



*Animal Use in Biomedicine: An Annotated Bibliography of Buddhist
and Related Perspectives.*

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This article is offered as a resource on the general topic of animal use for healthcare purposes from Buddhist perspectives. Some works focusing on Buddhist ethics, including in healthcare, already contain material regarding animals in this area (e.g. Florida, Harvey, Hughes and Keown, Kennaway). In particular, information is included here on one special area in which Buddhists have over the past several decades made seminal contributions, namely by leading a growing movement to publicly acknowledge and reflect on the use of animals for biomedical purposes.

In a very practical and applied way, Buddhism has for decades now contributed methods for reflection on the use of sentient beings other than humans in the biomedical field. This could be seen as a fresh addition to often polarized general public discourse on this issue. It was in Buddhist East Asia (e.g. Thailand, Korea, and Japan) that the first examples of organizations publicly acknowledging and reflecting on

such animal use appeared. A range of specific vehicles have been used, such as ceremonies and memorial markers within animal-using organizations (Asquith, Choi, Iliff, Kast). In the past ten years, this movement has spread outside East Asia as well, adapting to and respecting the ethnic/religious diversity of parts of the world where Buddhism is not the predominant depth/wisdom tradition. In North America for example, activities acknowledging animal use have often not used overtly Buddhist symbolism, although in various ways Asian Buddhist influences have been key factors in initiating some of the leading animal acknowledgement events there (e.g. Lynch and Slaughter, Taylor and Davis).

Additionally included here are a few citations of seminal works on the growing body of Western literature regarding relationships between humans and other beings (Arluke, Davis and Balfour). Though some of these citations are not specifically on Buddhist perspectives regarding animal use in biomedicine, they are included as links to broader general public and scientific discourse on this topic. This is because contributions of Buddhist thought and practice to world biomedicine will take place through dialogue with non-Buddhists, and familiarity with broader discourse on human relations with other species can enrich that dialogue. Indeed, traditional Buddhist perspectives acknowledging close ties between humans and the rest of the natural world may have much in common with emerging scientific information and ideas on relationships and boundaries between humans and other beings (Kitahara-Frisch), perhaps more so than mainstream thought in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition. In the West since the 1950s, the most widely-cited guiding principles for animal use in biomedicine are the "three Rs": Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement of animal use (Russell and Burch, Smith). Interestingly, Buddhist authors sometimes arrive at very similar positions (Kennaway).

Worldwide, the large scale use of animals for biomedical research intended to benefit humans and other animals is a relatively new development. It is also an area where different strains of Buddhism may have, or may have come to have, different views. New thinking may have to be applied, as this use of others may not square well with some reference points sometimes used by Buddhists regarding taking the lives of sentient beings. What might various strains of Buddhist thought conclude regarding use of some experimental animals to benefit large numbers of humans and other sentient beings? Discourse on this topic will of necessity include attitudes towards death: for example, how essential is the prolongation of human life? And at what costs to other sentient beings? Perhaps the best discussion of varying Buddhist viewpoints in this general area is Harvey:

From the traditional Buddhist perspective, it is more certain that killing an animal is wrong than that generating better drugs etc. from experiments on it is good (cf. King, 1964: 281). If the early Buddhist attitude to meat eating is applied in this area, though, it will be acceptable for a Buddhist to take drugs that others have developed using animal research. The Mahayana ethic would give an ambivalent answer: the precedent of vegetarianism would suggest opposition to drug-testing in that way; the principal of skilful means might suggest that it was acceptable, where really necessary. However, the precedents of skilful means cases only give possible legitimation for killing someone about to do a heinous act: not for killing innocent beings supposedly to help other beings. (p. 169)

Certainly, a tradition as diverse, flexible, and growing as Buddhism gives no one unified approach on this or other ethical questions.

Perhaps, indeed, as one author suggests, "There is very little commonality in theoretical approaches to ethical reasoning in Buddhist texts and traditions . . . no unified answers or approaches can be expected, and such are really not to be hoped for in the Buddhist tradition which respects diversity" (Florida, footnote 2).

