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# The Question of Vegetarianism and Diet in Pāli Buddhism

James J. Stewart\*

## Abstract

This article is concerned with the question of whether Pāli Buddhism endorses vegetarianism and therefore whether a good Buddhist ought to abstain from eating meat. A prima facie case for vegetarianism will be presented that relies upon textual citation in which the Buddha stipulates that a good Buddhist must encourage others not to kill. The claim that the Buddha endorses vegetarianism, however, is challenged both by the fact that meat-eating is permissible in the Vinaya and that the Buddha himself seems to have eaten meat. The article will suggest that this conflict emerges as a distinct ethical and legal tension in the canonical texts but that the tension may have arisen as a consequence of difficult prudential decisions the Buddha may have had to make during his ministry.

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The purpose of this study is to again consider the question of vegetarianism in Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> It is now well understood that under Buddhist monastic legislation meat-eating is permitted and is in fact customary in many Buddhist countries.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, there remains a *prima facie* case that the good Buddhist still ought to be a vegetarian. This *prima facie* case follows from arguments in the canonical literature against the killing of animals.

It is noticeable that this implied endorsement of vegetarianism conflicts with the aforementioned monastic guidelines. This article will highlight this tension and attempt to explain its occurrence by claiming that the permissibility of meat-eating may have been a prudential necessity for the Buddha in order to avoid contributing to schism in the *saṅgha*. In general, this article looks favorably upon the possibility that Buddhism endorses vegetarianism as an implicit requirement following from its rejection of animal killing.

### **An Argument for Vegetarianism**

The argument for vegetarianism in Buddhism starts with the question: what do humans owe animals? The Buddhist canonical texts seem to affirm the notion that we should not harm or kill animals. Does this mean that we should not eat them either? There are two parts to this analysis: First, I will argue that that it is clear from the texts that a good Buddhist should not kill either humans or non-human animals.<sup>3</sup> Second, following some textual citation, I will also argue that the good Buddhist is committed to the non-eating of animals if he or she is to hold that we should not encourage their killing.

#### *Not killing animals*

Numerous texts repudiate killing living beings, whether human (*manusso*) or animal (*satto*). The most obvious case of this directive is the first precept which rejects the killing, or sometimes even the injuring, of any

living beings.<sup>4</sup> An oft-repeated passage in the canonical texts states that: “Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic Gotama dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings” (DN 1.8 68).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this provision against slaying is so profoundly endorsed that the Buddha even argues that the only kind of slaying that he encourages is the killing of anger and other negative emotions (SN 7.1 255).

This rejection of violence and killing seems to stem from the view that such actions will lead to suffering both for the individual acted upon—the victim—and for the aggressor (SN 12.41 578).<sup>6</sup> Violence is rejected so strongly that it seems to include even killing in self-defence. For example, in the *Samyutta-nikāya* the Buddha endorses Puṇṇa’s pacifistic attitude towards the treatment of violent adversaries. Puṇṇa remarks that even if he were to be attacked whilst visiting the violent and irreligious people of Sunāparanta, he would not fight back, even if fighting would save his life (SN 35.88 1167-1169). Given that the Buddha approves of this conduct, it is reasonable to conclude that the Buddha’s teachings are against killing not just in the weak sense that it should be avoided where possible, but also in the strong sense that killing should never be carried out under any circumstances.<sup>7</sup> We will not dwell here on the plausibility of such a view, but focus rather on its application.

From the above remarks we find that a good Buddhist must never kill any “living being” (*pāṇo*).<sup>8</sup> What counts as a living being, and therefore what is not to be killed, is itself controversial. For example, Lambert Schmithausen has considered whether this provision would include plant life.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, it seems clear that this idea of a “living being” includes most, if not all, animals. This would make them morally relevant to the extent that they should not be killed.<sup>10</sup>

In support of this, we find numerous passages in the texts where the Buddha condemns animal slaughter and repudiates those who en-

gage in practices that involve the killing of animals. For example, it is said that the Buddha rejects even the killing of “tiny creatures” (AN 10.21 23) and, furthermore, it is claimed that certain occupations are condemned in particular because they involve animal slaughter:

What kind of person, bhikkhus, torments himself and pursues the practice of torturing others? Here some person is a butcher of sheep, a butcher of pigs, a fowler, a trapper of wild beasts, a hunter, a fisherman, a thief, an executioner, a prison warden, or one who follows any other such bloody occupation. This is called the kind of person who torments others and pursues the practice of torturing others. (MN 51.9 447).<sup>11</sup>

These occupations are rejected for the same reasons that killing was earlier rejected: because they lead to suffering on the part of the victim, here an animal, and also because they cause suffering on the part of the slaughterer. In fact, the canonical texts assert that the profession of a cattle butcher (and by extension, presumably, other animal killing professions) leads to torment in the hell realms for “many years, many hundreds of thousands of years” (SN 19.1 701; also AN 10.200 185).<sup>12</sup> These passages clearly indicate with respect to the rejection of killing that not just human beings, but also animals, are morally relevant.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation is well supported in the secondary literature.<sup>14</sup>

One might nevertheless conclude that although Buddhism does not promote the killing of animals it is still speciesist because Buddhism appears to regard human beings as having greater moral worth than other animals. Waldau seems to endorse this particular argument.<sup>15</sup> A great deal can be said on this issue, but it is important to note that the present article is concerned only with the question of the non-killing, and non-eating, of animals and not with the wider and complex issue of

speciesism and whether it can be properly applied outside this context of killing.

*Not eating meat*

It seems, then, that it is possible to conclude that the killing of animals is to be condemned by the good Buddhist. But it has not yet been definitively established that the good Buddhist should abstain from the eating of meat. What follows is one argument that can be advanced in favor of this view. This argument draws upon textual support, namely the following passage that seems to endorse an argument that we might call the Argument from Sympathy. The passage reads:

Here, householders, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘I am one who wishes to live, who does not wish to die; I desire happiness and am averse to suffering. Since I am one who wishes to live...and am averse to suffering, if someone were to take my life, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to me. Now if I were to take the life of another—of one who wishes to live, who does not wish to die, who desires happiness and is averse to suffering—that would not be pleasing and agreeable to the other either. What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the other too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?’ Having reflected thus, he himself abstains from the destruction of life, exhorts others to abstain from the destruction of life, and speaks in praise of abstinence from the destruction of life. Thus this bodily conduct of his is purified in three respects. (SN 55.7 1797).<sup>16</sup>

This argument can be clarified and reformulated in the following manner:

### The Argument from Sympathy

1. Psychological claim I: It is true that I would not wish another to harm me by taking my life or injuring me (line 1-5).
2. Psychological claim II: It is true that the other also does not wish me to harm him by taking his life or injuring him (line 5-8).
3. Suppressed premise I: Inconsistencies, or contradictions, in conduct and belief should be avoided wherever possible.
4. Suppressed premise II: It would be inconsistent for me to not want others to harm me, but for me to harm others (implied by the rhetorical question on line 9-10).

Conclusion: Therefore, I should avoid harming others, encourage others not to cause harm and praise those who do not cause harm (line 10-14).

The argument is predicated on a psychological claim, namely that everyone wishes to avoid suffering. The argument, in fact, appeals directly to the reader: it asks, “Do you wish to avoid suffering?” Of course, in the event that one desires suffering or death then the argument would have little force. This might be the case, for example, if one were a masochist or suicidal. But in general, the Buddha will probably argue that masochists and suicidal people both devalue suffering anyway: the latter because they wish to escape it (though they wrongly conceive of how that can be accomplished), and the former because their understanding of suffering is actually a type of pleasure (but, the Buddha might say, this is

an equally misconceived notion). So the Buddha is likely to think that it is a universal truth that people wish to avoid suffering. In this way P1 might be thought to be acceptable.

If it is assumed that the desire to avoid suffering is universal, then it can be argued that P2 is also a sound premise. If you think suffering is to be avoided, then it is likely that others do too. Certainly, as argued earlier, it appears that the texts endorse the view that both humans and animals regard suffering as something to be avoided. So “the other” here refers not only to human beings, but all sentient beings, including most animals.

P3 is a suppressed premise to the extent that it is wrong to hold inconsistent views. Although this premise is not present in the argument, it is necessary to assume it in order for the argument to make sense and its presence is indirectly suggested by the rhetorical question that generates P4. P4 is derived from the rhetorical question “How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?” In formal argument, rhetorical questions are understood to stand in for statements. The question appeals to the reader to agree with the following statement: I cannot inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me. The truth of this statement originates from the fact that, as per P3, it is inconsistent to both recognize the psychological fact that I wish to avoid harm, whilst endorsing the harm of another. After all if I were in the place of the other I would not wish to be harmed.<sup>17</sup> This latter provision relies upon the notion that we feel sympathy for the other and the pain and suffering that they experience.

This leads to the conclusion that one should abstain from the killing of another. This, as already mentioned, would include the killing of animals. But one important feature of this argument is that the conclusion does not stop there: it is also argued that the good Buddhist must encourage *others* to also abstain from killing. In this way the argument



appears to provide a license for the good Buddhist to try to promote the universal ban on killing and encourage others not to hold deviant views. It is clear, therefore, that the good Buddhist has a duty to try to persuade those who are engaged in immoral occupations such as the animal slaughter trade to abandon their work and take up less morally suspect practices. The motivation to abandon these practices stems not only from a concern about the suffering animal's welfare but also the humans who are engaged in these trades. In other words, the good Buddhist has an interest in preventing slaughterers from suffering many eons in the hell realms. The good Buddhist, in other words, is asked to be sympathetic both towards the animals *and* the human oppressors.

How does the duty to prevent others from engaging in immoral occupations lead to abstinence from meat-eating? At this point, it is clear that we must depart from direct textual citation as such and enter into what is logically entailed by the aforementioned passages. What follows is the Argument Against Meat-Eating. It is, as already mentioned, an argument not explicitly endorsed by the texts, but rather one that implicitly follows from the previous Argument from Sympathy. In other words, it represents a reasonable extrapolation of what must be endorsed if the Buddhist is to practice the conclusion of the argument as articulated above.

### The Argument Against Meat-Eating

1. The animal slaughter trade causes suffering in two ways: (a) it torments the animal, and (b) it torments the tradesperson.
2. It is the duty of a good Buddhist to encourage others to abandon trades, like animal slaughter, that lead to this kind of suffering.
3. The consumption of meat obtained from a slaughterer encourages the practice of animal slaughter.

Conclusion: Therefore it follows that the good Buddhist has a duty to avoid supporting such occupations by not consuming meat obtained from animal killing.

The argument here is a causal one. Effectively, in order for the good Buddhist to fulfill his or her duty not to support the animal slaughter trade, the good Buddhist must abstain from purchasing and consuming meat produced by such businesses. This argument relies upon the causal presupposition implied in P3 that the consumption of meat causes further suffering because it provides the conditions for which further killing can take place: counterfactually, if no one bought meat from a slaughterer, then the slaughtering would end and so would the suffering associated with it. Note that this is traditionally the type of argument that is used to support contemporary Western vegetarian arguments.<sup>18</sup>

It seems reasonable that such a causal argument follows from the Argument from Sympathy. Of course, it may well be argued that this only shows that the good Buddhist should not *purchase* meat; it does not

show that the good Buddhist may not *eat* meat. To some extent, as we will see, this is one Buddhist strategy to justify meat consumption. However, the strategy only defers the duty to encourage others to abstain from morally suspect occupations. After all, if it is not the good Buddhist buying the meat, then it is someone else, and then the good Buddhist has a duty to encourage *that* person to cease purchasing meat from the “tormentor of the other,” that is, the slaughterer.

In summary, the duty to encourage others not to kill operates in two ways: directly and indirectly. In both ways the support for the slaughterer’s occupation is withdrawn. It operates directly to the extent that the good Buddhist should not purchase meat, and indirectly to the extent that the good Buddhist should encourage others not to purchase meat. It is important to note that, in both cases, abstinence from meat consumption is an indirect duty in that it further encourages others not to kill animals or purchase animal flesh. It represents a boycott of the animal slaughter trade which certainly appears to be the implied requirement of a good Buddhist if they wish to dissuade others from animal slaughter. After all, if there were no demand for the meat, then not only would many animals not be killed, but their remains would not be bought either. To this extent, it seems that vegetarianism follows *in an indirect fashion* from the directive to encourage others to abstain from killing.

Finally, the argument also concludes that those who *do* abstain from killing ought to be applauded. It might be suggested that this directive operates as a general warrant to approve of non-violent attitudes. If this were thought to be the case then it might also be suggested that the good Buddhist is required to approve of the ethical vegetarian since he or she is concerned with the animal’s welfare. If such an attitude of care is considered praiseworthy then it would mean that it is an attitude to be modeled: it is a good attitude. In point of fact, this is actually what hap-

pens since in many Theravāda countries, vegetarianism is highly commended.<sup>19</sup> If something is judged a morally good practice it is usually thought that such a practice should be carried out.

So perhaps it might be maintained that the directive to approve of the attitude of non-violence might also imply that the good Buddhist should approve of vegetarianism and hence that vegetarianism is a desirable dietary practice. This latter consideration adds further weight to the argument that vegetarianism is an approved of diet following the Argument from Sympathy. Let us now address some objections.

### **Monastic Regulations Concerning Diet**

The above argument endorses the view that there is a *prima facie* case to be made for the endorsement of vegetarianism in Pāli Buddhism. However, the argument faces a number of serious obstacles. To begin with, although it can be argued that there is an *ethical* precedent for vegetarianism in Buddhism, there is also a *legal* precedent that appears to indicate that meat-eating is allowed. The consumption of meat is permitted in two contexts: (1) the *Vinaya-piṭaka* says that a monk may eat meat if it is pure in three ways (he has not seen, heard, or suspected that an animal was killed for him), and (2) statements in the *Nikāyas* indicate that a monk must dutifully accept any food donated by a layperson. Due to both of these points it can be strongly argued that vegetarianism is not endorsed as an ethical directive after all. In this way, the good Buddhist might reject vegetarianism in spite of the fact that it appears to follow from the Argument from Sympathy.

