

Editorial

Animal studies have advanced in recent years with respect to a more non-anthropocentric approach toward animal rights. Arguments in favor of survival of species and non-intervention have been assiduously made and legitimized. Both animal survival and sustenance are key issues in the current debate on this very special branch of environmentalism. There is a call for preserving the ecosystem. There is a call for maintaining biodiversity for a planet threatened with human activity and the associated climate change that endangers several marine and terrestrial species. Pro-animal sentiments are inspired by environmental awareness and a direct engagement with accumulating data on the changes within our complex ecosystem.

On the other hand there is polemical animal rights activism that has contributed to our awareness of human intervention and cruelty, and the rampant exploitation of animals for human benefit. The historical and culturally entrenched neglect of the moral nature of animals, and their morally tangible behaviors and tendencies has left us ignorant about a whole world of possibilities. A proto-humanist animal care movement was discerned as early as in the anecdotal precepts of Siddhartha in early India, just as Christianity also at times levied this concern for human beings. St. Francis advocated that animals in our care would be led through the gates of heaven after their death. Of course it is interesting to see how contemporary animal activism has shifted from this old world theological animal care perspective to a radical sense of justice for animals. The reflections on justice in response to the rational perception of the animal body, and the animal entity as a center of feelings, actions and as an entity capable of socially involved, collective behavior show that all our existing laws and legends on animals stand in need of revision. Animal slavery has to be recognized as a historical reality. The claim for ecological rights of animals are not enough. We would appreciate a stronger concern for the moral valence of animal behavior, and promote what Thomas Taylor, as early as in 1792, called *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, in a text published almost contemporaneously with Mary Wollstonecraft's revolutionary book on women's equality. Taylor dedicated his book to Thomas Paine, the forerunner of liberty in the new world. Taylor sets the discourse for contemporary animal rights activism at least in so far as he advocates the need to reconsider the true dignity and moral capacities of other species.

In a sense Taylor's book anticipates the modern politically engaging discourse on animal rights. It is one of those pioneering studies for today's discussions on interspecies engagement. The current issue of *Rupkatha* deals with several aspects of the animal-human relationship in conventional literature and in related contexts of ecology, biodiversity and animal heritage preservation. Animal studies is placed at the intersection of Science and Arts, like many other interdisciplinary endeavors which now shed light on unknown aspects of nature and existence, and the measures which define our evolving ecosystem.

Perhaps an ambivalence about animal activism still persists with some sections of the academic elite who believe that several questions about the state of things are unresolved and that we do not know how things outside of us are disposed and whether a 'moral' animal question were feasible. Every aspect of animal rights issues would have to be raised in any forum dedicated to the question.

~Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay