

Ethical Vegetarianism in Seventeenth-Century Britain: Its Roots in Sixteenth-Century European Theological Debate¹

Hereafter followeth the order of meats how they must be served at the Table in their sauces: Potage of stewed broth, boiled meat or stewed, chickens and bacon, powdered beef, pies, goose, pig, roasted beef, roasted veal, custard is the first course; the second is roasted lamb, roasted capons, roasted conies, chickens, peahens, bacon [and] venison tart. (Quoted from *A Proper new Booke of Cookery*, 1576, owned by Archbishop Matthew Parker and his wife.)

The germ of this paper was a single work read in the Huntington Library in December 2000. In following up a note, derived from a secondary source, on the Marian Martyr John Bradford in a paper I had recently published,² I discovered that the work of Bradford referred to, called ‘The Restoration of All Things’, was in fact not original to Bradford, but translated from Martin Bucer’s *Metaphrases et narrationes . . . in Epistolam ad Romanos*, published in Strasbourg in 1536. That discovery, speaking as it did to a long-standing interest in Romans 8:19–22, the most significant statement on the theology of nature in the New Testament, led to the present paper’s rash subtitle, which may lack a significant referent. I have found, not so much a debate as an assertion of irreconcilable positions on the meaning of that passage, which in the Authorized Version reads as follows:

18. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.
19. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.
20. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.
21. Because the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
22. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Presumably as a result of western Christendom’s recent discovery of ecological concerns, this is now one of the most frequently discussed of all New

Testament passages.³ From the time of the early Fathers to the seventeenth century, there has been much difference of opinion about the meaning of the Greek word *κτίσις*, which in the Authorized Version is translated as ‘the creature’. Augustine thought that it referred to human beings only, others that it referred to ‘this universal frame’, which, as Dryden put it, began from heavenly harmony. I am concerned here only with commentators who did not limit its reference to human beings. From, say, Martin Bucer in the 1530s until Henry Hammond around 1660, they were in the majority. Henry Hammond went back to the Augustinian understanding, but with a difference: he thought it referred not to the unregenerate part of human beings generally, but specifically to the Jews.

There were in the seventeenth century, among those who agreed that the Greek word *κτίσις* (the Authorized Version’s ‘the creature’) referred to the non-human creation, two major parties. One party agreed with Calvin’s successor Beza. In his translations of Romans published before 1580, Beza translated *κτίσις* as *res creatae*, created things. In the edition of 1580 and in all but one of the editions thereafter that I have seen, that of 1647, *κτίσις* was translated as *mundus conditus*, the established world. In his commentary of 1594 Beza explains why. He writes that the Greek word *κτίσις* signifies the world itself, not the inhabitants thereof: *mundus ipse, non eius incolae, significatur*. In neo-Calvinist commentary following Beza, the restoration of the creatures was confined to the rational, i.e. human beings, and the non-rational, i.e. the earth, the moon, and other heavenly bodies. The irrational creatures, such as fish, flesh and fowl, would not so survive. A common argument was that ‘things shall not abide in the last day, unless they shall serve to some use’.⁴ We shall not need them, either for food or for raiment, so it is most probable that they shall be abolished.⁵ Leaving aside the theology for the moment, and expressing these neo-Calvinists in modern terms, they thought of all the non-human inhabitants of the earth as lacking intrinsic value; they were merely instrumental to human purposes. The strongest literary opposition to this view of the creatures as merely instrumental is Henry Vaughan’s lovely poem ‘The Book’.

Beza’s departure from Calvin’s understanding of Romans 8:19–22 did not occur in a vacuum. There is reason to believe that Bucer’s commentary, which John Bradford drew upon heavily in a letter to a female friend after his condemnation, might have been significant in the context in which Beza moved from translating *κτίσις* as ‘created things’ to translating it as ‘established world’. That is, Beza’s change of translation might well be part of the reception history of Bucer’s commentary on Romans. More was at stake than the understanding of that one passage. At issue too was the question of how the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, or Eucharist, was to be understood; and within that the question of the being of the resurrected Christ in the world. Here is a letter of Bucer to Calvin on that subject, written on Whitsunday in 1550. ‘We must observe . . . that not a few persons, laying aside all desire for true repentance . . . do nothing but dispute and contend . . . how they may seclude Christ our Saviour from our Sacraments and holy assemblies, and confine him to his place in heaven’. Beza, in his 1576 edition of Calvin’s correspondence, rendered Bucer’s clear and indeed pungent expression into the vague words: ‘They

deliver upon the participation of Christ through the Sacraments such things as are not sufficiently imbued with the sense of true piety'.⁶ Behind Beza's disagreement with Bucer about the understanding of *κτισις* there is almost certainly his disagreement about how the Eucharist is to be understood. Bucer's commentary, which I read in the Lambeth Palace Library, seems to be a rare book indeed: neither the British Library nor the Bodleian have a copy, and it is not listed in the ninety works by or about Bucer in the Bavarian State Library. However, John Bradford's nineteenth-century editor wrote accurately: Bradford's letter to 'his dearest sister in the Lord, Joyce Hales' is in large part a translation of Bucer's (much more extensive) commentary; and he transcribes one of the passages more significant for our purpose in a footnote. 'This was your doubt', wrote Bradford to Joyce Hales, 'whether that plants, beasts and other things having life shall be restored also'. He answers that he will fasten his mind to consider this his so great happiness, whereunto 'I shall be restored "in the resurrection": the which "resurrection" doubtless shall be adorned by the whole shape of the world, "delivered from corruption"'. 'It is enough, and enough for me, that I, and all the whole world with me, shall be much more happy than now I can by any means conceive'. He adds 'This is my cogitation in this matter, and not mine only, but the cogitation of one who was my father in the Lord'. A sidenote in the Parker Society edition, attributed to Bishop Coverdale, reads: 'He meaneth that most godly and learned father, M[aster] Martin Bucer'. He did indeed. I recall that many years ago, one of my colleagues, called upon to explain herself, said that she had written an article with her graduate student's M.A. thesis in front of her, as 'the most convenient repository of [her] own ideas'. Such, *mutatis mutandis*, was the relation between Bucer's commentary and this section of Bradford's letter.