#### *Accepting whatever food is offered*

There are a number of passages in the canonical texts that seem to endorse the notion that the monk (and therefore the good Buddhist) should accept whatever food is offered to him as a matter of course. For example, it is claimed in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* that a monk should be

“content with whatsoever supply of robes, alms-food, lodging, comforts and [medicines] for sickness he may get” (AN 10.17 19; also SN 16.1 662). Elsewhere it is said that, “When they [the laity] give him [the monk] food, mean or choice, he eats it carefully and without a murmur” (AN 8.13 131).

These sorts of remarks have led some authors to conclude that vegetarianism is an unsuitable practice for a monk because it would require the monk to display preferences and otherwise be fussy about his food. Such behavior would be unmonkish. For example, Peter Harvey writes:

If they were given flesh-food, and it was ‘pure’ as described above, to refuse it would deprive the donor of the karmic fruitfulness engendered by giving alms-food. Moreover, it would encourage the monks to pick and choose what food they would eat. Food should be looked on only as a source of sustenance, without preferences. (160)<sup>20</sup>

Harvey makes two points on behalf of the Buddhist meat eater. The first is that failing to accept meat would deprive the donor of good karma. This argument relies upon the permissibility clause and the assumption that meat can be received in a morally pure way. I will later argue that this clause can be doubted, and if it can, so too can the argument upon which it relies. At the present time, however, we will focus only on the second argument. This latter argument relies upon the observation that vegetarianism would require the monk to hold preferences. One interpretation of this argument is that the holding of preferences might entail having cravings (*tanhā*), which are universally considered the root of suffering in Buddhism. To this end, it is argued that vegetarianism presupposes the very thing that Buddhism seeks to destroy: namely cravings (in the guise of preferences). Therefore it is concluded that vegetarianism is inappropriate.

However, this argument does not seem to be a very plausible defense of Buddhist meat-eating because it appears to apply just as well to *any* example where a monk demonstrates a preference, food orientated or otherwise. For example, one of the ten precepts is abstinence from alcohol. According to the above argument it would follow trivially that a monk could not uphold that precept because to do so would involve harboring a preference. The monk might be accused of being fussy about what beverages he consumes. Yet in point of fact monks are expected to refuse alcohol if it is offered to them. Likewise, they are expected to act honestly even in circumstances that invite lying. Similar remarks can be made about the various other precepts.

Indeed, all of these behaviors can be glossed as preference-demonstrating behaviors to the extent that the monk would prefer one thing over another: he would prefer not to have the alcohol and so refuses it and he would prefer not to lie and refuses to do so. Hence, there is no reason why the above argument against vegetarianism cannot be applied to other common monastic practices. Yet, in doing so we see that the argument is shown to be extremely unpalatable because it disrupts other accepted practices. Therefore, it seems clear that as a strategy for defending meat-eating it will not do.<sup>21</sup>

#### *The “permissibility clause”*

A second argument against vegetarianism is based upon the apparent justification of meat-eating in the canonical texts. Both the *Vinaya* and the *Nikāyas* state that the consumption of meat is permissible if the meat is known to be pure in three specified ways.<sup>22</sup> These three conditions are that the monk has not seen, heard or even suspected that an animal has been killed for him (cf. Thomas 129; King 282; Harvey 59). In other words, the monk must be completely satisfied that an animal was not killed with the intended purpose of feeding him.

It seems that this directive is designed to ensure that the monk is not connected directly with the animal slaughter as such. Rather, his connection to the slaughter is only tacit and indirect. Hence, the monk cannot be blamed for the killing since the animal would have been slaughtered anyway. Given that meat-eating is allowed in this way it is often claimed that it is difficult to see how it could be argued that Buddhism promotes vegetarianism. This allowance can be called the “permissibility clause.” But did the Buddha, in fact, give monks such an exemption? Roshi Philip Kapleau thinks it unlikely:

So if the Buddha actually uttered the statements attributed to him, what they would mean effectively is that with the exception of the handful of persons who were offered meat from an animal killed just for them—and of course hunters, slaughterers, and fisherman—he freely sanctioned meat eating for everyone, including monks. Not only does this contention fly in the face of the first precept, which makes one who causes another to take life equally culpable; it also implies that the Buddha approved of butchering and the horrors of the slaughterhouse. (54)<sup>23</sup>

His overall argument seems to be something like this:

### Kapleau's Forgery Argument

1. Either it is the case that the permissibility clause is a forgery, or that the Buddha contradicted himself.
2. The Buddha could not have contradicted himself (which would be impossible as the Buddha is both deeply compassionate and perfectly wise).
3. The consumption of meat obtained from a slaughterer encourages the practice of animal slaughter.

Conclusion: The permissibility clause must be a forgery or a malicious inclusion by a later editor.

This disjunctive argument suffers from at least two difficulties. First, it assumes that the Buddha would not make a mistake: but perhaps he simply did. For any Buddhist traditionalist this conclusion would be impossible since the Buddha is thought to be a “perfected one” (*sammā sat-ta*) and would be immune from such carelessness.

On the other hand, perhaps there is no contradiction. The permissibility clause does not contradict the directive not to kill animals since it is not about killing animals, only eating them. What it might contradict is the directive not to encourage others to kill, but Kapleau does not address that. Hence Kapleau is missing the direct link between non-killing and non-eating.

Moreover, Kapleau provides no independent evidence that the permissibility clause is a forgery. Who forged it? When in the history of



the composition of the canon did this occur? And for what end was the inclusion made? Nonetheless, as we will see later, Kapleau's concern about the authenticity of the clause may carry some weight once we bring to bear some contemporary scholarship on the issue of the Mahāsāṃghika schism.

Let us consider the challenge to the permissibility clause that might be raised if we take into consideration the directive to discourage others from killing. If the good Buddhist is to discourage killing, it becomes possible to conceive that there *is* a causal link between non-eating and non-killing.<sup>24</sup> There is at least a prima facie case to be made that abstaining from meat consumption will encourage animal slaughterers to give up their trade. This brings us back to the essential tension between what the canon considers morally right and what is allowed legally in the *Vinaya* and the *Nikāyas*. In other words, the extreme pacifism of the canonical texts implies that meat-eating might be considered a morally hazardous behavior, but the fact remains that the Buddha appears to allow the practice.

How can this tension be explained? There are two ways: (1) accept Kapleau's conclusion that the permissibility clause is inauthentic and a later inclusion, or (2) argue that the Buddha included the clause only under political duress; he allowed meat-eating in order to prevent monastic schism (*saṅghabheda*). That there were warring Buddhist factions would also explain the motivation for fabricating the passages, as Kapleau concludes. Yet there remain other, less serious, objections to vegetarianism that must be first dealt with.

