

**Environmental ethics and the belief that
'the whole of creation possesses Buddhahood'
(*sônoku kokudo shikkai jōutsu*)**

YAMAUCHI Tomosaburo

Translated by Stacey Steele

Contents

I Human beings and nature: conditions for co-existence

- Easter Island and the Japanese archipelago

II The objective order of value and the General Rule

III Sentient and non-sentient dualism

-Indian Buddhism and Singer's sentientism

IV Attributing value to the non-sentient world

V The enlightenment of all animate things, plants, trees and soil

VI The contemporaneous destruction of nature and the quest for enlightenment

I Human beings and nature: conditions for co-existence

- Easter Island and the Japanese archipelago

Human beings do not exist in isolation from nature. They are merely one part of nature. The history of the whole of civilisation is an account of humanity's utilisation of nature. Agriculture and pastoralism have been pursued on an ever-increasing scale and the environment has been exploited. This was essential to feed the people, but in time these activities caused the population to grow. Eventually, these acts will bring nature to its limit. When human beings have exhausted nature and when there are no more virgin wildernesses, humans will have destroyed the very foundation upon which they depend for their existence.

I will give two examples which illustrate different possibilities for the relationship between human beings and nature. The first example is the case of Easter Island and the second is the case of the Japanese archipelago. Easter Island is situated in the middle of the Pacific, 3700 kilometres from the west coast of South America. It is an island of a mere 120 square kilometres. When Europeans first visited this island in the eighteenth century, the environment had been destroyed beyond repair: hardly a tree was left, food was scarce and the people lived in a state of desperate poverty. The small number of surviving indigenous people were all living in a single, small colony. Despite these people's abject lives, on this island there remained the ruins of more than 600 giant stone figures, all over six metres in height. At the peak of Easter Island's prosperity in the sixteenth century, there were lush forests and it is estimated that the population reached 7000 people. It was at about this time that society on Easter Island suddenly collapsed, leaving 300 stone statues unfinished. The collapse of this society was caused by the deterioration of the environment due to the destruction of its forests. In order to transport a stone figure from the quarries where it was made to its sacred place, logs were laid end to end and a group of people would then roll the stone along the logs. As the competition between families over building stone figures intensified, the amount of necessary materials increased and eventually exceeded the natural limit. The cultural excesses of the people of Easter Island — both the increase in their population and their religious customs — completely exhausted the resources of their island: resources which were extremely limited to begin with (see Ponting 1991: Ch. 1).

This story has a number of implications for us today, in light of the global environmental crisis which faces contemporary human beings. If we were to think of the entire earth as one island, it becomes painfully obvious that the current scenario being played out today is analogous to the history of Easter Island: the excessive population growth, the unlimited exploitation of our finite resources, excessive consumption and extravagance, and the enormous waste which is created by this. Indeed, the exhaustion of places which can be used to accommodate the waste produced by modern society is as much a factor in the destruction of the environment as the exhaustion of our resources. Those of us in developed nations, poisoned by Western education's modernisation, have become captives of the mythology of economic growth. Behind this myth lies the theory of anthropocentrism. We ignore the burden that our activities place on the environment and follow the god of economic competition. It would be hypocritical of us to pass a negative judgment on the people of Easter Island for completely ignoring the burden that they were placing on their environment, or to pass a

negative judgment on the competition between families over the building of their gods of stone and their eventual martyrdom for them.

In contrast to the history of Easter Island, the Edo Period (1603-1867) in Japan provides us with an example of a self-perpetuating society that managed to use the environment of their isolated island, whilst increasing their population and creating a high level civilisation. At the height of its prosperity, the population of Edo (present day Tokyo) had increased from one million to 2.5 million. The population of the whole of Japan increased ten-fold. Although the Edo Period lasted for close to 300 years, its influence continued until the advent of the oil culture in the 1960s. We can hypothesise that the Japanese people's treatment of nature also followed a similar pattern in large cities other than Edo. It would not have been easy for them to support a population of this size over such a long period of time, on a narrow island nation with almost no overseas trade. Given these considerations, the fact that the people of Edo Period Japan did not destroy their environment in order to support their population makes them rather unusual in world history (Tamanoi et. al, 1984: tome XXXVII; Tsuchida, 1986: Ch.7; Murota, 1987; cf. Callicott & Ames, 1989: 289).

The Kantō Plains and Musashino area, where Edo was situated, had poor volcanic earth. This meant that the soil in these regions lacked nutrients and that although there were groves of various kinds of trees, the yield from crops grown on this land was not very good. However, this began to change during the Edo period, when people bartered vegetables for human excrement and the human waste was used as fertiliser. Mould from leaves and other nutrients also caused the soil to become more fertile. They floated down from the mountains via rivers, eventually being caught in paddy fields. The waste water from the citizens' everyday activities was both absorbed by the land and washed away into Edo Bay, where a number of varieties of seafood and seaweed were cultivated. The seafood and seaweed were used as food and products such as dried sardines were used as fertiliser. Apart from a rich diet of seafood, the people mainly ate rice. They also ate birds and other small animals. This custom of near self-sufficiency continued in farming villages until recently. The small amount of arable land on the Japanese archipelago meant that had meat been the main ingredient of the Japanese people's diet, the population of Japan would probably have been less than one fifth of that which was able to survive on a diet of vegetables. (It should be noted that grain, when given to cattle, only produces one tenth of its value in meat.) One of the characteristics of society in the Edo Period was its propensity for recycling, as shown by its efficient use of resources. Resources such as paper, cloth and metal were usually collected and used again. An example is the 'candle-dripping' industry. This trade was solely devoted to collecting the wax drips from used candles in order to combine them, so that they could be used again (Ishikawa, 1990: 21).