Now Henry Vaughan and his brother Thomas, in their view of the creatures as 'our fellow-creatures', were influenced by such figures as Paracelsus and by the intellectual constellations we refer to broadly as hermeticism and Ficinian Platonism. And so, one imagines, were Martin Bucer in his commentary on Romans and John Bradford in his decision to translate the particular part of Bucer's commentary that he did. If we recall the occasion of Bradford's letter to his 'dearest sister in Christ', it would seem that he regarded what Bucer, his 'father in the Lord', had written, opposed as it was to that which Beza was later to advance, as of cardinal importance.⁷ A man facing death by burning because he refused to acknowledge transubstantiation is not likely to be playing epistolary Trivial Pursuit.

In considering the intellectual background of ethical vegetarianism, then, we need to bear in mind two distinct but increasingly commingled streams. One is the western version of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as expressed in biblical commentary. The other is the pagan or Graeco-Roman tradition, which began in the sixteenth century to exert pressure on received Christian opinion as it had not done since perhaps the third century A.D.

As so often when we move away from mainstream thinking, Edwards's *Gan-graena* is a useful resource.⁸ Here are some of the heresies he cites: (1) 'God loves the creatures that creep upon the ground as well as the best saints'.⁹ (2) 'Christ shed

his blood for kine and horses and all other creatures, as well as for men'. Edwards cites this with the significant gloss: 'for the proving of which that Scripture is miserably perverted, Romans 8: 19–22'.¹⁰ (3) 'There shall be in the last day a resurrection from the dead of all the brute creatures, all beasts and birds that ever lived upon the earth, every individual of every kind of them that died shall rise again, as well as of men, and all these creatures shall live for ever upon the earth'.¹¹ 'Tis unlawful to . . . kill any of the creatures for our use, as a chicken'.¹² 'All the creatures shall assuredly partake of the Gospel of peace . . . Christ . . . offereth himself a sacrifice, not for all men only, but for all that by man was lost, even the whole creation of God'.¹³ 'It is wrong to kill any other creature'; that is, Edwards condemns those who began to reject meat because they thought it wrong to kill animals at all. According to Keith Thomas, Edwards mentions a Hackney bricklayer called Marshall, a follower of the Familist Giles Randall, who taught that it was 'unlawful to kill any creature that had life, because it came from God'.¹⁴ Thomas cites a number of others who held it sinful to eat flesh, including one who followed a regime so ascetic that he died.¹⁵ The citation of Romans 8:19–22 does not occur in the context of explicit vegetarianism, but it does occur in the context of a declaration that Christ died for kine and horses and all other creatures. Here is the first element of the meaning of ethical vegetarianism: we should not eat animals, because we should not kill them. We should not kill them because God values them as themselves and not merely as they are instrumental for human beings; they have intrinsic value. This meaning relates to the interpretation of Romans 8:19–22 favoured by Henry and Thomas Vaughan and by Paracelsus, who taught that 'every single flower that blows hath its own proper (i.e. individual) eternity'.¹⁶ This interpretation, not found for the most part in books devoted exclusively to biblical commentary, probably already represents the influence of hermeticism and neo-Platonism upon biblical interpretation. I shall add, since the Vaughans have been close to my heart for so long, that their interpretation of *κτισις*, rather than that of the biblical scholar Beza, is favoured by modern scholarship. The range of meanings of 'ethical vegetarianism' include some that are anthropocentric enough: but to refrain from eating animals because they are seen as valuable in God's eyes is to refrain from anthropocentrism in an important part of one's life.

In reading around this subject, the persistence of anthropocentrism presses itself on one's attention. Philemon Holland, introducing Plutarch's 38th treatise, 'That Brute beasts have discourse of reason', remarks that 'it may serve men for their instruction . . . not to vaunt themselves, but in the mercy of him, who calleth them to a better life, wherein brute beasts (created only for our use, and for the present life, with which they perish for ever) have no part nor portion at all'.¹⁷ That puts a spin on Plutarch's essay, with a vengeance. Less blatant, but equally telling, is the treatment of Bucer by a modern theologian, T. F. Torrance, who writes on the eschatology of Luther, Bucer and Calvin. Torrance represents Bucer as meaning that all creatures are dependent on each other, as being inter-related in God's creative activity. He writes that 'it was into this perverted and disordered [post-lapsarian] world that the Son of God descended to restore Creation to its true

Ordnung, and to bring back all things, physical and spiritual, to their true being and usefulness in the praise of God'.¹⁸ This 'all things' echoes the *omnes creaturae* of Beza's first translation of *κτισις*. Yet it does not occur to Torrance, though he is dealing explicitly with Bucer's eschatology, to refer to Bucer's commentary on Romans 8. He notes what Bucer says about Christ in relation to the non-human creation, but shows no sign of thinking about what it might mean, no sign, that is, of taking it seriously. C. E. B. Cranfield, author of the volume on Romans in the International Critical Commentary series, interprets *κτισις* in line with other modern commentators, as Henry Vaughan did, but nevertheless writes of the sub-human creation.

Among seventeenth-century vegetarians Roger Crab may be counted an extremist.¹⁹ He was unusual in his belief that meat-eating was the cause rather than a consequence of the Fall. Crab, in Christopher Hill's view the original Mad Hatter, took his bible reading as seriously as had St Francis of Assisi, and sold all that he had and gave it to the poor. By the age of twenty he was restricting himself to a diet of vegetables and water, 'avoiding butter, cheese, eggs and milk', that is, he was what we now call a vegan. As time passed he became more austere, dropping carrots and potatoes as luxuries, though in old age (he lived to be 59) he allowed himself parsnips. Crab's vegetarianism seems partly to have been dictated by a self-administered vow of poverty; living on dock-leaves and grass, he claimed to live on three farthings a week. But he argued that 'Eating of Flesh is an absolute Enemy to pure Nature'.²⁰ He also thought that there is a connection between meat-eating and aggression, in this anticipating another hatter, Thomas Tryon, the most notable vegetarian of seventeenth-century Britain. Tryon was a prolific author whose arguments for vegetarianism are extensive and varied, and never far away, whatever his announced subject. In his work we can clearly see the coming together of the Judaeo-Christian and the classical streams of influence, referred to earlier.

Thomas Tryon (1634–1703) is known to the British Library Catalogue as 'merchant founder of the Tryonist sect'. I have an open mind on the subject, but at this point do not know of any other Tryonists. Tryon did, however, enunciate a set of rules that he hoped others might follow, and according to the DNB seems to have been widely read on both sides of the Atlantic. Benjamin Franklin was among those he impressed, and as late as 1896 his memory lived on in Howard Williams's *The Ethics of Diet*.²¹ Tryon's memoirs tell a sort of rags to riches story, of an apprentice who worked very long hours so as to afford a tutor and books; they also tell something of a religious odyssey, though one less varied and vivacious than that of Lawrence Clarkson. Apprenticed to an anabaptist hatter, he became an anabaptist for three years; in about 1657, probably as a result of reading Jacob Boehme, he broke with the anabaptists, and became a vegetarian and teetotaler. The DNB says, I think accurately enough, that 'in his horror of war and his advocacy of silent meditation, as well as in his mystical belief, he forms an interesting link between the Behmenists and the early Quakers'.²² This brings us to another facet of the meaning of 'ethical vegetarianism'. Boehme and the Quakers had in common perfectionism, the belief that at least in principle it is possible to attain

pre-lapsarian perfection *in this life*. Boehme wrote that the ‘at the Fall Paradise was not destroyed, but swallowed up and hidden’; it is still potentially available to the regenerate: ‘the right man regenerate and renewed in Christ is . . . in the Paradise of God’.²³ In both the pagan and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, there is a pre-lapsarian world in which animals were not eaten: see Genesis 1 and the first book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. To become vegetarian was, for someone like Tryon, an important step towards the perfection of the pre-lapsarian state, an important component, that is, of Christianity. In his letter, ‘God’s Permission for the Eating of Flesh’, he writes:

It is manifest, that all the Cruelty and Barbarity we see daily exercised in destroying the Peace and Well-being of one another: And Inferior Creatures, who were Created for another End and Service, do take their birth, and proceed from the Dark and Stygian Degeneracy and Separation, from the Divine Power and Union; not from the Uniting Power and Eternal Love of God, by whose Virtue all things were made and preserved; this same Holy Principle became Flesh, and Dwells in every Creature, and is the Light and Life of Man; This is the Voice of Wisdom, that crys in the Gates of Man’s Microcosmical City, against all Violence to Man and Beast, and is the Reconciler of Man’s Soul to God, bringing it into an Equality and Union. This is the true and natural Effect of God’s Love, and whoever has attained to this Blessed State, will esteem the killing of an Ox, as the slaying of a Man.²⁴

Given Boehme’s influence on Tryon, and that of Paracelsus on Boehme, there is a clear line back to what was in the sixteenth century mostly regarded as heterodox opinion. An equally clear line is suggested by Tryon’s title *Pythagoras his Mystick Philosophy Reviv’d, or The Mystery of Dreams Unfolded*, 1691. Tryon’s adherence to Pythagorean philosophy extended beyond the interpretation of dreams.²⁵ Gillian Clark, introducing her translation of Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life*, points out that ‘philosophical asceticism aimed to regulate diet, sleep and lifestyle generally so as to free the mind for the hard intellectual work which prepares it to contemplate reality’.²⁶ This statement applies well to Tryon’s writing; he was exceptionally aware, or so it seems to me, of what we now call psycho-somatic considerations. Vegetarianism for him represents our duty to ourselves as well as our duty to our fellow-creatures.