### **Moderation in Eating**

Vegetarianism is a dietary practice in which certain foods, namely meat, are abstained from completely. One question is whether such a practice of dietary abstinence is compatible with other aspects of the Buddha's

teaching. There are at least two possible objections related specifically to vegetarianism as a dietary practice. These particular objections can be distinguished from the above legal directives that permit the consumption of meat.

These two objections can be summarized as follows: (1) Vegetarianism entails the harboring of unhealthy sentiments like hatred (*dosa*), and (2) vegetarianism is a practice that is akin to asceticism which is a method rejected by the Buddha because it does not contribute towards one's enlightenment. So in spite of the fact that vegetarianism seems to follow from the Argument from Sympathy, the good Buddhist might be inclined to reject vegetarianism for independent reasons, namely, because they are incompatible with other philosophical views central to the Buddha's *Dhamma*.

The first objection arises from statements in the canonical literature to the effect that the good Buddhist does not look upon objects with feelings of hatred but rather cultivates a mind disposed to look upon things without hatred. The canonical texts state that hatred leads to unwholesome consequences while non-hatred leads to wholesome consequences (MN 9.5-8 133). It can be argued, as Peter Harvey has done, that vegetarianism could lead to feelings of hatred because vegetarians often become disgusted with meat (160). Furthermore, this sentiment of hatred might even be applied to meat eaters themselves. Disgust and hatred are sentiments closely related to one another and so it might very well be suggested that one would lead to the other. Vegetarianism, therefore, is a disgust-promoting diet that leads to unwholesome mental states and hence it is a practice that might be construed as distinctly non-Buddhist.

Such an objection, however, can be met in the same way that the preferences objection was met: to accept this objection would require us to reject other central Buddhist practices. After all, the same argument

can be applied to lying and alcohol consumption. Certainly a Buddhist might become negatively attached to those practices as well. So while it is true that a Buddhist vegetarian might come to hate meat there is no reason to think this would occur out of necessity and so the objection seems to lack force. It seems clear that one could practice vegetarianism without at once hating meat just as it is possible for the good Buddhist to abstain from alcohol without hating whiskey or beer. If the good Buddhist can succeed at the latter, there is no reason why they cannot succeed at the former. And if this is refuted then so are other essential Buddhist practices. In any case, it can also be argued that the possible risks of abstinence are outweighed by the definite moral benefits of vegetarianism. For these reasons, this objection will not stand.

This dovetails with the second objection. The canonical literature insists that there are two extremes when it comes to diet: the extreme of self-mortification in which food is completely withdrawn, and hedonism in which all our desires are fulfilled. The Buddha appears to preach a middle path between hedonism and extreme asceticism. Against hedonistic eating the Buddha says, “Bhikkhus, when the perception of the repulsiveness of food is made much of, this conduces to great fruit and profit” (SN 46.69 1620). Such remarks are echoed elsewhere in the literature where it is said that seeing food as “repulsive” (*paṭikūla*) helps provide a better understanding of craving and, ipso facto, a better understanding of the control of craving (AN 10.217 199).<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note here that food is expressed as being “repulsive” which, in part, clearly shows that there is some kind of psychological distinction between “hatred” and “disgust”—this further refutes the objection posited previously since it can be said that one can be repelled by meat but not hate it (just as one can be repelled or disgusted by a pool of blood, but not hate blood). The idea of cultivating a sense of repulsion to food is that it is not to be understood as an object of enjoyment but as mere sustenance. In this way, a monk will avoid becoming tainted:

Reflecting wisely, he uses almsfood neither for amusement nor for intoxication nor for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending discomfort, and for assisting the holy life, considering: ‘Thus I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and I shall be healthy and blameless and shall live in comfort.’ (MN 2.14 94; also MN 39.9 364; MN 53.9 462).

This attitude towards food, understanding that it is merely a source of sustenance and nothing more, is intended to be the dietary ideal for the good Buddhist. While it is clear that vegetarianism probably does not fall on the side of hedonism, it is possible to argue that it falls instead on the side of asceticism. During the Buddha’s foray into experimenting with different contemplative practices he undertook extreme austerities involving the withdrawal of food. As a consequence of these practices the Buddha reports that, “Because of eating so little my belly skin adhered to my backbone; thus if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin” (MN 36.28-30 339-340). The Buddha then states that he found these practices unsuitable for liberation and hence the practice of extreme austerities is cast in a bad light.

In similar circumstances the Buddha mentions another ascetic practice in which adherents rely only upon the consumption of kola fruit, beans or rice (MN 12.52 175; also MN 36.6 333). The Buddha concludes, however, that “...Sāriputta, by such conduct, by such practice, by such performance of austerities, I did not attain any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones” (MN 12.52 176).

In this way it might be claimed that vegetarianism is a wrong practice for the Buddhist if it were practiced for the sake of attaining enlightenment (Harvey 160). On the face of things, this seems like a de-

cidedly weak objection to vegetarianism. However, it is notable that, according to the Argument from Sympathy, vegetarianism is entailed for moral reasons. It is possible that one might be inclined to think that one would become morally perfect merely on account of changing one's diet, and perhaps this is what the Buddha is objecting to here. If so, then the objection stands as a precaution against vegetarian zealotry only. But if the objection is taken to be a rejection of vegetarianism in totality then there are several difficulties here that need to be addressed.

First, if one does not believe that vegetarianism will lead to enlightenment, the objection is irrelevant. Second, vegetarianism does not constitute extreme bodily mortification. There seem to be considerable differences between the asceticism described above (living only on rice or kola fruit or beans) and vegetarianism. Rather, vegetarianism is merely a diet in which meat does not feature. Third, if vegetarianism is an ascetic practice, the Buddha's ruling that a monastic should eat only a single meal a day could equally be considered ascetic, perhaps more so since there is nothing about a vegetarian diet that limits when and how the food is to be consumed (MN 65.2 542).

In general, it appears that the previously mentioned objections will not adequately counter the notion that a good Buddhist ought to be a vegetarian. Vegetarianism does not appear to be non-Buddhist in either of the two senses just mentioned. Of course, it might also be argued (though it seems that no one has yet done so) that vegetarianism does not provide adequate sustenance for a monastic. Such an objection might arise from the fact that food (*āhāra*) is considered to be one of the four nutriments necessary for "the maintenance of beings" (SN 12.11 540; also see SN 46.51 1597). A monastic needs to maintain his body so that he may prosper on the path of purification. Without proper sustenance the good Buddhist will be unable to complete his soteriological

objective and so it might be concluded that vegetarianism is an improper diet.

But this objection presupposes that vegetarianism necessarily does not provide a suitable diet for this task. This presupposition contradicts contemporary medical evidence that vegetarianism is a diet that can provide all the necessary nutrients for a healthy life (ADA 1266). Even in the days of the Buddha, it was well known that the Jains were vegetarians and there is no evidence that the Buddhists regarded their diet as being medically unsound.