The cycle of nutrition and production was self-completing. It brought together the forests, waterways, farming land, urban areas and the ocean without creating pollution, because waste material was consumed within nature's boundaries. I think that it is correct to say that this was a civilisation which conformed to the 'cycle of nature' in its broadest sense. This includes the water cycle, the cycle of living creatures and the everyday industrial activities of human beings. Of course, even people in the Edo Period destroyed individual ecologies and it is true that to a large extent they changed natural things into objects which could be used by human beings. There was sporadic

development of new rice fields, but there was also anti-flood afforestation and other flood control works. Reforestation was also common (see Satō, 1996: 39; Murota, 1982: Ch.7; cf. Simmons, 1994: 152). It seems that the policy of society towards the use of nature was not that of dominating nature, robbing it of its resources and leaving the waste. That policy is reflected in anthropocentrism. The Japanese policy was quite the opposite: it reflected a symbiotic tendency which involved giving life to nature as a partner and human beings living in a way which gives life to that partner. Accordingly, even taking into account the destruction of many individual ecologies, it can be said that in principle it was a civilisation which had the capacity to perpetuate itself, because it conformed to the cycle of nature as part of a larger framework. In contrast, modern industrial society in its current guise does not generally have the capacity to perpetuate itself. This is because of its use of large amounts of energy and the production of a correspondingly large amount of waste. The term 'ecology' has more than one reference point. It can be used in the context of an 'ecology within a particular area', but it can also be used in the context of the 'cycle of nature as part of a larger framework', or in other words, 'ecology' in a macro sense (the biocycle, cycle of living creatures). The destruction of our ecology has gone beyond permitting this ecological destruction within a certain boundary, as defined by the smaller frame. In our industrial society, it goes beyond borders: modern industry ignores the burden being placed on the ecology in its pursuit of progress and in doing so it destroys its own micro-ecology and thus the larger framework.

In the case of nomadic people, even if the environment around them was destroyed, they could seek a new environment — the next useable frontier — and move there. There are conditions for the emergence of the anthropocentric view of nature, a view which posits the importance of human beings' dominance of nature and is prevalent amongst nomadic people. Western modern industrial societies rob nature of its resources and throw away the waste because they developed on the premise that in some larger sense, another frontier exists. To civilisations of this type, the existence of a frontier is based on the premise that the cycle of nature is part of a larger framework which will [eventually] materialise. If all the frontiers were to disappear, the place of nature's cycle in the larger framework would be destroyed and civilisation itself could not continue (see Singer, 1993: Ch.3).

In contrast, agricultural people — who are settled and thus bound to the earth — are likely to learn that destroying their farmland means that they will lose the basis of their own existence. Accordingly, this type of agricultural society, even if they do use the ecology of the area, must give rise to a culture and view of nature that is consistent with the idea of nature's cycle being part of a larger framework.

In the latter part of the Edo Period, it appears that, in order to make way for salt and mining industries, the destruction of the forest along the shores of the Inland Sea (*Setonaikai*) progressed quite considerably. This lumber was not required for any purpose and, if development had been forced to continue, there would have been no nature left in this area. This probably would have meant that in order for society to perpetuate itself, it would have been necessary to limit the population and limit industries which were connected to the destruction of nature. If society could not have survived without doing this, the Japanese people would have had to choose between two scenarios: follow the path of limitation, or perish. We will never know which the

Japanese people would have chosen, because before they were forced to make a decision a 'frontier' was discovered in the form of international trade.

II The order of value and the General Rule

According to one Western tradition originating in Judeo-Christian thought, all beings are located within an hierarchical order of value. This order is known as the 'Great Chain of Being'. Human beings have a position in the order which is superior to animals or plants because they were made by God in God's image. God is at the apex of this order, followed by the angels, then human beings, animals and plants. Non-living creatures are in the lowest position. This schema establishes an order on the basis of existence and the belief that human beings, unlike other animals, have a soul (*tama*). It also reflects the idea of the superiority of human beings and that human beings possess an independent value. The use of this hierarchical ordering method and the idea that God instructed human beings to be dominant over other living creatures as a justification for human beings' dominance of nature, has become the focus for criticism and attack by contemporary environmental ethics scholars (White, 1967; Singer, 1986; Plumwood, 1993).

According to traditional Western theories of ethics, 'value' is divided into 'intrinsic value' (*honraiteki kachi*) and 'instrumental value' (*shudanteki kachi*). It was generally thought that humans possess an intrinsic value and that animals other than humans only possess instrumental value. This is one form of traditional anthropocentrism. Although anthropocentric thinking has been widely criticised, here I will offer only the following three points in criticism. These criticisms, as I will explain later, also apply to the position which has taken the place of anthropocentrism, namely sentientism.

(1) *The ambiguity of the borders of the human.* Because the lives of human beings are considered to have a special value in most societies, the idea that 'thou shall not kill a human being' is recognised as the general moral rule. The problem with this rule is deciding the definition of 'human': where do we draw the line? The status of a fetus, for example, presents us with a number of difficult questions. Up to what stage of a pregnancy is it acceptable to kill a fetus? Is it ever acceptable? There are also problems when we attempt to define human beings in biological terms for the purpose of an organ transplant. Indeed, grave suspicions exist about life-prolonging treatments developed by modern medical science. It is impossible to reconcile the definition of a human being with the contradictions between the theory and actual application of the general rule (Yamauchi, 1991: Ch. 9).

(2) *What is human life?* The answer to this question can only be provided by considering a further two questions: 'what should be described as a human being?' and 'what is it not necessary to kill?' The first question is an issue of 'description' and the second is an issue of 'precept' (see Hare, 1963). It should be noted that there is no inherent connection between the biological fact that one is a member of the human race and the moral precept that 'thou shall not kill a human being'. In a society that practices, for example, *mabiki* (the killing of newborn babies in order to reduce the number of children the family must support) and *hara-kiri* (ritual suicide), a general rule such as 'thou shall not kill a human being' has an ambiguous meaning. If the rule must

recognise many exceptions it cannot be said to be the paramount rule of that society, since other factors are taken into consideration.