Here is the first rule of his code of laws: ‘Thou shalt not kill, oppress, hunt, hurry, nor offer any kind of violence, either to mankind or to any creature, either of the air, earth or water; they all bear thy Creator’s image . . . they are thy Brethren, having the same Father, Creator and Preserver with thyself, and participate equally with thee, according to their natures, of his care and influence’.²⁷ Rule 2 is ‘Thou shalt not eat the flesh, nor fish, of any living creature whatsoever’. Rule 3 is ‘Thou shalt not . . . prepare any sort of Food in the Vessels of those that eat any living Creature . . . neither shalt thou sit down at table with those that eat Flesh or Fish’.²⁸ Rule 5 is ‘Thou shalt not use the skins of any living creature for shoes, gloves, saddles or any other thing whatsoever. Thou shalt not lie on down or feather beds, nor on the

beds of such as eat Flesh or Fish, or drink strong drink.²⁹ This all sounds quite thorough-going, but as Gordon notes, ‘Tryon does not hesitate to give, in *The Way to Health*, several easy but sure recipes for the destruction of vermin’.³⁰ The fact that he was a ‘castor-maker’, that is, a hatter, and wrote of himself that he ‘made beavers to success’, may not be significant, since ‘beavers’ were often made of imitation fur.³¹ In giving recipes for the destruction of vermin, Tryon is in harmony with John Bradford, Martin Bucer and Pythagoras. Bradford, translating Bucer, writes of a ‘renovation and deliverance from corruption . . . of all and every part of the whole world . . . of every part, I say, meaning parts indeed, and not such as be rather vices and added for plagues, than for parts; for by reason of sin many spots and corruptions are come into the world, as is all that is hurtful and filthy in the creatures, also all that cometh of corruption, as perchance fleas, vermin, and such like’.³² Similarly, Iamblichus cites Pythagoras as teaching that we should ‘not harm or destroy any living thing which is not harmful to the human race’.³³ It is possible to find more radical opinion than this in the early modern period: there is a very interesting letter by Boyle in which he points out that creatures considered noxious by humans survived the Flood by being admitted to the Ark. Boyle is pointing out that God in creating did not merely consult *our* convenience. Of course one finds inconsistency everywhere and Boyle, in spite of as radical a set of arguments I have seen for an an-anthropocentric view of things, was a vivisector. (See Appendix I.) There is one more connection between Tryon as Behmenist and Pythagoras, or at least between Tryon and Iamblichus as Pythagorean. Gillian Clark, introducing Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life*, writes that philosophers like Iamblichus, in the early centuries of the Christian era, thought that an ‘earnest commitment to the philosophical life . . . can make human souls worthy of being raised to the level of the divine’. The Quaker and Behmenist philosophy of perfectionism, then, has a long pre-history.

According to Iamblichus, Pythagoras ‘required abstinence from living creatures for many reasons, and especially because the practice makes for peace: people who are accustomed to be disgusted by the killing of animals, thinking it contrary to law and nature, found the killing of a human being even more contrary to divine law, and ceased to make war’. In Canada, the state of law against cruelty to animals is comparatively primitive; but some movement is underway. Among the reasons given is research that might be thought of as related to this Pythagorean view: the argument is that people who behave sadistically towards animals frequently graduate to behaving sadistically towards other humans. Vaughan’s use of the phrase ‘fellow-creatures’, or its underlying meaning, is anticipated in the Pythagorean view that animals are akin to us, sharing life and basic constituents and composition, linked in a kind of brotherhood.

Tryon is realistically Pythagorean in understanding that his arguments would not immediately prevail. He provided what he thought of as more

healthful meat-recipes and also recipes for making comparatively harmless alcoholic drinks. Similarly, the followers of Pythagoras fell into two groups. The learners would have been religiously vegetarian. They disapproved of hunting and did not use it as a form of exercise. The hearers would include *politikoi* who engaged in civic life, therefore in civic cult, therefore in sacrifice. There was an argument that human souls do not migrate into animals that could be lawfully sacrificed. Iamblichus himself thought that human souls, being rational, did not migrate into non-rational animals. In the fifth century Proclus, otherwise a strict vegetarian, tasted meat at public sacrifices.³⁴

Pythagoras was, of course, not the only pagan philosopher whose work began to be influential in the Renaissance, though he was one of those most frequently mentioned. His disciple Empedocles was less well known, but should be noticed. It is said of him that 'one of his strongest religious beliefs was that there could be no greater sin than the shedding of blood, even that of animals. It is this crime that has caused divine spirits to be cast out of heaven and to wander through the long cycle of earthly existence, and it was such a crime that brought Empedocles himself to earth'.³⁵ Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, if only because it survived in more than fragmentary form, was probably more important, and, at the popular level, Plutarch's essays on animals, for example in the translation of Philemon Holland.³⁶ Views similar to theirs began to be expressed by such writers as Sir Thomas More and Montaigne. The most religious of More's Utopians 'slaughter no animals in their sacrifices, and do not think that a merciful God, who gave life to all creatures that they might live, will be gratified with slaughter and bloodshed'.³⁷ Montaigne, in his 'Apology for Raymond Sebond', gets to the heart of the matter, so that one wishes that North American fundamentalists and others might catch up with him. 'There is no hostility that excels Christian hostility', he writes; that seems a pretty good start.³⁸ Montaigne is thoroughly opposed to anthropocentrism, and to the idea that the creatures should be viewed as purely instrumental. 'Who has persuaded [man] that that admirable motion of the celestial vault, the eternal light of those torches, rolling so proudly above his head, the fearful movements of that infinite sea, were established and have lasted so many centuries for his convenience and service?' He is prepared to concede that creatures other than humans might have an aesthetic and a religious sense, his idea of a religious sense being, attractively I think, the emotion of gratitude. 'And this privilege that [man] attributes to himself of being the only one in this great edifice who has the capacity to recognize its beauty and its parts, the only one who can give thanks for it to the architect . . . who has sealed him this privilege?'³⁹ He goes beyond this, to conceding rationality to animals: 'Shall we say that we have seen in no other creature than man the exercise of a rational soul?' 'By what comparison between them and us does [man] infer the stupidity that he attributes to them?' He reminds us that 'Plato, in his picture of the golden age, counts among the principal

advantages of the man of that time the communication he had with the beasts'.⁴⁰ He then gives anecdotal evidence for animal intelligence, taking his place in a centuries old and highly popular genre, of which a best-selling recent example is Jeffrey Masson's *When Elephants Weep*. His conclusion is that 'It is apparent that it is not by a true judgement, but by foolish pride and stubbornness, that we set ourselves before the other animals and sequester ourselves from their condition and society'.⁴¹

So Montaigne, then, the first modern man. But we are reminded, by his anecdotes illustrating animal sagacity, of a major classical author, Plutarch; and by his respectful treatment of the non-human creation, of a major neo-Platonist, Porphyry. It would require greater learning than mine adequately to compare Iamblichus and Porphyry on the subject of Pythagoras: clearly in both cases it is a very *filtered* view of Pythagoras that we are given. Dominic O'Meara suggests that it was for Numenius that Pythagoras represented the commanding heights of ancient philosophy, while for Porphyry he was 'essentially a Platonic philosopher whose views can be corroborated by reference to various oriental religions'.⁴² Porphyry's *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* is his most substantial surviving work; it is addressed to one Firmus Castricius, named in the first sentence of each of its four books, who had reverted to eating meat. In the first few paragraphs we learn that a lively debate had been in progress, with the Peripatetics, the Stoics and the Epicureans all in opposition to the vegetarianism of Pythagoras and Empedocles. A Peripatetic argument is still very much alive today: animals cannot reason; there can therefore be no question of *justice* as between humans and animals. In answering, Porphyry did not confine himself to a justification of Pythagoras, that is he was not solely or even chiefly concerned with the doctrine of the kinship and transmigration of souls (which apparently worried people lest they might be dining on a relative). The context in which he argued was the familiar neo-Platonic view that our minds should be fixed on the immaterial world; vegetarianism is better because it is inexpensive, easy to prepare and not over-exciting. Pythagoreanism becomes assimilated into a Platonic metaphysical and ethical other-worldliness supported by reference to Egyptian, Jewish, Persian and Indian sources. It has often been remarked that Renaissance Platonism is a highly syncretistic affair; and so clearly was the philosophy of late antiquity on which it is based.⁴³ Porphyry's work is fascinating, but it is very much an intellectual's book and one imagines that Plutarch would have found a wider readership in early modern Britain. One has to concede, however, that many of Plutarch's positions seem not to accord with what is now known. In his essay 'That brute beasts have use of reason' we have a conversation between Ulysses and Gryllus, a human who had been turned into an animal by Circe. Gryllus wants to know why he would want to revert to being a human, on the grounds that animals are better, being naturally courageous, temperate and chaste; crows are praised for their chastity above Penelope. Men like perfumed women; the beasts

manage to copulate without such artificial aids. There are no homosexual acts in the animal kingdom. This position is, curiously, buttressed by the argument that while a dunghill cock may tread another when there is no hen at hand, it is 'burnt quick, for that some . . . interpreter of such prodigies will pronounce that it is omenous, and presageth some evil luck'. That is, humans are the interpreters of what is 'natural' in nature. Man is the only omnivorous creature: 'of all living creatures, he alone . . . eateth and devoureth all things'.⁴⁴ Plutarch clearly had not met the canine member of my family, who has more than once brought herself to the brink of the grave by ingesting such unsuitable fare as magic mushrooms and marijuana plants. She is not a good argument for animal sagacity. Some of Plutarch's stories of animal sagacity are attractive, for example how partridges teach their young to escape the fowler 'by lying on their backs, and holding up with their feet a clod of earth to hide themselves under it'.⁴⁵ Plutarch's essay 'Whether it be lawful to eat flesh or no' is prefaced by a long 'summarie' by Philemon Holland, another piece of spin-doctoring. It is, he suggests, a product of the ancient's method of teaching rhetoric, in which the better students would argue both sides of a question. Plutarch, in Holland's view, did not really believe in the Pythagorean opinion of the transmigration of souls.⁴⁶ What Plutarch himself suggests is that the first meat-eaters may have acted from necessity, but that no longer applies: 'what rage, what fury and madness inciteth you to commit such murders and carnage? Seeing you have such store and plenty of all things necessary for your life?' He is amazed at human callousness: 'we are nothing moved either with the fair and beautiful colour, or the sweet and tunable voice, or the . . . subtiltie of spirit, or the neat and clean life, or the vivacity of wit and understanding, of these poor silly creatures; and for a little piece of flesh we take away their life, we bereave them of the sun and of light . . . and more than so, those lamentable and trembling voices which they utter for fear, we suppose to be inarticulate or insignificant sounds'.⁴⁷ The language may be archaic, but it makes more sense than Descartes or twentieth-century behaviourists. When I was a boy we used to kill two pigs, which had been fattened together in the same shed, the second maybe a month after the first. I well remember what terrified resistance the second put up to being dragged off to the heap of straw outside the barn that was to soak up its blood. It was obvious that it understood where its companion had gone, and the intention of those who would drag it away. Plutarch's second declamation *Of Eating Flesh* begins by arguing for treating the subject again. 'We have all', he writes, 'drunk of the cup of custom'. In this essay he anticipates Tryon by suggesting that if we cannot be 'innocent and faultless' in this matter, we should 'commit sin in measure, and transgress with reason'. He goes on to detail various cruelties of the time. If the ancients had not discovered factory-farming, de-beaking and close confinement of chickens, the imprisonment and deliberately induced anaemia of veal calves, they nevertheless had their methods. These included thrusting red-hot spits

