyond prayer, required truly global efforts alongside doctors and science.[76] The Dalai Lama devised this responsibility principle as a counterpart to the notion of human rights, among which he undoubtedly includes a 'clean environment' for both present and future generations[77]. He has also shown concern for animal suffering and promoted vegetarianism, though he is not a vegetarian himself, as advised by his doctor.[78]

These last issues have been the focus of interest of Khenpo Tsultrim Lödro, a reputable teacher from Larung Gar, probably the most extensive religious setting in Tibet. In a series of writings and speeches and as part of a larger project of moral regeneration, Tsultrim Lödro has tackled the conditions of animals among nomads on the Tibetan plateau, pleading for a stop from selling livestock to slaughterhouses in exchange for fast cash (sometimes used to buy guns and generate further violence), advocating for more compassionate methods of slaughter, and asking lay people to eat less meat and not use fur clothing.[79] In the case of monastics, giving up meat, even if not imposed, is strongly recommended:

'Vegetarianism is the cause of a healthy body as well as peace in one's surroundings. It is also food in harmony with the path to liberation and bodhicitta. Consuming meat is the means to defeating in a single stroke: the welfare of animals, one's own health, and one's path to liberation in future lives. Friends, I urge you to keep love and compassion in your mind. I invite you to join the ranks of those who live as vegetarians.[80]'

These traditional teachers constitute a minority. The bulk of the scholarly literature on Buddhist environmentalism has been developed by University academics, so much so that it has been argued that contemporary interest responds mainly to a Western influence.[81] The question of whether Buddhism is traditionally and intrinsically ecology-oriented is a complex issue that raises

[75] See extensively M Álvarez Ortega, 'Global Virus, International Lamas: Tibetan Religious Leaders in the Face of the Covid-19 Crisis' in Kaesehage, Nina (ed), *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic* (Transcript 2021).
[76] ibid 190–193.
[77] The 14th Dalai Lama, 'A Clean Environment Is a Human Right' (*The 14th Dalai Lama*, 10 September 2024) <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/environment/clean-environment> accessed 11 September 2024.
[78] 'Nine Questions About Vegetarianism' (*FPMT*) <https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-issues-for-2011/january/nine-questions-about-vegetarianism/> accessed 11 September 2024.
[79] See H Gayley, 'The Compassionate Treatment of Animals: A Contemporary Buddhist Approach in Eastern Tibet' (2017) 45 Journal of Religious Ethics 29.
[80] ibid 41.
[81] See in detail I Harris, 'How Environmentalist Is Buddhism?' (1991) 21 Religion 101; I Harris, 'Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of ecoBuddhism' (1995) 25 Religion 199.

questions of anachronism (environmentalism is globally a recent phenomenon) and the limits between merely describing a tradition or developing and proposing ethical stances based upon or in harmony with such a tradition, something which is not always clearly stated or justified by authors. In any case, most scholars share a similar take in grounding their ecological discourses upon core Buddhist notions. Thus, the understanding of the world as an interdependent reality (*pratityasamutpada*) and karma as a result of agency typically lead to emphasising that all beings and phenomena are interconnected, implying that human actions affect the entire ecosystem and hence identifying an ethical responsibility that resonates with environmentalism. At the same time, the concepts of compassion and no-violence would be extended to the environment, encouraging the protection of ecosystems and avoidance of actions that cause harm to animals and nature. Finally, the ideas of simplicity and non-attachment would encourage a Buddhist ideal of living simply and being content with fewer material goods, which aligns with sustainable living practices.[82]

The discussion of animal rights, on the other hand, would constitute a more convoluted theoretical scenario since the very notion of (human) rights receives varied treatment within Buddhist scholarship. Ethical debates at the turn of the century showed that while some academics find the concept of human rights to be a valuable legal and political instrument to protect from suffering and allow development (including dharma) justified by the unique human capacity and agency,[83] others reject it altogether as a construct which contradicts emptiness and promotes entitlement, attachment, and greed.[84] A third group considers the notion unreasonably restricted for humans and rather advocates for an extension to all sentient beings with which humans share the experience of suffering.[85] It is with the logic of this last group that recent academic works developed their specific defense of 'animal rights' as a reasonable consequence of Buddhist ethics in dialogue with well-known Western proposals such that of Peter Singer.[86]

At the sociopolitical level, it is important to note that these ideas did not just remain in the theoretical realm, inspiring activism and several organised movements generically referred to as 'Eco-Buddhism,' such as the International

[82] ME Tucker, DR William (n 31); De Silva (n 31); Sahni (n 31); James (n 31); LE Sponsel, P Natadecha-Sponsel, 'Buddhist Environmentalism' [2016] Teaching Buddhism: New Insights on Understanding and Presenting the Traditions 318.

[83] S Promta, 'A Concept of Rights in Buddhism' (2002) 1 The Chulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies 17, 26; P Schmidt-leukel, 'Buddhism and the Idea of Human Rights: Resonances and Dissonances'' (2006) 26 Buddhist-Christian Studies 33, 52.

[84] CK Ihara, 'Why There Are No Rights in Buddhism: A Reply to Damien Keown', *Buddhism and human rights* (Routledge 2012) 48; S Arguilère, 'Peut-on Parler Des Droits de l'Homme Dans Le Bouddhisme?', *Le Bouddhisme et ses Normes: Traditions-Modernités* (Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg 2006) 148 ff.