(3) *The general rule and the concept of 'superiority'*. Let us consider an example. A couple already have two children and do not want any more. There is an unwanted pregnancy and just when they have decided to terminate the pregnancy, their two children die in an accident. Due to this, the couple decide that they want to keep and raise the fetus. When it was a choice between two or three children, the parents decided that it was better to have two and the fetus was viewed as unnecessary. However, when it was a choice between one child and no children, the couple decided that they wanted at least one and the fetus became important. In other words, the decisive factor between 'necessary' and 'unnecessary' in this context was not the General Rule; it was a question of weighing up the possible options and as such the concept of good and evil depended upon the options. In the case of this couple, consideration for their family's circumstances took precedence over the General Rule of respecting human life. A country's population policy may reflect the priority given to human life in that society, however, it also depends upon other circumstances which exist in that country. In light of the current threat to our world from our continuing destruction of the environment, population control has become an important consideration. In this context, it is not the General Rule and its corresponding value order that decides which considerations will take precedence, but the larger concern for the relationship between human beings and the environment (Yamauchi 1991: Ch.5).

In order for the General Rule — 'thou shall not kill a human being' — and the corresponding value dualism which suggests that human beings possess an intrinsic value and other things possess only an instrumental value to be true, it would be necessary for all related circumstances to be the same in every situation and every society. However, circumstances are seldom identical, and the General Rule is usually only one consideration amongst many. The General Rule of 'thou shall not kill a human being' is commonly applied ordinary or very general cases, however, it encompasses many exceptions. In exceptional cases other considerations are given greater precedence than the General Rule. In this case, the final decision must be made after comparing the other options within the larger context. Drawing a line based on certain biological characteristics and establishing a General Rule recognises that at some level there is a general situation to which it is applicable, however, the General Rule must include many exceptions and this will be relative to the degree of development of the society. The rule can never be final. When other considerations take precedence over the established rule it becomes temporarily ineffective, and eventually it must be exchanged for another rule.

III Sentient and non-sentient dualism: Indian Buddhism and Singer's Sentientism

The brutal environment in which the people of India lived gave rise to the perception that the very act of living was suffering. They also believed in reincarnation. The Indian people thought that when a human being died their body perished, but their 'spirit' (*kokoro*) was not extinguished. Their 'spirit' would be reborn in the body of another

human being, or an animal other than a human being, as a reward for their past deeds.¹ It stands to reason that if the act of living meant suffering, then continual reincarnation meant eternal suffering. Accordingly, the goal of Buddhist salvation was to escape from suffering, or in other words, to be free of the suffering of reincarnation. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is 'to extinguish one's spirit and become Buddha'. Both human beings and animals have a 'spirit', which may be exchanged. They possess the capacity of reincarnation because both groups belong to the sentient world. This capacity is only shared by sentient beings and means that apart from their physical attributes, which will perish, there is no definitive value system which distinguishes human beings from animals.

There is one qualification to this seeming equality between human beings and other animals which cannot be ignored. It relates to the Buddhist goal of 'extinguishing one's spirit and becoming Buddha'. Only human beings have the capacity to become an enlightened person (Buddha). In order to become Buddha, animals other than human beings must be repeatedly reincarnated until they eventually take the form of a human being. However, for those things which are deemed not to have a 'spirit', such as grass, trees, mountains and rivers, the situation is worse because only those things with a 'spirit' can become Buddha. Unlike animals, which possess a 'spirit', these things belong to the non-sentient world (the world of useable objects) and can never become Buddha. This means that the difference between sentient and non-sentient is far greater than the difference between human beings and animals. It gives rise to a theory of dualism which creates a sharp distinction between the sentient and non-sentient worlds. It effectively excludes those parts of nature which are non-sentient from its consideration and reflects a completely sentient-centred world.

The English utilitarian thinker Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) argued that to the extent that animals have the ability to feel pain, they must be included in moral considerations. The contemporary Australian ethicist Peter Singer (1946-), elaborated on Bentham's arguments and began the animal liberation movement. The Buddhist belief in the dual nature of animate and inanimate objects corresponds to Singer's distinction between 'beings who have feeling' (sentient beings) and 'beings which do not have feeling' (non-sentient beings). Singer's ideas deny the anthropocentric view of the world and eliminate the ethical boundaries which separate humans and other animals. In the field of contemporary ethics he has contributed to the revival of sentient-centred ideas which share commonalities with Buddhism. Although Singer's animate-centred theory, or sentientism, is based on a traditional Western anthropocentric view of the world, his ideas gave birth to an antithesis. The main thrust of Singer's position is that appropriate consideration must be given to the interest of beings with feelings (sentient beings) in avoiding suffering and finding comfort. If a sentient being has a large stake in this, they must be given an equivalently large degree of consideration; if their interest is less, so should be the consideration given to them. To say that human beings should be paid special consideration simply because they are human beings is nothing more than discrimination according to species, or anthropocentrism. Singer's fundamental theory of the equality of interests of species has not only had a large impact on the field of

¹ Note: The fundamental interpretation of Buddhism presented in this work is beyond the scope of the author's professional expertise and relies solely on the collected works of Kobayashi Nobuhiko. The author is greatly indebted to the scholarship of Mr Kobayashi.

environmental ethics, but has also become an influential argument in the development of the field of bio-ethics (Singer, 1991).