### **The Buddha's Own Diet**

There is one final objection to the *prima facie* case for vegetarianism: the Buddha's own diet. The Buddha represents the religious ideal of the canonical texts and is the moral authority within Buddhism as a whole. It follows from this that the behavior he enacts is the behavior that ought to be modeled (see Keown 29). The problem is that if the Buddha were to have followed a meat-based diet rather than a vegetarian diet then it might also follow that the good Buddhist ought to be a meat eater rather than a vegetarian. In short, if the Buddha is morally impeccable, and if he ate meat, then it would seem to follow that meat-eating is also morally impeccable.

However, it is not clear that the Buddha was a meat eater. The debate over the Buddha's dietary preferences appears to center around a single meal, the Buddha's last. The pertinent question in this debate is whether the Buddha was served and ate pork or whether he was given another non-meat dish, perhaps mushrooms. It will be suggested later that the issue of the Buddha's diet does not turn only on his last meal, but given the prominence of his last meal in exciting debate over vegetarianism (Kapleau 43, Walshe 571) it seems prudent to consider it at least to some extent. Nevertheless, whatever the food happened to be, the ca-

nonical texts are unanimous that this contributed to his death.<sup>26</sup> The issue is further complicated by the fact that the text refers to a type of food which remains uncertain. Under Walshe's translation, the text reads:

And as the night was ending Cunda had a fine meal of hard and soft food prepared with an abundance of 'pig's delight', and when it was ready he reported to the Lord: 'Lord, the meal is ready.' (DN 16.4.17 256)

The problematic term here is "*sūkara-maddava*," which Walshe has translated as "pig's delight." Rhys Davids has, however, provided an alternative translation: simply "truffles." Walshe mentions (DN 571 n.417) that this translation by Rhys Davids, and subsequent translations thereafter, may be designed to please those who expect Buddhists to be vegetarians. Walshe's considers the rendering "pig's delight" as suitably ambiguous and regards it as neutral as to whether the term refers to meat or vegetable. Walshe admits in closing that there is some basis for the translation "truffle" although he concludes that the term *sūkara-maddava* is simply ambiguous and uncertain. Other scholars, including Edward Thomas (149) and Arthur Waley (345-346), agree that the meaning of the term *sūkara-maddava* is unclear.

Other writers have argued strongly that the term *sūkara-maddava* refers to a type of vegetable. The two most important exponents of this view are Kapleau and Wasson. Kapleau relies mainly upon Arthur Waley's research (43-45). Waley remarks that there are at least four ways that *sūkara-maddava* can be translated.<sup>27</sup> One of these translations, "truffles" (following Rhys Davids), is seriously considered by Waley. Waley's main defense for this vegetarian interpretation relies upon medicinal research undertaken by Neumann. Neumann has argued that it was quite common during the era of the Buddha for the names of certain medicinal herbs to have "pig prefixes" even though there was no actual

meat involved (345). Still, Waley seems apprehensive as to whether *sūkara-maddava* can be translated in the way Kapleau would like. The same is true of Edward Thomas, who Kapleau also cites. Thomas outright says that although the correct translation at present remains an “unprovable theory,” the Pāli commentators regarded *sūkara-maddava* as being pig’s flesh (149). For these reasons Kapleau overstates his case when citing both these writers since neither of them actually agree with Kapleau’s bold conclusion.

On the other hand, R. Gordon Wasson claims that *sūkara-maddava* refers to an obscure type of Indic mushroom. He bases this supposition on botanical research he and his associate Heim conducted with the Santal people of Bihar and Orissa. Wasson suggests that *sūkara-maddava* is actually a native fungus known as “*Pūtika*” (592).<sup>28</sup> He gives two reasons for his conclusion: (1) the Buddha’s order to bury the left over *sūkara-maddava* because it is indigestible to all except a Tathāgata, and (2) a report from his Santal informants that pigs like to forage for the *Pūtika* fungus. With respect to the first point Wasson says that, “To this day the custom among the Santal seems to survive to bury any surplus *sūkara-maddava* in a hole” (593). Wasson concludes that the reason the Buddha wanted the remaining *sūkara-maddava* buried was because it would begin to stink. This is a known property of *Pūtika*.

With respect to his second point Wasson says: “Throughout our visits to the Santal country the people we spoke with said that pigs dug for the *putka* [*Pūtika*], thus confirming what the canonical Pāli Commentary [says]” (596). In this passage Wasson presupposes considerations made by authors like Walshe and Waley to the extent that *sūkara-maddava* could mean “pig’s delight.” Wasson thinks that this might mean that it is a vegetable of which pigs are particularly fond. The *Pūtika* fungus, as Wasson points out, is burrowed for by pigs.



Wasson also suggests that mushroom was a dish that was shunned by the orthodox Brahmanical religion of the Buddha's day (592). It was considered impure and disgusting. The Buddha, Wasson claims, having been previously associated with that religion, would still have been to some extent conditioned by its customs and habits. So although he might have rationally accepted that mushrooms were harmless, he might still have felt queasy eating something he had previously found disgusting. This might have complicated his existing medical condition and contributed to his death. Wasson says:

However, let us remember that in the upper Hindu castes where the Buddha had been brought up and lived out all his early life, even though he was now free from food tabus and caste distinctions, all mushrooms would be shunned as inedible....what could be more natural than a violent reaction in one brought up as a kṣatriya to consider mushrooms inedible? (597)

Why, then, does the text ambiguously refer to *sūkara-maddava* rather than the more proper *Pūtika*? Wasson speculates that the authors of the canon elected to use the more ambiguous term so that difficult questions could not be raised about the Buddha's apparent gastronomic ties to the "Old Religion" (600). In other words, the authors of the canon wished to preserve the image that the Buddha remained completely untouched by prevailing customs and traditions opposed to Buddhism.

Certain doubts can be raised over the strength of Wasson's argument. For example, Wasson is inconsistent about whether *Pūtika* really does have an odor because he admits that at least one informant did not regard it as having a particularly obnoxious smell (597). In any case, the Buddha appears to want Cunda to bury the remaining *sūkara-maddava* because it is indigestible, not because it stinks.<sup>29</sup> These reasons seem to cast some doubt on Wasson's first similarity. Second, even if *Pūtika* and

*sūkara-maddava* do share the properties Wasson claims they do, they might merely be different foods that share a few similar properties. Third, it might be suggested that Wasson's account is too speculative and relies upon some tenuous inductive leaps. Nonetheless, and in spite of these difficulties, Wasson's research does provide some compelling evidence that *sūkara-maddava* might, in fact, be a type of mushroom and not a meat dish after all. At the very least, Wasson provides evidence lacking in Kapleau's analysis.

But even if the Buddha's last meal was vegetarian does this fact help show that the Buddha was a habitual vegetarian? It would seem not. As Harvey has pointed out, it is apparent elsewhere in the canonical literature that the Buddha ate meat (160). For example, in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* there is a passage that states that the Buddha was given pig meat by Ugga the layperson. There can be no doubt that the meal was pig meat as the term here is *sūkara-mamsam* (AN 5.44 41). This point is also made by Waley (347). Since the Buddha seems to have partaken in that meal then we must conclude that the Buddha was at least an occasional meat eater irrespective of his last meal.