[85] PD Junger, 'Why the Buddha Has No Rights', *Buddhism and Human Rights* (Routledge 2012) 62–63; JU Sobisch, T Brox, 'Translations of Human Rights. Tibetan Contexts' in C. Meinert and H. Zöllner (eds), *Buddhist Approaches to Humans Rights: Dissonances and Resonances* (Transcript 2010) 176; MT Adam, 'Buddhism, Equality, Rights' (2013) 20 Journal of Buddhist Ethics 422, 421–443.

[86] See N Phelps, *The Great Compassion: Buddhism and Animal Rights* (Lantern Books 2004); P Waldau, 'Buddhism and Animal Rights' in D. Keown (ed.), *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (Routledge 2013).

Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Green Buddhism, The Buddhist Climate Action Network, or Dharma Voices for Animals.[87]

6. An Implementation Case: The Kingdom of Bhutan.

A lingering question remains about the actual legislative incorporation and effective implementation of the values, models, and goals contained in the normative models. It does thus seem appropriate to look at, even if very briefly, a case of a country typically presented as a living example: the Himalayan landlocked Kingdom of Bhutan.

Founded in the 17th century by monastic elites fleeing Tibet, Bhutan is considered to have functioned as a Buddhist Vajrayāna theocracy until the beginning of the 20th century when it became a monarchy. In 2008, the country experienced a process of constitutionalization promoted by the king, establishing, as mentioned above, a Dual System of Government (*Chhoe-sid-nyi* [dharma and politics]) and Buddhism as the 'spiritual heritage' of the country, promoting peace, non-violence, compassion, and tolerance.

Bhutan has established strong environmentalist legislation, policies and goals. At the constitutional level, there is a mandate to maintain at least 60% forest cover for all time (art. 5.3), which, along with a battery of measures, has made Bhutan the first and one of the few carbon-negative countries in the world.[88] The choice for 'high value, low volume' tourism means that only relatively few high-profile tourists, who pay environmental taxes, visit the country annually. Hunting activities are largely prohibited, especially in reserved forests and protected areas, with limited exceptions, such as subsistence hunting by Indigenous communities in remote regions,[89] and slaughterhouses are heavily regulated, with meat commerce being forbidden on Buddhist auspicious dates and the first month and fourth months of the Bhutanese calendar.[90] At the same time, issues of religious freedom have been raised by minorities who continue practising animal sacrifices, even if discreetly.[91]

Despite the expected tensions with local practices and economic considerations that might challenge viability in the future,[92] and though there is room for speculation on the varied motivations for this ecological agenda—including strategies of international marketing or protection of local spirits — it seems a fair assessment to consider Bhutan as an exemplary case of national

[87] Each of these organisations possess their own website containing their principles an goals. An overview may be found at S Kaza, 'To Save All Beings: Buddhist Environmental Activism' in R. S. Gottlieb (ed.), *This Sacred Earth. Religion, Nature, Environment* (Routledge 2003) 304-311.
[88] D Yangka, V Rauland and P Newman, 'Carbon Neutral Policy in Action: The Case of Bhutan' (2019) 19 Climate Policy 672.
[89] See mainly the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan, 1995.
[90] See mainly Livestock Act of Bhutan, 2001
[91] D Lee, 'Here There Be Dragons! Buddhist Constitutionalism in the Hidden Land of Bhutan' (2014) 15 Australian Journal of Asian Law 17, 28 ff.
[92] See M Miyamoto, J Magnusson and FJ Korom, 'Animal Slaughter and Religious Nationalism in Bhutan' (2021) 80 Asian ethnology 121; B Ghosh, S Chakraborty, 'Implications of Paradigm Shift in Tourism Policy: An Evidence of Bhutan' (2020) 13 Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management; U Tshewang, MC Toabias and JG Morrison, *Bhutan: Conservation and Environmental Protection in the Himalayas* (Springer 2021).

prioritising of animal protection and environmentalism explicitly based upon universalising Buddhist values.[93]

7. Concluding remarks.

This paper has attempted to present an overview of Buddhist normative responses regarding animals, nature, and environmentalism. In contrast to simplifying and essentialising idealisations, the overall picture is a complex and rich tapestry prompted by diversity, internal and external tensions, and potentialities.

Buddhist ethics is highly gradualistic, contextual, and casuistic rather than hard-core deontological, meaning that the ideal goal of not inflicting suffering on any living creature is in tension with a plural reality of socio-cultural dynamics and contexts, resulting in exigencies of different intensity depending on the agent (e.g., rulers, monastics, laypeople) and their situation, and the resort to exceptions (donor offerings) and loopholes (slaughtering outsourced to low casts or imported). In any case, traditional sources do not condone a general imposition of vegetarianism.

This leads to another tension between local and Western approaches and priorities, exemplified by the opposition between modern and traditional scholars. The latter are generally less prone to develop a specific interest and exigent discourses on environmentalism and vegetarianism, with more local sensibility and an advisory tone, and usually an external exposure. Western academics, on the other hand, have made Buddhist environmentalism a research field dedicated to exploring the potentialities of Buddhist concepts and understanding to create a theoretical corpus to address animal issues and ecology in a comprehensive fashion. The debate on animal rights is an excellent example of the diversity of stances and the Western influence of these proposals.

Finally, the Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan, one of the most environmentally committed countries in the world, provides a practical and concrete implementation scenario for the aforementioned tensions, complexities, and potentialities.

[93] See, e.g., S Lhundup, 'The Genesis of Environmental Ethics and Sustaining Its Heritage in the Kingdom of Bhutan 2002 Student Notes Issue: Graduate Note' (2001) 14 Georgetown International Environmental Law Review 693.