into pigs before killing them, 'to cause the flesh forsooth to be more tender and delicate; [leaping] upon the udders . . . of the poor sows ready to farrow, that the blood, the milk and the congealed bag of the young pigs, being all jumbled, confused and blended together, even amid the . . . pangs of farrowing (O Jupiter Piacularis [he exclaims]), they might make . . . a most dainty dish of meat, and devour the most corrupt and putrified parts of the poor beast'. Cranes and swans were mewed up 'in a dark place' and 'crammed with strange compositions and pastes made of dried figs . . . because their flesh should be more dainty and pleasant: whereby it appeareth evidently, that it is not for need of nourishment . . . but even for a sumptuous curiosity, and superfluous excess, that of horrible injustice and wickedness, they make their pleasure and delight'.⁴⁸ Plutarch goes on, as others before and since, to suggest that such cruelties lead in to other forms of depravity, for example the desire to see violent and cruel spectacles. The author of the most substantial recent bibliography of the animal rights movement suggests that Tryon was the first person to use the term 'rights' in regard to animals.⁴⁹ But in Philemon Holland's Plutarch we read, in relation to Pythagoras and Empedocles, 'that [in their view] there were between us and brute beasts certain common rights', and, in relation to the Stoics, that they argued that 'there is no communication of rights between beasts and us'.⁵⁰

I shall conclude with some foundation stories of Christianity, and one foundation story of the vegetarian philosophers of late antiquity.

First is a story of Pythagoras's visit to Kroton, where the people marvelled that he offered prayers only at the altar of Apollo Genetor, who alone receives no blood sacrifice. 'This time, travelling to Kroton, he came upon some fishermen still hauling in their nets, full of fish, under water, but he told them how big a catch, giving the exact number of fish. The men said they would do whatever he told them, if it proved to be true. He told them to catch the fish carefully, and to let them go alive. What was even more remarkable, not one of the fish died while he stood by, though they were out of the water for all the time it took to count them. He gave the fishermen the price of their catch, and went on to Kroton.'⁵¹

In the last chapter of St. John's Gospel, there is the story of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his fishermen disciples, who had caught nothing. Jesus tells them to cast the net on the right side of the ship, and they were unable to draw it in for the multitude of fishes. The disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, it is the Lord, and Peter put on his fisher's coat and waded out to the ship. When they were come to land, they found a barbecue prepared, and fish laid thereon, and bread, on which Jesus invited them to dine. Immediately after this, is the story in which Jesus asks Peter three times, 'Lovest thou me?', and is told 'Feed my sheep'. Presumably not so long after this, as recorded in Acts 11, Peter is defending his mission to the Gentiles. 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend . . . upon the which I saw four footed beasts of the earth, and wild

beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again, from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common'. Chronologically before these places is the event recorded in Matthew 26: 26–28: 'And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'. No doubt modern scholarship would in the case of all these stories stress their symbolism rather than their historicity; but I think it may be said that the foundation stories of Christianity are carnivorous rather than vegetarian.

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Appendix

The practice of vivisection became more general in this era, and of course the Cartesian teaching that animals were merely automata helped to justify it. Boyle's experiments upon animals were frequently carried out in the presence of an audience of lay-people; when 'the pity of some fair ladies'⁵² caused him to interrupt an experiment, it was repeated at night in private. The fact of Boyle's experiments upon animals would be of little interest but for the 'cognitive dissonance' it displays. I borrow the phrase from Professor J. J. Macintosh of the University of Calgary, who read a paper on 'Robert Boyle on Animal Rights' at a Simon Fraser Philosophy Seminar, and kindly sent me a transcript from the Royal Society manuscript on which his paper was based.⁵³

The manuscript is a draft of a letter to an unnamed friend, and seems likely to have been written when Boyle was a very young man, perhaps as young as eighteen. There had apparently been an evening conversation, following 'the savage treatment of our fellow-traveller yesterday to his horse'; Boyle had upheld the right of animals not to be ill-treated and his unknown correspondent, intrigued by his arguments, had asked him to set them forth more fully in writing. Boyle begins by citing an unnamed philosopher with whom he had talked only a few days earlier, one known by Boyle's correspondent to be 'unparalleled in Nature's knowledge; who very confidently asserts, that the Soul of every Beast, does as immediately descend from God as our's'. Boyle then proceeds to make eighteen further points, following the custom of his time in grounding moral considerations upon theological ones, and basing them frequently on biblical texts.⁵⁴ The first point is the possibility 'that Beasts do participate of Reason'. The conclusion to be drawn from this possibility is clear: if beasts do indeed participate of Reason, 'with what Reason we can thus torment those that partake of that Beame of Divinity as well as we, let each man's Conscience judge'.

Boyle's second point is important in relation both to the seventeenth century forerunners of animal rights, and to the period's precursors of the deep ecology movement. Once again Boyle cites an unnamed authority. He writes: 'I might alleadge the Opinion of one of the ablest & famousest Divines our Age can boast, who (as himselfe has told me) . . . esteemes that in the Greate Renovation at the Last Day /of

all things/ [the] Beasts also shall receive & be preferred to a more exalted Nature; & in their respective Degrees be sharers with us in our future . . . Happynesse'. Boyle argues that this view is supported by 'that Groaning and Longing of the whole creation, mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans', giving a marginal reference to Romans 8: 19–22.