At the same time, Buddhists worldwide have been leaders in developing gatherings for respectful reflection regarding sentient beings outside our own species that are now being used in biomedicine. Although such gatherings do not of course solve the current – and longstanding – passionate public debate on the pros and cons of such animal use, perhaps Buddhism's reflective contribution on this issue will be beneficial to people worldwide. Other animals may benefit from this trend as well, as reflection on animal use could lead some to reduce, replace, or simply stop using other beings in this way.

Please feel free to forward comments and suggestions for updating this listing to the author.

Bibliography

Arluke, Arnold. 1994. "The Ethical Socialization of Animal Researchers." *Lab Animal* June: 30-35.

One article of many by this prolific sociologist/anthropologist who researches the culture and ethics of animal use in biomedicine.

Asquith, Pamela. 1983. "The Monkey Memorial Services of Japanese Primatologists." *Royal Anthropological Institute News*, 54: 3-4.

A brief article describing *ireisai* and *kanshasai* ceremonies (comforting and giving thanks) in Japanese university primate centers beginning in the 1950s by this anthropologist who focuses on Asian-Western scientific cultural issues including perspectives on animal use.

Choi, Hae. 1998. "Koreans Honor Dead Lab Animals." *Wall Street Journal*, November 10: B1.

Describes South Korea's Food and Drug Administration's annual event acknowledging research animals.

Davis, Hank and Dianne Balfour, eds. 1992. *The Inevitable Bond: Examining Scientist-Animal Interactions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Examines the complexity of non-humans used in research and recent scientific literature probing bonds between people and animals. The lead editor established the first ongoing organizational animal acknowledgement event in North America (University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada).

Florida, Robert E. "The Lotus Sūtra and Health Care Ethics." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/flori981.htm>

Discusses traditional Buddhist inclusion of all living creatures in social teachings regarding health care provision. Suggests *ahiṃsā* (non-injury) as "central to any Buddhist medical ethical system."

Goodwin, James. 1997. "Chaos and the Limits of Modern Medicine." *JAMA* [Journal of the American Medical Association], 5 November: 1399-1400.

Commentary on the importance of humane care, rather than a quest for complete understanding of nature, as the core of medical education and practice.

Harvey, Peter. 2000. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Discussion of "sentience, the ability to experience and suffer" as the key distinction in classical Buddhist views (p. 151), breaking precepts against killing when there is motivation to help others, and accepting responsibility for killing animals (pp. 134-137).

A two-page section entitled "Animal experimentation," in the chapter "Attitude to and treatment of the natural world," briefly discusses several issues. This includes meat-eating and experimental animal use (e.g. how taking drugs developed through animal experimentation could be comparable to eating animals killed by others). Other authors are cited on how "the tension with Buddhist norms [regarding animal use in research] is dealt with by many companies and research facilities performing annual memorial rites to honor the animals they 'use'" (p. 170). Also stated is: "[M]ost Buddhists would see any angry and violent means of opposition to animal experimentation . . . as unwholesome. Acting more in line with traditional Buddhist behaviour would be to liberate animals by *buying* them from establishments that would otherwise experiment on them" (p. 169).

Hughes, James J. and Damien Keown. "Buddhism and Medical Ethics: A Bibliographic Introduction." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/2/dkhughes.html>

Briefly mentions Buddhist Indian Emperor Asoka's attention to human and animal health, and cites others' discussions of personhood and animal rights, and karma and killing animals.

Iliff, Susan. 2002. "An Additional 'R': Remembering the Animals." *ILAR Journal* [Institute for Laboratory Animal Research], January: 38-

47.

A survey of various activities acknowledging human use of animals around the world, including a listing of Buddhist and other ceremonies for this purpose. Suggests "an additional 'R' – **R**emembering the animals" be added to the "three Rs" guiding ethical use of animals in the West.

Kast, A. 1994. "Memorial Stones for the Souls of Animals Killed for Human Welfare in Japan." *Berliner-Muenchener Tierarztliche Wochenschrift*, May: 166-171.

Discusses Buddhist and Shinto influences in Japanese animal memorial stones at 170 research laboratories as well as at other sites where animals are used for human consumption or welfare.