Singer's position of pointedly distinguishing between sentient and non-sentient beings has many practical similarities with the sentientism found in Buddhism. They overlap in many aspects, including ideas such as choosing a lifestyle which does not include killing animals and using them for food, because animals are also sentient beings. Of course, the basis for the decision is different: for Buddhists, who seek to become Buddha, it is a preliminary step of the reincarnation process; in contrast, for Singer, it is based on the biological fact that both human beings and non-human animals have an interest in avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. However, the idea of reincarnation also assumes that animals apart from human beings share similar feelings of pleasure and pain to those felt by human beings. If other animals cannot share those feelings of pleasure and pain, then it is difficult to conceive of a human being's spirit being able to be reincarnated into the body of another animal. The standard for the differentiation between beings is not a human being's ability to reason, but the ability to feel. The common ability to feel forms a basis for the ability to empathise.

Based on theories such as Singer's sentientism, the animal liberation movement has grown into an influential force in contemporary Western-developed nations. It is achieving great results. The social effects have been enormous: most people no longer wear fur, the sale of animal products has declined significantly, there are now regulations against cruel animal experiments and the number of vegetarians has increased. The average text on ethics now accords moral consideration for animals the same importance as Kant's ideas on respect for people.

In contrast, people in Japan are yet to fully comprehend the concept of 'animal liberation'. This is despite the fact that in Japan even a three-year-old child knows the saying '*jinkaku no songen*' ('respect for people'). Considered from a Western-developed nation's viewpoint, the Japanese failure to embrace Singer's animal liberationism and vegetarianism is quite extraordinary, because these ideas are extremely close to the Buddhist view of animals. Japan is considered not to have a tradition of anthropocentrism and to have long been accepting of Buddhist cultural influences. Furthermore, its population has traditionally led a vegetarian lifestyle. How is it that such a nation has virtually ignored ethical considerations to do with animals? How is it that out of all the developed nations, only Japan has not felt their full impact? The misunderstanding reflected in these questions arises from the belief that Japan has a tradition of accepting Buddhism. I argue that if this belief were to be replaced by the idea that Japan never really accepted Buddhism, the answer to these questions would become clear. It can then be argued that it was the need to support the population that led to Japan's tradition of vegetarianism and avoidance of the destruction of their natural environment. These characteristics did not originate in Buddhism. Furthermore, contemporary Japanese have had little to do with this tradition as they embraced anthropocentrism, which has its origins in the West, in their eagerness to 'catch up' with Western nations. Thus they have failed to embrace animal liberationism and vegetarianism in modern times.

Regan's assertion of rights for animals is similar to Singer's stand on animal liberationism (Regan, 1993). The movement is an extension of other connected

movements, such as movements for the rights of slaves, the rights of non-Western people, the restoration of citizen's rights and the rights of women. In more recent times, there has even been concern over the rights of mountains and rivers, the rights of nature and rocks (Nash, 1989: 127ff, 162). This argument suggests that the concept of human rights emphasises that all those who fall within a certain category share certain rights, however, when those rights are asserted, those who are outside the category are clearly discriminated against. Movements which seek the expansion of the concept of rights can thus be seen as an attempt to restore equality to society, but also as a means of dividing it. Because there is no notion of rights in the Eastern tradition, it seems that theories of animal rights and the rights of nature are unlikely to be easily understood in Eastern societies. When Japanese refer to 'human rights', it is difficult to say how seriously they embrace the moral demands which the concept incurs in the West or whether they are just using it as political rhetoric in a society which has accepted the anthropocentrism of Western modernisation.

Before going any further, I will offer a brief critique of Singer's sentientism. The ideas are similar to those that I canvassed with respect to anthropocentrism.

(1)*Where do we draw the line?* Dividing objects into sentient and non-sentient worlds is really an excuse to perpetuate the human viewpoint for the convenience of human beings. From an ecological point of view, sentient and non-sentient objects are mutually dependent and inter-related, so it is difficult to draw a dividing line between the two. Even from a biological viewpoint, there are objects which cannot be classified as either animal or plant. It seems that it is biologically impossible to define with certainty to what extent animals possess feeling in order to give consideration to that feeling. For practical purposes, it must be decided which animals can be eaten and which should not be eaten. However, this poses difficult questions when approached from an ethical point of view. Furthermore, sentientism does not provide a true explanation for the biological cycle. As the workings of the food chain would suggest, all living things (including human beings) exist within nature to use each other for their mutual benefit. They come together in such a way as to make them inter-related and mutually dependent. Sentient beings cannot be seen as leading a gilded existence which sets them apart from the cycle of nature as if they have some special significance (Taylor, 1986).

(2)*The difference between the hierarchy of values and the General Rule.* The differentiation between sentient and non-sentient species gives rise to the General Rule of 'thou shalt not kill any sentient beings', or, 'thou shalt not kill any living thing'. If fully and consistently applied, however, it cannot be considered a universal yardstick. There is a difference between saying that a being does or does not possess 'feeling' and saying that a being does or does not fall within a certain 'species'. Even if we were to temporarily ignore the problem of defining which species possess feeling and which do not, the fact remains that not all animals falling within a certain species are able to feel. Depending on the circumstances they may or may not be able to feel suffering. It is really an issue of whether the being can truly feel pleasure and pain, not a question of whether they fall within a certain species or not. Thus Singer's suggestion that a line be drawn between beings on the basis of species, cannot be used as a definitive guide.