A further point is that 'Divines teach us, that all God's Creatures . . . glorify their Creator . . . either by our employing them to his Glory that made them, or by some secret expressions of their Thankfulness in a way & Language unknowne to us tho naturall to them'. The conclusion Boyle draws from this is that in mistreating animals, we are at fault in that we pervert and prostitute 'the Creature to the service of our exorbitant and unruly Passions' and in that we disturb 'their Gratitude & Devotion' to God. The part of this double point I want to underline is that which refers to the so-called 'prayer of the creatures': what Boyle refers to as 'their Gratitude & Devotion to God'. There were two views among those who believed in it at all: one, enunciated by the poet George Herbert, is that Man acts as the High Priest of Creation, praising God on behalf of the other creatures who have no voice of their own; the other, enunciated by Vaughan, is the stronger view, implied in Boyle's expression, that the creatures 'glorify their Creator' on their own account 'in a way & Language unknowne to us tho naturall to them'.⁵⁵ Although Boyle is writing here only of animals, as enunciated by Vaughan the prayer of the creatures is rendered up by the entire creation, by rocks, streams, and plants as well as by animals. So we see that, in the concept of the prayer of the creatures, as well as in the concept of the restitution of all things after the Last Judgement, today's deep ecologists had their seventeenth-century forerunners.

The next point Boyle makes explicitly addresses the question of man's dominion over the creatures, that dominion which had been stronger before the Fall and which Bacon's programme was to recover as far as possible, in the despotic mode suggested by his image of leading Nature with all her children to bind her to our service and make her our slave. Boyle's concept of dominion is expressed differently: 'we deceive our selves, to fancy a Right in man to any other Dominion over the Creature, than what will make us through them more instrumentall to the Glory of . . . God . . . our Common Maker'. Boyle goes on at some length to make the point that they are not our creatures, but God's; we are allowed to use them, but forbidden to abuse them: 'give me a Charity', Boyle writes, 'that extends to the whole Creation of God', a charity that 'loves the Effects of so infinitely lovely a Cause . . . & remembers that they are such Creatures too as [God] in his Generall Survey . . . declar'd Very Good'. This is interesting as indicating a theocentric rather than an anthropocentric view of creation, a view which twentieth-century theologians, notably Jurgen Moltmann, are beginning to recover in the face of environmental disaster.⁵⁶ It is also interesting in the importance it implicitly attributes to the expression of God's pleasure over his *entire* creation, as he saw that it was good. This is to acknowledge that the natural world should be the object of religious contemplation, an object of wonder, love, and praise, as well as an object of use.

A further point made by Boyle, which Macintosh labels ecological, is again theocentric rather than anthropocentric and, for those to whom seventeenth-century arguments and biblical texts are not in principle irrelevant, interesting in relation to the species-destruction which is a major component of today's ecological crisis. After citing a number of passages from the psalms, to demonstrate that 'God's Care reaches ev'n Brutes', Boyle produces what he thinks might be an original citation in contemporary

discussion of this matter, that is the preservation of each of the species by Noah during the Flood. God, he says, 'would not permitt any the basest or most pernicious Species (no not Serpents themselves) to be extirpated; but commands Noah to . . . nourrish them in the Arke; tho the Species, were, and still be, never so venomous or noxious to man'. On this basis he suggests that God made the creatures 'for other Ends, besides Man's Service & Advantages' and proceeds to other biblical texts which indicate that 'God sometimes considers Brutes, abstractedly from their Relation unto Man'. In other words, it is irreligious and therefore wrong to consider the other creatures solely on the basis of their usefulness to human beings. The anthropocentric, exploitative view of the creatures was so predominant in the religious establishment of England in the decade during which Boyle was writing, that Boyle may be considered, though not unique, as being in a small minority in opposing it in this letter, which strikes one as being a truly remarkable document from so young a man.

Notes

- 1 The readings in *Ethical Vegetarianism from Pythagoras to Peter Singer*, eds Kerry S. Walters and Lisa Portmess (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), leap from antiquity to the eighteenth century. This is presumably because of the distinction the editors draw between ethical and religious vegetarianism, which I consider to be problematic, at least until the modern period. An important and fascinating discussion of philosophical positions from antiquity to the present is Richard Sorabji's *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (London: Duckworth, 1993).
- 2 'For then the Earth shall be all Paradise: Milton, Vaughan and the neo-Calvinists on the Ecology of the Hereafter', *Scintilla*, 4 (2000), 39–52, note 30.
- 3 So I was told by Edward P. Echlin, author of *Earth Spirituality: Jesus at the Centre* (New Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 1999).
- 4 Peter Martyr's *Commentaries . . . upon the Epistle . . . to the Romans* was published in Latin at Basle in 1558. The English version, some nine hundred pages in folio, came out in London in 1568. For the quotation see p. 217 of the English edition.
- 5 Andrew Willett, *Hexapla: that is, a six-fold commentary upon the . . . Epistle . . . to the Romans* (London, 1611). For the quotation see the 27th question.
- 6 Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), p. 50. For a statement of Bucer's belief in a Real Presence, as contrasted with the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Zwinglian views, see Hopf, pp. 41ff.
- 7 *The Writings of John Bradford*, ed. Aubrey Townsend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1848), p. 355.
- 8 Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena: or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in these four last years* (London, 1646).
- 9 *Gangraena*, Part 1, p. 20, no. 16. Copy consulted BL 108.b.56.
- 10 *Gangraena*, Part 3, p. 11, no. 32 .
- 11 *Gangraena*, Part 1, p. 27, no. 90.
- 12 *Gangraena*, Part 1, p. 34, no. 160.

- 13 *Grangraena*, Part 1, p. 35, no. 171.
- 14 See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 291. Thomas's citation, n. 22, p. 399, is to *Gangraena* 1, 34, 80. I have been unable to verify this.
- 15 Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 291.
- 16 See A. E. Waite, ed., *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus the Great* (1896), I, 269: 'It is opposed to all true philosophy to say that flowers lack their own eternity. They may perish and die here, but they will reappear in the restitution of all things. Nothing has been created out of the Great Mystery which will not inhabit a *form* beyond the aether.'
- 17 *The Philosophie, commonly called The Morals . . . by . . . Plutarch of Chaeronea*, tr. Philemon Holland (London: 1603), p. 562.
- 18 T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church, A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), p. 74.
- 19 I mention Crab here only briefly as he is the subject of another paper in the present issue. See also B. J. Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult from the Renaissance to the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 78, where Crab is described as a Behmenist.
- 20 See the chapter 'The Mad Hatter' In Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Mercury Books, 1965 (1958)), pp. 314–22.
- 21 Howard Williams, *The Ethics of Diet, A Biographical History of the Literature of Human Dietetics, from the earliest period to the present day*, a revised and enlarged edition (London: 1896). See pp. 242–8.
- 22 Alexander Gordon, 'A Pythagorean of the Seventeenth Century', *Proceedings of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool . . . 1870–1871*, pp. 277–320, makes the point that Tryon used the publishers of the Quakers (p. 289). *The Way to Health*, 1683, was published by Andrew Sowle; the *Memoirs*, 1705, by T. Sowle. G. F. Nuttall, *James Nayler, A Fresh Approach* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1954), refers (p. 7) to the Quaker woman publisher Tace Sowle.
- 23 Epistle 25: 14 ; for a notice of contemporary comment linking Boehme to the Perfectionists, see Nuttall, *James Nayler*, pp. 7–8.
- 24 *Letters Upon Several Occasions* (London: 1700), p. 70. In the same work he states an inclination to veganism (p. 86).
- 25 Tryon's interest in dreams and their interpretation no doubt stemmed from personal experience. He records a dream, at the age of about six years, 'wherein it pleased God to shew me the Kingdom of Love, and the Kingdom of Darkness'. He wrote that this and another dream , 'wherein methought the Devil stood before me and scourged me', 'pointed out for me the work my Great Creator ordained me for' (*Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Thomas Tryon* (London: 1705), pp. 8–10).
- 26 Iamblichus, *The Pythagorean Life*, tr. Gillian Clark (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), 1989, p. xiii.
- 27 *Memoirs*, pp. 82–4.
- 28 *Memoirs*, pp. 84–5.
- 29 *Memoirs*, pp. 85–6.
- 30 Gordon, p. 315.
- 31 Gordon, p. 293.
- 32 Bradford, p. 356.

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- 33 On the other hand, Pythagoras is said to have taught that we should not kill even a louse in a temple: the divine being must not share in unnecessary and destructive acts (Iamblichus, tr. Clark, p. 68, paragraph 153).
- 34 Iamblichus, tr. Clark, pp. 34–5.
- 35 Kathleen Freeman, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Companion to Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949), p. 174.
- 36 Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, tr. Gillian Clark (London: Duckworth, 2000).
- 37 *Utopia*, ed. G. M. Logan, R. M. Adams and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 237.
- 38 Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, tr. Donald Frame (Stanford U.P., 1948 (reprint 1952)), p. 324.
- 39 This recalls an interesting difference between Herbert, who regards man as the great high priest, and Vaughan, who thinks of the creatures as being able to give thanks on their own account. See note 55 below.
- 40 Montaigne, tr. Frame, pp. 328–31.
- 41 Montaigne, tr. Frame, p. 358.
- 42 Dominic J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 27.
- 43 This is O’Meara’s summary, pp. 27–8.
- 44 *The Philosophie, commonly called The Morals . . . by . . . Plutarch of Chaeronea, translated out of Greek into English, and conferred with the Latine translations and the French, by Philemon Holland of Coventry, Doctor in Physick* (London: 1603), pp. 565–9.
- 45 Plutarch, p. 570.
- 46 Plutarch, p. 571.
- 47 Plutarch, p. 573.
- 48 Plutarch, p. 577.
- 49 Charles R. Magel, *Keyguide to Information Sources in Animal Rights* (London: Mansell, 1989), p. 72. The word ‘rights’ appears in Tryon’s *The Way to Health*, p. 515.
- 50 Plutarch, pp. 578, 579.
- 51 Iamblichus, tr. Clark, pp. 14–15.
- 52 J. J. Macintosh MS p. 13.
- 53 I am grateful for Professor Macintosh’s permission to make use of his transcript.
- 54 J. J. Macintosh, Boyle MS, pp. 2–3.
- 55 Herbert wrote, ‘Man is the worlds high Priest: he doth present / The sacrifice for all’ (‘Providence’ in F. E. Hutchinson, ed., *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 117; Vaughan wrote that ‘Birds, beasts, all things / Adore him in their kinds’, (‘The Morning Watch’, in Alan Rudrum, ed., *The Complete Poems of Henry Vaughan*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1995), p. 179). Adam and Eve, in their morning prayer, based upon the *Benedicite, omnia opera* from the Book of Common Prayer (Paradise Lost, V, 153–208), exhort the creatures, from the angels down, to praise God.
- 56 Jurgen Moltmann, *God In Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, translated by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985).

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