### **The Threat of Schism**

It now may seem that the *prima facie* case for vegetarianism cannot survive given (1) the permissibility clause that allows meat-eating and (2) the apparent fact that the Buddha ate meat on at least some occasions. Apparently the good Buddhist does not have to be a vegetarian, since vegetarianism cannot be considered a morally mandatory activity. In fact, in the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the Buddha himself specifically refused to make vegetarianism mandatory. Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin and rival, approaches the Buddha with the idea of making vegetarianism mandatory for the *saṅgha*. The *Vinaya-piṭaka* reports the following:

Then Devadatta together with his friends went up to the Lord, and having gone up to the Lord, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting to one side, Devadatta said to the Lord: "...Lord, these five items are in many a way conducive to desiring little, to contentment, to expunging evil, to being [conscientious], to what is gracious, to decrease in the obstructions, to putting forth energy. It were good, Lord, if the monks, for as long as life lasts, let them be rag-robe wearers; whoever should accept a robe given by a householder, sin (vajjam) would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts, let them live at the root of a tree; whoever should go under cover, sin would besmirch him. For as long as life lasts let them not eat fish or flesh; whoever should eat fish or flesh, sin would besmirch him.' The recluse Gotama will not allow these. (CV vii 277)<sup>30</sup>

In this passage we find Devadatta asking the Buddha to add new monastic rules to the *Vinaya*. These rules, amongst other things, effectively make vegetarianism a required dietary practice. It is important to note that the Buddha rejects Devadatta on all counts. Rather, the Buddha follows his original ruling, namely that while a monk may follow these five provisions, none of them are mandatory. Devadatta's only innovation here is that they all be made mandatory and so the Buddha effectively rebukes Devadatta's entire contribution.

Yet in many ways Devadatta's attempt to introduce vegetarianism as mandatory appears reasonable given that the Argument from Sympathy seems to entail vegetarianism.<sup>31</sup> It appears that this argument for the better treatment of animals and humans alike is at odds with the legal ruling that meat-eating is a permissible activity. Monks are at once asked not to encourage animal killing, but are permitted to eat meat. This latter action can easily be conceived of as an act of support for ani-

mal slaughter thus contradicting the directive not to encourage it. This tension, perhaps, is what leads Kapleau to be so incredulous as to why the Buddha would allow meat-eating at all. But allow it he did. This tension between the ethical and legal content of the canon appears to be the source of the continued controversy—which appears to be practically aporetic—over whether the good Buddhist ought or ought not be a vegetarian.

Why did the Buddha allow the eating of meat? The Buddha clearly sympathized with vegetarians. First, the permissibility clause itself implies a general suspicion of the cleanliness of meat. The Buddha permits meat-eating only if the meat is pure in the three previously mentioned ways. This implies that there is at least something *prima facie* wrong with meat-eating. Second, no such remark is made about the eating of non-meat foods. The Buddha does not stipulate that monks may only eat certain plants if they are prepared in a certain way. This implies that the vegetarian diet is intrinsically safe from a soteriological point of view.<sup>32</sup> To this end we might see that the Buddha is not foreclosed on the question of vegetarianism and if we are to accept the vegetarian argument offered earlier, he may even regard it as being morally virtuous. It was only that he refused to make it a mandatory diet and that he refused to do this is explained by certain contingent political circumstances.

With regards to this last point, it can be argued that the Buddha was particularly resolute on the question of not making vegetarianism mandatory because he was concerned about schism in the *saṅgha*. This would mean that the Buddha might approve of vegetarianism as a recommendable diet from an ethical perspective, but not from a prudential or political perspective. Counterfactually, had the practical conditions been favorable, the Buddha might have made the practice mandatory. But since the practical conditions were not favorable, he could not en-

dorse it. There are two pieces of evidence that might push us in this direction.

First, there is the matter of Jainism. The Jains were keen vegetarians and this in fact defined part of their fundamental doctrine. It can be hypothesized that one of the reasons that the Buddha rejected vegetarianism is because it would have made Buddhism appear to be a derivative of Jainism rather than being a religious movement in its own right, one very different from Jainism metaphysically. It is important to recall that Buddhism was just one view (*dassana*) amongst others, competing with other religious and philosophical schools for followers. To make matters worse, many of the people to whom he was appealing were ordinary people who might not grasp the nuanced distinctions between the different schools but would fasten on to surface practices such as vegetarianism. The Buddha was probably aware of this and would have been particularly careful to ensure that Buddhism was distinctive. Perhaps making vegetarianism mandatory would alienate too many of those he hoped to reach.

Related to the problem of Jain dietary practices is the second issue of the schism orchestrated by the deviant monk Devadatta. The introduction of vegetarianism by Devadatta might have contributed to a break in the *saṅgha* that could have led to the ruin of Buddhism. It has already been pointed out in the above passage from the *Vinaya* that Devadatta attempted to reform monastic practices by, amongst other things, making vegetarianism mandatory. What was not mentioned, however, was that he was not driven by an interest in better monastic conduct, but rather out of envy of the Buddha and a desire to destroy the *saṅgha* and rebuild it under his own leadership. Devadatta says to his conspirator before approaching the Buddha that: “It is possible, your reverence, with these five items, to make a schism in the recluse Gotama’s Order, a breaking of the concord. For, your reverence, people esteem

austerity” (CV vii 276). Devadatta simply planned to usurp control of the *saṅgha* by creating a rift through the introduction of divisive practices (c.f. Ray 167).

Given that Devadatta introduced the notion of vegetarianism only as a strategy to destroy the unity of the *saṅgha*, the Buddha might have reasoned that while vegetarianism might be a more pure dietary practice, its benefits were outweighed by the harms. The schism of the *saṅgha* would have been a much greater loss than the loss of one preferred dietary practice. Therefore, the Buddha chose to maintain the allowance on meat-eating. This would also explain the Buddha’s own meat-eating practices: although he was sympathetic to vegetarianism, he could not risk promoting vegetarianism as such since it would lead to many political difficulties.

However, whether Devadatta really did incite a schism, and even whether he was the evil monk the canon claims he was, has been much debated. Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien (circa 400 C.E.) wrote that there was a community of monks in India who were followers of Devadatta and his alternative *Dhamma*. This community of heterodox Buddhists followed the five moral reformations recommended by Devadatta, including the vegetarianism directive. Reginald Ray concludes from this that, “There can be no doubt that Devadatta’s schism is not an event imagined by Buddhist authors but is a historical fact....” (172). Ray also cites Bareau as being in agreement on this point and that the Devadatta tradition appears to have lasted for quite some time as there is evidence of a similar sect in Bengal as late as 700 C.E. (172).

Edward Thomas is more circumspect than Ray in concluding that the sect has a clear lineage stemming from Devadatta. He remarks that, “When we come down to the fifth century A.D., we find that Fa Hien [Fa-hsien] mentions the existence of a body that followed Devadatta, and made offerings to the three previous Buddhas, but not to Śakyamuni”

(137-138). However, “It may even be the case that this body consciously adopted Devadatta’s rules, but there is nothing to suggest that it had continued to exist in complete obscurity from the time of Devadatta for a thousand years” (138). Thomas maintains that while there was almost certainly a dispute in the order, possibly originating from the five proposed rules, it is not clear whether these rules are attributable to the historical Devadatta or even what date the alleged dispute may have arisen (137). Ray agrees that the historical date of the split cannot be easily established; it may have occurred well after the Buddha’s day, perhaps when the Mahāsāṃghikas split from the orthodox Sthavira tradition (137). The latter claim is of considerable importance for what follows.

I have argued that the rejection of vegetarianism as a mandatory activity may have been only a prudential decision made by the Buddha to avoid schism in the *saṅgha*. However, it seems possible that the split envisioned by Devadatta did not happen until well after the Buddha died. This further seems to damage the argument that the Buddha rejected vegetarianism only on prudential grounds.

On the other hand, Ray argues that the split may have occurred due to the Mahāsāṃghikas who objected to Sthavira innovations. The Sthaviras, in turn, feared that the Mahāsāṃghikas would corrupt the Dhamma with deviant views.<sup>33</sup> It seems that at least one off-shoot of that tradition may have regarded the vegetarian maxim as being a better articulation of the Buddha’s intended position. This follows from the analysis given by Ray, who claims that the Devadatta fable might have originated during this schism. It is possible that the tension between the ethical and legal regulations occurred during this period.

### Conclusion

If we regard the Devadatta-Buddha conflict as an invention, we might agree with Kapleau that the permissibility clause was a later inclusion

stemming from a clash of values between the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Sthavira traditionalists. Or we might accept the traditional account of the Pāli *Vinaya*, in spite of its apparent ahistoricity, that the Buddha rejected vegetarianism only for prudential reasons. In either case, it appears that the permissibility thesis may have been formed for political reasons.

Therefore, it appears that it is possible to make a *prima facie* ethical case for vegetarianism in Buddhism. This argument can easily withstand minor objections that come in the form of dietary concerns pertaining to desire and moderation. It can also potentially survive stronger legal objections in the form of the permissibility clause once it is established that the Buddha may have endorsed such allowances only for prudential reasons. In this way, the natural tension between the legal and ethical content pertaining to the practice of vegetarianism can be at once recognized and diminished.

## Notes

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## Abbreviations

MV = Mahāvagga (Vinaya)

CV = Cullavagga (Vinaya)



PA = Pārājika Rules (Vinaya)

SN = Saṃyutta-nikāya

MN = Majjhima-nikāya

DN = Dīgha-nikāya

AN = Aṅguttara-nikāya

<sup>1</sup> In this article I will use wherever possible the most current translations available (for example, Bhikkhu Bodhi's excellent translations published by Wisdom). Wherever current translations are unavailable (for example, the *Vinaya*) I rely upon the Pali Text Society translations. In some instances I have corrected some archaic terminology following, for example, Bhikkhu Bodhi's preferences. Where I have done this I have made mention in the notes (see note 29).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Gombrich points out that meat-eating is relatively common in Sri Lanka (304-305). Peter Harvey also agrees with this claim (159).

<sup>3</sup> I will use the term "the good Buddhist" to denote whoever intends to follow the moral prescriptions of the Buddhist canonical texts. In this way, I am neutral on whether that would be a monk, nun or a layperson. In principle, it seems that the non-killing directives apply to anyone that is concerned with their own suffering or the suffering of other beings.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Waldau problematizes the first precept by pointing out that: (1) it receives different interpretations in the texts, sometimes being concerned with killing, sometimes with non-injury but not killing (146); and (2) the precept is expressed only negatively; it does not tell us what we ought to do, only what we ought not to do (143). Neither problem will concern us much here. The first problem is tangential for this article in the main because it is clear that, as Waldau admits, Buddhists seem to

regard killing animals as a wrong (although it is for instrumental reasons, that is not a concern here) in spite of the fact that the precepts are at times ambiguous. The second problem is irrelevant, since, as will be argued, vegetarianism follows from the negative prescription anyway.

<sup>5</sup> Other passages also encourage the Buddhist to abstain from, or abandon the practice of, the slaying of living beings (SN 45.8 1528; MN 51.14 448; AN 10.172 174; DN 2.43 99).

<sup>6</sup> The suffering on the part of the actor is usually construed as being the experience of guilt and mental anguish (see the above citation, but also consult AN 10.92 124; AN 5.174 151).

<sup>7</sup> Some authors have reservations about the extent of Buddhist pacifism. For example, Christopher Gowans has cited passages where the Buddha seems to approve of a King going to war with a rival kingdom (181). However, these cases are usually outliers and the bulk of the Buddhist canon is quite pacifistic. Pacifistic and anti-killing passages seem to outnumber pro-violence passages by a considerable margin.

<sup>8</sup> For a lengthy discussion of the term “living beings” and its associated concepts, see Waldau (113-115). For example, Waldau notes that the term “living being” is connected with at least four different terms: *satto*, *bhūto*, *jīvo*, and *pāṇo*. Waldau considers the different meanings in turn.

<sup>9</sup> Schmithausen deals with these issues in the following articles: “The Problem of the Sentience of Plants in Earliest Buddhism” and “Buddhism and Nature: The Lecture Delivered on the Occasion of the EXPO 1990—An Enlarged Version and Notes.”

<sup>10</sup> Waldau has argued that in spite of these provisions Buddhism is still speciesist because it treats human beings as having greater moral value. In a recent article (*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 15 [2008]), Colette Sciberras has argued against this view and has concluded that Waldau’s views are

misguided due to their presumption that they rely upon Western concepts.

<sup>11</sup> For similar remarks that repudiate these types of occupations see also AN 10.176 176 and AN 4.198 219.

<sup>12</sup> In the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the Buddha describes how various different slaughter trades (a butcher, fowler, hunter, and so on) all suffer from grisly afterlives. The *Vinaya* reports that these trades-people are all tormented after death by the very animals that they slaughtered when they were alive. (PA iii 183).

<sup>13</sup> Lambert Schmithausen (*Buddhism and Nature* 42; *Problem of Science* 1-3) and Christopher Chapple (221) both agree with this conclusion that, in the canonical texts, animal killing is condemned.

<sup>14</sup> Harvey says, “The object of this precept [the non-injury principle] is not limited to humans, as all sentient beings share in the same cycle of rebirths and in the experience of various types of suffering” (69). Gowans remarks that “Human beings and animals are part of the same cycle of rebirth, and we should show compassion towards both, first and foremost by not killing them” (177). Saddhatissa says that, “In taking this precept a Buddhist recognizes his relationship with all living things, a relationship so close that the harming of any living creature is inevitably the harming of himself” (59).

<sup>15</sup> Waldau concludes that Buddhism is speciesist in at least some respects (154-155).

<sup>16</sup> The passage is repeated elsewhere in the *Nikāyas*. For example, it is said in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* that one who “...takes life and encourages another to do so...” is cast into purgatory (AN 10.210 197; and AN 4.261 257).

<sup>17</sup> This type of argument actually anticipates much of the ethical writings of Śāntideva. For example, in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* he writes that: “92. Al-

though my suffering does not cause pain in other bodies, nevertheless that suffering is mine and is difficult to bear because of my attachment to myself // 93. Likewise, although I myself do not feel the suffering of another person, that suffering belongs to that person and is difficult [for him] to bear because of his attachment to himself // 94. I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering, just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings, just as I am a sentient being” (101). These passages are very similar to the Argument from Sympathy as conceived in the Pāli texts.

<sup>18</sup> This is certainly, for example, one of the main premises that supports Peter Singer’s argument for vegetarianism. For example, “The people who profit by exploiting large numbers of animals do not need our approval. They need our money. The purchase of the corpses of animals they rear is the main support the factory farmers ask from the public (the other, in many countries, is big government subsidies)...Hence the need for each one of us to stop buying the products of modern animal farming...Vegetarianism is a kind of boycott (161-162).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Gombrich writes that, “Vegetarianism I found universally admired, but rarely practiced” (305). Winston King says that, “Most Buddhist laymen eat meat with relish; nor do all monks abstain. Some, indeed, do not eat beef or pork and count it a great virtue not to do so. Yet again some will abstain from meat-eating during the meditation periods, Sabbaths, or holy days” (381-382; also see 284).

<sup>20</sup> Similarly Ruegg says: “And it has to be remembered furthermore that as an almsman the Bhikkhu was not only dependent on the offerings he received on his begging rounds, but that as a person to be honoured (*dakkiṇeyya*) and a ‘field of merit’ (*puññakkhetta*) he was morally bound to accept any alms offered in good faith by a pious donor and that if he failed to do so he was interfering with the karmic fruit and just reward that donor was entitled to expect” (239).

<sup>21</sup> It might also be observed that even if a monk were required to accept a meal that included a meat dish he would not be compelled to eat it. Accepting and consuming are two logically distinct concepts and one does not entail the other.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the Buddha says, “Monks, one should not knowingly make use of meat killed on purpose (for one). Whoever should make use of it, there is an offence of wrong-doing. I allow you, monks, fish and meat that are quite pure in three respects: if they are not seen, heard, suspected (to have been killed on purpose for a monk)” (MV vi 325; also see CV vii 277). This is repeated also in the *Majjima-nikāya* in the *Jīvaka Sutta* (MN 55.5 474). In that same *sutta* it is said that a person that slaughters an animal for a Tathāgata produces considerable demerit (MN 55.5 476).

<sup>23</sup> Also see: “Anyone familiar with the numerous accounts of the Buddha’s extraordinary compassion and reverence for living beings—for example, his insistence that his monks carry filters to strain the water they drink lest they inadvertently cause the death of any micro-organisms in the water—could never believe that he would be indifferent to the sufferings of domestic animals caused by their slaughter for food” (Kapleau 56-57).

<sup>24</sup> In Western animal ethics literature this has sometimes been doubted. The objection to this causal link is sometimes called the Causal Impotency Objection. The objection is that vegetarianism does not, in fact, affect the meat industry whatsoever, and hence is just symbolic. This objection, of course, has been disputed, but we will not deal with the debate here.

<sup>25</sup> Also, elsewhere in the canon food is described as “cloying” and something to be kept at a distance (AN 5.61 65).

<sup>26</sup> “And after having eaten the meal provided by Cunda, the Lord was attacked by a severe sickness with bloody diarrhea, and with sharp pains as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully and clearly aware, and without complaint” and then in verse the text says: “Having eaten Cunda’s meal (this I’ve heard), / He suffered a grave illness, painful, deathly; / From eating a meal of ‘pig’s delight’ / Grave sickness assailed the Teacher. / Having purged, the Lord then said: / ‘Now I’ll go to Kusinārā town’ (DN 16.4.20 257).

<sup>27</sup> “The word *sūkara-maddava* occurs nowhere else (except in discussions of this passage) and the *-maddava* part is capable of at least four interpretations. Granting that it comes from the root MRD ‘soft’, cognate with Latin *mollis*, it is still ambiguous, for it may either mean ‘the soft parts of a pig’ or ‘pig’s soft-food’ i.e. ‘food eaten by pigs’. But it may again come from the same root as our word ‘mill’ and mean ‘pig-pounded,’ i.e. ‘trampled by pigs’. There is yet another similar root meaning ‘to be pleased’, and as will be seen below one scholar has supposed the existence of a vegetable called ‘pig’s delight’” (Waley 344).

<sup>28</sup> I have followed Wasson here by capitalizing the term “*Pūtika*” although it is not clear why he has done this but has not, for example, capitalized *sūkara-maddava*.

<sup>29</sup> Granted, it could be that it is indigestible *because* it stinks, or stinking is an indication of indigestibility, but there is no indication that this is the case in Wasson’s article. In fact, it appears that stinkiness is a natural property (excluding the disagreement amongst his informants) of *Pūtika*.

<sup>30</sup> The PTS edition translates a number of terms in ways that are contestable. For example, the PTS has “*vajjam*” = “sin” but “fault” might be more appropriate. I have also replaced the PTS “punctilious” with “conscientious” as I think the term is a great deal less archaic.

<sup>31</sup> Reginald Ray has argued that the traditional story of Devadatta as an evil monk may be an invention of later canonical editors. Ray cites the fact that there appears to be a thematic shift between Devadatta as a monk who is praised and considered virtuous and Devadatta as a monk who is shunned and hated (170-171). Ray takes this to in part indicate that perhaps the story of Devadatta's fall involves considerable embellishment. Furthermore, Ray points out that Devadatta's planned reformation is not so outrageous and probably arose out of a sense of frustration from moral laxity in the *saṅgha* (171). He also (see text body) thinks that the Devadatta schism is associated with the later Mahāsāṃghika rebellion.

<sup>32</sup> We will leave aside Schmithausen's detailed analysis of whether plants are actually moral targets or not (see 1991a, 1991b). It has been assumed throughout the article that plants are not to be understood as having moral worth, although it is recognized that the question remains open.

<sup>33</sup> Scholars such as André Bareau have claimed that the Mahāsāṃghikas were perceived as particularly morally lax and the conflict that arose from this perception led to splintering of the *saṅgha* (Prebish 259). On the other hand Charles S. Prebish has argued that the split actually arose more as a consequence of innovations to the *Vinaya* authored by the Sthavira tradition. Although these innovations were designed to prevent schism, they caused it instead (258-259). The Mahāsāṃghikas objected to these innovations and removed themselves from the Sthavira core. One of these innovations, according to Ray, seems to be rooted in the Devadatta-Buddha conflict (Ray 168) (it is notable that Prebish does not mention this innovation in his article). If Ray is correct here then it seems perfectly reasonable that at least some of the Mahāsāṃghikas might have objected to the inclusion of the permissibility clause which, until then, might have not existed whatsoever. If the Devadatta-Buddha encounter is compromised, and this encounter in part centers around the

vegetarianism issue, then we might have good reason to think the permissibility clause that seems to originate before this encounter might be compromised too. This would, of course, give support to Kapleau's original suspicion that the clause is a forgery.

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