(3) *The hierarchy of values and the notion of superiority.* According to Singer's philosophy, the act of Eskimo people killing a seal and using it for food is justifiable when we consider that there is no other food for them to eat. In this case the interests of the human beings are greater than those of the seal. In a country such as Australia, it is possible that a similar justification might be used for killing and eating introduced animals such as rabbits, because they destroy the natural environment and disturb the ecosystem. Taking this line of thought to its extreme, a similar argument might one day be posited for the killing of whales. Protected in the oceans of both the North and South Pole, whales may one day grow too many in number and threaten the natural environment. Eventually they may have to be culled in a way which attempts to minimise their suffering as much as possible. The rule that 'thou shall not kill a member of another species' is important from an environmental ethics point of view, but the issue of whether that rule is denied or upheld in the context of specific situations really depends on other considerations. These 'other' considerations often take precedence over the original General Rule.

IV Attributing value to the non-sentient world

It is said that there are few references to nature in Buddhist literature. For those people who seek to become Buddha the ideal place is known as *bukkokudo* ('the nation where Buddha exists'). The natural landscape which is to be found in this place is an honest reflection of our contemporary industrial society, even including the devastation which we have wrought on nature. Nature is not portrayed as lush and green, and there is no such thing as plants. Instead, there are luxurious, expensive industrial goods such as buildings, furniture, clothing and ornaments. The artificial plants are made from jewels and precious metals. There are no mountains or oceans. There are rivers, but they are full of water that smells like perfume and the riverbeds are made of gold dust (see Kobayashi² for the reasoning behind this).

According to the Buddhist world view, in order for nature to exist, human beings must exist. Nature does not occur by itself, but is born as a result of human actions. In this way, nature is like a seashell. Just as the secretion from the shell's core forms the raw materials that make another shell, the actions of human beings are the raw materials which make nature. For people who believe in Buddhism, the sole object of interest is human beings. Recognising that for human beings life is suffering, they seek to gain understanding from this suffering. This is their sole purpose. Animals also become an object of consideration because it is possible for the spirit of a human being to be reincarnated in an animal other than a human being. However, interest is only directed towards animals to the extent that they are a possible destination for the human spirit; they are not considered as comprising part of nature itself. There are no references in Buddhist literature which portray the animal kingdom as part of the natural world. The mentality of animal protection is completely alien to the Buddhist mind-set.

² Note: The fundamental interpretation of Buddhism presented in this work (manuscript) is beyond the scope of the author's professional expertise and relies solely on the collected works of Kobayashi Nobuhiko. The author is greatly indebted to the scholarship of Mr Kobayashi.

As I pointed out earlier, in the past the Japanese people maintained their population by adapting their lifestyle so as to live in harmony with nature. The traditional Japanese person's view of nature was predominantly based on an animistic, indigenous view of nature. This was fostered by the Confucianist view of nature that emphasised *tenchi wa taifubo, ningen wa shōtenchi* ('Heaven and Earth are Great Parents, Humans are a small Heaven and Earth') and the Taoist view of nature which taught *muishizen* ('no action, only nature'). In contrast to the Buddhist view of nature which ignores nature by treating it as distinct and unconnected to the sentient world, the Japanese view of nature focuses on the continuity between human society and the natural environment as interdependent entities. It may be difficult to imagine that this view of nature holds true for contemporary Japanese people who have been swept up in modern Western anthropocentrism, however, it is not difficult to imagine that Japanese of the ancient and middle ages, who shared the view of nature I have outlined above, were not able to embrace Buddhism.

Unlike Buddhism, which pays scant interest to nature in the non-sentient world, Singer's sentientism gives us a positive reason to conserve nature. Nature must be protected in order to protect the interests of animals who originate from the world of nature. It follows then, that this position creates a solid ethical foundation for legitimising the preservation of the natural environment: we must preserve nature because we are bound to give consideration to the interests of future generations in the sentient world. With Singer as one of its idealistic leaders, animal liberation movement targets the cruel treatment of animals and the environmental destruction brought about by our industrial society's use of animal breeding factories and cruel, unnecessary experimentation on animals. The fundamental position of Singer's environmental ethics is that nature in the non-sentient world is merely of instrumental value. In other words, because nature exists as a prerequisite for the existence of sentient beings, a new system of ethics is required to protect the environment (Singer, 1993: Ch.8).

To the extent that Singer's position has recognised the essential value possessed by animals as a part of nature and the moral obligation to give them consideration, he has made an enormous contribution towards the overthrow of anthropocentric thought and towards the breaking down of the 'human being versus nature' dualism that goes along with it. He has brought Western thought one step closer to traditional Eastern thought. However, he still uses fundamentally the same logic as the anthropocentric position to explain his environmental ethics. He still cites the existence of human beings as the basis for the need to protect our natural environment. Arguing that we must protect the environment in order to 'protect the interests of human beings' and arguing that we must protect the environment in order to 'protect the interests of sentient beings', amounts to much the same thing. To the extent that the latter includes animals as part of its human ethic, it is a giant step forward, however, it is only one step. For this reason, Singer's position should be described as 'expansionist', rather than 'revolutionary' (Callicott, 1986: 392ff).

By drawing a clear distinction between the world of human beings, or the sentient world, and other parts of the world of nature, Singer's theory fails to overcome the traditional dual value system. The dual structure attributes intrinsic value to the sentient world and only instrumental value to the non-sentient world. On this point, Singer's ideas suffer from the same structural problems as anthropocentrism and Buddhism. All

three recognise a dual structure of 'human beings' (or 'sentient') versus 'nature'. Singer's animal liberationism is linked to popular movements for the liberation of animals. These movements have expanded the concepts of the earlier actions for the liberation of slaves and the more recent rejection of racism which is manifested in movements such as those for the liberation of black people. These liberation philosophies have also gone beyond the liberation of women. In other words, there is a strong tendency to emphasise the discontinuous and discriminatory aspects existing between living things. This preoccupation is reflected in the tradition of Western thought which seeks to order aspects of creation and gives rise to theories such as the 'Great Chain of Being'. (There are those supporters of the 'Great Chain of Being' theory who note that continuity exists between living things, however, they still tend to recognise an ordering) (Lovejoy, 1963: Ch.7).