Kennaway, Rev. Saido. 1980. "Classroom Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes," in *Buddhism and Respect for Animals*, collected excerpts from the *Journal of Shasta Abbey*, Mt. Shasta, California, USA. Vol. XI, nos. 7 and 8.

Reflections on animal use in education by a Sōto Zen priest, including:

It should be possible to teach about life without needless killing and the resulting karmic consequences . . . However . . . [i]t is useful for some people to learn about the practical aspects of biochemistry and physiology through dissection and experimentation, bearing in mind that the knowledge they gain can be used to save lives . . . From a Buddhist point of view, anyone prepared to do this has to know and accept the karma of his actions. This would entail trying to do as little harm as possible, killing only if absolutely necessary, treating the

being with tender respect and making sure the knowledge is put to good use. (p. 23)

King, W. L. 1964. *In the Hope of Nibbana: An Essay on Theravada Buddhist Ethics*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.

Cited in Harvey (above) regarding attitudes on killing animals for drug development.

Kitahara-Frishi, Jean. 1991. "Culture and Primatology: East and West," in *The Monkeys of Arashiyama: Thirty-five Years of Research in Japan and the West*, eds. L. Fedigan and P. Asquith, Albany, NY: State University of New York, 74-80.

Discusses "the lack of clear distinction, in a Buddhist worldview, between human and other living things" (p. 75) and how that influences human interactions with other primates.

Lynch, John and Bill Slaughter. 2001. "Recognizing Animal Suffering and Death in Medicine." *Western Journal of Medicine*, August: 131-132 and data supplement 131-a.

Acknowledges Buddhist influences in the founding of one of the oldest annual university animal acknowledgment gatherings in the USA, at the largest public medical school in North America. Gives suggestions for establishing such events in other organizations, including reasoning for developing a reflective rather than opinionated tone.

Russell W. M. S. and R. L. Burch. 1958. *The Principles of Humane Experimental Techniques*. London: Methuen.

Seminal work that proposed the now widely-cited ethical guideposts

for animal use in the West, "The 3 Rs": Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement.

Severinghaus, L. L., and L. Chi. 1999. "Prayer Animal Release in Taiwan." *Biological Conservation* , 89: 301-304.

Survey of the Taiwanese and other Asian Buddhist practices of releasing animals from human control as a vehicle for prayer.

Smith, Richard. 2001. "Animal Research: The Need for a Middle Ground." *BMJ* [British Medical Journal], February 3: 248-249.

Uses the perspective of the "three Rs" of animal use in research (replacement, reduction, refinement) to reflect on current animal use in research, arguing that polarized positions oversimplify current public discourse on the issue.

Taylor, Allison and Hank Davis. 1993. "Acknowledging Animals: A Memorial Service for Teaching and Research Animals." *Anthrozoos* , 6: 221-225.

Describes North America's oldest annual event acknowledging animals used in research and training, as well as Buddhist-based and other events elsewhere.

Waldau, Paul. 2000. " Buddhism and Animal Rights, " in *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* , ed. Damien Keown, Surrey, UK: Curzon, 81-112.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and nuanced overview and analysis published of various strains of Buddhist thought regarding non-human animals. Discussed are on the one hand Buddhism's inclusiveness ("all

sentient beings") regarding compassion, and, conversely, hierarchical distinctions made in the tradition between humans and other species. Suggestions on how evolving scientific understanding of the complex lives of higher non-human primates might fit with contemporary discourse on animal rights, and how Buddhist thought may need to be renewed in the light of new biological discoveries are some of the many areas touched on.

" Of course, important caveats regarding [Buddhism ' s] acceptance of certain negative assumptions about all other animals, and the resultant shortcomings in its claims about the realities of their lives, are in order, but, in summary, the Buddhist tradition offers a profound understanding of the moral agent ' s responsibility for his or her own intentional actions. This is pertinent to human ' s ability to choose between alternatives to harmful uses of animals, human or otherwise. The emphasis on compassion alone, which pervades the tradition so thoroughly, makes the Buddhist tradition a fertile source for insights regarding the shortcomings and even immorality of many contemporary practices with regard to other animals. " (p. 106)