Apart from recognising a dual structure which distinguishes between human beings and nature, the tradition of Western anthropocentrism has also cemented the superiority of the ideology of human beings' dominance of nature. Now, Western environmental ethics scholars have recognised the pressing need to face environmental dangers, which are now reaching global proportions, and thus the need to come to terms with a logic that can restore the relationship between human beings and nature. In contrast to this, in mainstream traditional Japanese thought, there is no superiority complex which ascribes human beings a higher status than the rest of nature. In general, human beings were merely seen as one of the many parts existing in nature. In Japan, as I have explained, civilisation was based on the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. There was a strong consciousness of the mutual dependency and inter-relatedness of human beings and nature. I think that it is possible to argue that traditional views of nature which emphasised continuity and equality between human beings and nature were widely accepted. Accordingly, there was no need to create an ordering which gave a different value and rank to human beings, animals, plants and other aspects of nature. No thought was given to defining points of discontinuity and discrimination, because there was no consideration given to the idea that some parts of nature might have a different value and that there must be some means of distinguishing between them. The dominant view was a holistic one which incorporated all things as mutually dependent and inter-related. When one considers Japan's ideological background in this way, it becomes apparent why Japan has not embraced animal liberationism and the animal rights movement. The Japanese find it difficult to accept a notion which singles out animals from the rest of nature's creation and then accords them a connection and equality with human beings which is not shared by other aspects of nature. Indeed, such a notion emphasises the discontinuity and inferiority of plants and other elements of nature. Perceptions of the relationship between animals and other parts of nature can be divided into two groups: those which see the relationship as continuous and those which see it as discontinuous. It can also be divided into two classes: equality and inequality. According to these scales, the Japanese view of nature, unlike the Indian and Western view of nature, would fall into the continuous group rather than the discontinuous and be classified as equal rather than unequal.

It may be possible to argue that contemporary Japanese have embraced Western anthropocentrism which views human beings in a special light as beings of value, distinguishable from the rest of creation. In response to this it could be argued that Japan had no choice but to follow the Western path of modernisation after it was forced to

open its doors to the rest of the world; it was the only way that it could survive (Yamauchi, unpub.). Following in the footsteps of the United States of America, Japan has built many animal factories in order to accelerate the greater consumption of meat, the consumption of grain has increased and the environment has been polluted. Even if the suffering of the animals shut up in animal factories continues to increase, when one considers Japan's place in the world today, it is unlikely that there is any threat of foreign pressure for it to put an end to this suffering.

V The enlightenment of all animate things, plants, trees and soil

According to Mahayana Buddhism, only human beings possess the capacity to become Buddha (Buddhahood): animals cannot possess the capacity to become Buddha until their spirit is reincarnated into a human being's body. Moreover, it takes 3.88×10^{59} years of preparation before one can become Buddha. In order for a human being to become Buddha, it takes an enormous amount of time and effort. This is based on the presumption that living is denied because life itself is suffering and that nature itself does not have a value. These ideas are not adhered to by the Japanese people, so it follows that they do not desire to be liberated from their 'suffering' and they also do not feel the need to spend an enormous amount of time in religious preparation (*shūgyō*, the pursuit of knowledge). The expression *shujō jōbutsu* ('the enlightenment of all animate things') originally referred to those living things which possessed the capacity to become enlightened, in other words those which possessed Buddhahood. However in the Japanese context, this expression tends to be interpreted as meaning 'all human beings are inherently enlightened', and it seems that it is used without explicitly distinguishing between it and other interpretations (Kobayashi, unpub: 18; unpub: 15). When Buddhism was introduced to Japan by Saichō (767-822), the ideas of Mahayana Buddhism evolved somewhat. Saichō taught that animals too could be enlightened without changing their form. He emphasised that even animals and minerals have spirits and thus they have the capacity to become Buddha. Kūkai (774-783) was even more positive in his interpretation, teaching that not only did animals and minerals possess Buddhahood, they were already Buddha. This meant that there was no need for them to become enlightened once more. This is where the phrase *sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu* ('the whole of creation possesses Buddhahood') comes from. It has since become an established part of Buddhist teachings in Japan. From this discussion it becomes clear that when Japanese people refer to the words *jōbutsu suru* ('to become enlightened'), they are referring to something completely different to the phenomenon referred to in Indian Buddhism.

In Japan, it is possible to be able to become a 'Buddha' without being a living thing equipped with a ready 'spirit', as envisaged by Buddhism. As such, the identity of the 'Buddha' which the Japanese have in mind is completely alien to the concept of Buddha which exists in Buddhism. Perhaps we could go as far as to say that for the Japanese people, the term 'Buddha' has the status of a loanword and does not have anything to do with the Buddha of Buddhism.

That which the Japanese see as inherent in every living object is a 'soul' (*tama*). According to the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, 'that which is equipped with a ready heart' is recognised as having the 'capacity to become a Buddha'. If we were to view this 'soul' (*tama*), which is inherent in every living object, as the same as the Buddhist 'spirit' (*kokoro*), then it follows that all living objects have the 'capacity to become Buddha'. Japanese people have continued to view the Buddhist 'spirit' to be the same as an object's

‘soul’ for thousands of years without any qualms. When Dōgen said that ‘the sun and the moon and the stars have a spirit’, the word ‘spirit’ was really referring to the Japanese ‘soul’ (*tama*), not the Buddhist ‘spirit’ (*kokoro*) (Kobayashi, unpub: 19).

Instead of embracing Buddhism, the Japanese people gave expression to ancient animistic, indigenous ideas, borrowing the Buddhist vocabulary and calling the newly coded ideas ‘Buddhism’. I have already argued that Japanese people did not want to distinguish between human beings and the world of nature and that they have a tendency to focus on the mutual dependency of humans and nature. Next, I will consider how this is expressed in the idea that ‘the whole of creation possesses Buddhahood’ and in conclusion I will discuss its significance from the viewpoint of contemporary environmental ethics.

Firstly, let us consider the argument for the whole of creation possessing Buddhahood. The teachings of Buddhism make a clear distinction between all animate things (the sentient world) and the non-sentient world. Because Buddhists believe that sentient beings have the capacity to become enlightened, they include animals in their consideration and do not kill animals or eat meat. However, they do not pay any special interest to the world of nature in their deeds. This is a clear expression of their beliefs, where their moral attitude equates their deeds to the Buddhist way of thought. Unification of action and thought can also be seen in anthropocentrism, where the lives of human beings are considered to possess a superior value and this in turn is reflected in the strict rule of ‘thou shall not kill human beings’. If we elaborate on the idea that human beings possess a superior value by saying that ‘sentient beings possess value’, then the strict rule of ‘thou shall not kill human beings’ becomes the strict order that ‘thou shall not kill sentient beings, including animals’. At this point, we find that the notion of contemporary sentientism which emerges from this argument corresponds to the attitudes expressed in Buddhist teachings. Despite this, followers of Buddhist teachings in contemporary Japan, even if they teach that ‘thou shall not kill animals’, usually do not make any effort to stop the custom of eating meat. This means that in reality they have not embraced sentientism, because according to sentientism even animals that are not human beings have value. (By Western ethical scholars’ standards, Buddhists who eat meat lead a contrary existence where reality does not mesh with faith (Singer, 1993: 285 onwards)) The rule that ‘thou shall not kill living things’ becomes no more than an expression which occurs in the Buddhist tradition, mere *tatema*, as people pay lip service to the conventional use of the expression. The other possibility is that those more conscientious believers may find that they experience psychological unrest when an animal is killed, however, this is no more than an expression of a psychological condition, not an ethical decision. In both cases, the rule has lost its influence and is no longer considered an ‘order’; it is no more than a simple ‘description’ of social convention and an idea that exists at the back of one’s mind. Although it is reasonable to expect that a moral order has the power to restrict people’s actions, and that it does have some connection with practice, in this case it remains mere words, having lost the weight of an order.

This is apparent in the belief that human beings will be forgiven for consuming living things such as cows, fish or rice if they give thanks or experience a sensation of regret when they eat. Rather than giving thanks to cows and then eating them, it would be a much more desirable if we were to detest cows and eat less of them. Feelings of thanks and regret are given meaning where they have some connection to practice; this means

that in the future a person who experienced feelings of gratitude or regret about a certain act will not repeat that act. However, if their actions do not reflect their feelings, then it is a mere psychological habit. Eating one's food whilst feeling that to eat living things is a conscious sin, must be seen as not so much meaningless as psychologically harmful. Even when considered as a moral issue, we see that the attitude emerging that completely ignores the rule in practice, yet people with this attitude cite it as an established rule. Their attitude treats the moral rule as having no connection with a person's deeds, the rule having become completely flexible. Eventually, it becomes simply customary interpretation, and the moral rule, which was originally formed in order that it be followed in practice, becomes a hollow expression. People who possess such an attitude are not beholden to the rule, because they either choose to ignore it, or at the very least, they do not understand it.

The concept of 'sentientism', whether we look at Buddhism or at Singer's concept, essentially presents us with a choice about how we should live; whether one's deeds can be balanced with the inherent tension of a universal rule. This includes living by the philosophy which says 'thou shall not kill living things'. Deciding where we should draw the line between human beings and the rest of nature, and to which elements we attribute value, is a question of choosing a certain type of lifestyle. Accordingly, for contemporary Western people, the question of how to live is a choice between following anthropocentrism or following sentientism. Eating meat means not only abandoning vegetarianism, but also not being a sentientist. In contrast, Japanese people have traditionally ignored this distinction, or perhaps it is more correct to say that they have not observed this sort of universal rule. Because Japanese people perceive human beings and nature as being continuous, and emphasise their equality, it is possible to argue that for the Japanese, it does not matter which lifestyle they choose, it will not have any effect on the way they live. In other words, when Japanese people talk of 'the enlightenment of all animate things', it is not clear whether they are referring to anthropocentrism, which excludes animals, or sentientism, which includes animals. Indeed, it can be said that they do not make any such distinction.

I will now turn to the topic of the enlightenment of plants and trees. Contemporary environmental ethics scholars would probably refer to this as a position which gives 'consideration' to even plants as things of 'value'. Paul Taylor's concept of bio-centrism corresponds to this position (Taylor, 1986). According to this theory, we must give moral consideration to all things which are living.

If we ignore the practical issue of how far human beings should be allowed to make use of certain creatures, then deciding what falls into the category of living things is merely a question of biology. However, it becomes an issue of ethical values because we cannot ignore the fundamental issue of human beings' existence being based on the use of living creatures as food. If human beings do not eat grains such as rice or wheat, and vegetables and fruit, they cannot go on living. The words 'thou shall not kill things with feelings' have a completely different practical impact to the words 'thou shall not kill beings with no nervous system and no spirit': the latter is impossible in reality. It is completely meaningless for us to interpret respect for plants as living things, as meaning an order not to eat 'individual living things'. In the case of a rare species, where destroying an individual living thing may mean the extinction of that species, they possess value because of their rarity. In that situation, we can understand the value of

the living creature. In this context, the words ‘we must not destroy a living thing which is a prerequisite for the existence of human beings’ (*ningen no sonzai no zentei de aru seimeien o hokai shite wa naranai*) become quite easy to understand and justify. Once again, it comes down to a question of comparing the various choices. Deciding the value of a particular living thing presents us with the same problem as deciding the value of a human being: there are always other considerations which need to be taken into account and these considerations depend on the individual case. Compare, for example, the value of human beings and rice. If human beings do not eat rice, they will starve. In this situation the value of the rice is subordinate to the value of human beings. Then compare the situation of rice seed versus a human being. If someone were to eat the seeds which grow into rice plants, there would be no rice harvest the next year and human beings would starve. In this situation, the seeds have an important value. It is possible that there are situations where the value of such seed is greater than that of an individual human being. However, in most cases, the life of a human would take precedence over the seed. Similarly, when it comes to giving value to individual plants, their existence will always be subordinate to other things which are considered to have greater value, including the convenience and comfort of the lives of human beings and the ability to sustain the population. Even if we were to emphasise the idea that in general living things possess value because they are living beings, this becomes meaningless when we consider the many other things to which their value is subordinate.

Albert Schweitzer taught that we should have ‘reverence for life’, an attitude of biocentrism. When he built a hospital in Africa, he avoided using trees which were healthy. It seems that he determined whether or not it was appropriate to kill these living things by looking for bacteria through a microscope. This was a compromise between the ideas of anthropocentrism and biocentrism which put Schweitzer well before his time, living as he did in an age of production which had not yet developed an environmental conscience. Schweitzer’s idealism is laudable, but he was really only following his own interpretation of the General Rule that, ‘thou shall not kill a living thing’ (Singer, 1993: 278f). He may have been trying to save healthy trees and build a hospital to save ailing patients, but in the process he killed bacteria. Does it follow then that bacteria are not living things? If we argue that living things should be revered without discrimination, it becomes impossible to answer the question of ‘which living things take precedence’. We must create an order of superiority or the justification for actions such as treating the sick disappear.

There are two ways in which the concept of the ‘enlightenment of plants and trees’ (*sōmoku jōbutsu*) can be interpreted. It may be interpreted as a ‘description’ which indicates certain circumstances, or, it may be interpreted as a kind of ‘order’ which instructs us as to the way those circumstances should be. First of all, let us consider the interpretation which says that the concept of the ‘enlightenment of plants and trees’ means that the world of plants is inherently enlightened and it has value as it is, thus, it is necessary to recognise this. In this case, the idea that the ‘plants are enlightened’ means that because the present circumstances must be recognised, even in a case such as Easter Island where all of the plants have been destroyed and humans and animals became unable to live there, in practice there would be no order which dictates that the forests must be restored. Or perhaps, the world of plants can be seen as an object of human beings’ emotional compassion. However, in that case, because it is possible that

the aesthetic, emotional value which is possessed by nature can be expressed in, for example, the music of Mozart or a picture by Picasso, the idea that we must protect nature at all cost (because the plant world is inherently enlightened), does not eventuate.

Let us compare that with the interpretation which grants plants and trees Buddhahood. By interpreting the phrase 'the enlightenment of plants and trees' to mean that plants and trees have Buddhahood, plants and trees become objects of value which must not be destroyed, similar to the position of biocentrism. This position suffers from the following inconsistency: the support of the whole sphere of living things above ground is an indispensable condition for the existence of sentient beings. However, the function of an individual living thing can be partially substituted for by another living thing, or, even if an ecology were partially destroyed, if it is maintained at a limit which does not exceed the capability of the whole, other parts will replace it. This position does not provide a motivation for the protection of individual plants and trees.

Next, I would like to consider the concept of the 'enlightenment of soil' (*kokudo jōbutsu*). It would be reasonable to assume that because of the apparent differences between the meaning of the phrases 'the enlightenment of plants and trees', and 'the enlightenment of soil', that there is some debate as to the boundaries of these two concepts. Even the most trivial differences between Western scholars of environmental ethics, give rise to criticism and attack, which in turn spurs scholars to present arguments in their defence as they attempt to explain their own stance. In Japan, however, the seeming disparity between the concept of 'plants and trees' as opposed to 'soil' being enlightened, has not led to any great debate. It seems that no real distinction is drawn between the two and that no thought is given to the possibility that inconsistencies may exist between the two concepts.

The concept of the enlightenment of soil, if anything, corresponds to Leopold's land ethic (Callicott, 1993). In the West, whether one chooses to follow biocentrism or whether one chooses to follow the concept of land ethics, usually involves tension and much critical thought. Japanese followers of Buddhism, however, simply shifted from the 'enlightenment of plants and trees' to the 'enlightenment of soil'. The 'harmonious' co-existence of these phrases results more from the difficulty of distinguishing between them, rather than a lack of conscious effort in making the distinction.

VI The contemporaneous destruction of nature and the quest for enlightenment

Singer's sentientism is based on the fact that human beings and other animals possess the common feature of 'feeling'. He provides numerous arguments which support the notion that we should demolish the barrier of species which exists between human beings and other animals. Singer suggests, for example, that those animals which are regarded as higher animals for the purpose of the theory of evolution, have a nervous system which is similar to that of human beings; in fact, ninety-nine percent of a chimpanzees' genes are the same as a human beings. However, the concept of sentientism still requires that a distinction be drawn between sentient and non-sentient, because in order to decide which animals we should not eat, we must decide which animals will be attributed the possession of feeling. The boundary is drawn between a prawn and a shellfish (Singer, 1991: 216). Herein lies the fundamental problem with sentientism. Even if we were to disregard the realities of the eco-system and the food

chain, how are we as human beings to know which animals have a nervous system and can feel suffering? There are various species which cannot be categorised as animal or plant. In other words, 'the great chain of being' is continuous. As a practical problem, take for instance the question of what human beings should eat. As I have mentioned before, rather than the biological fact of whether the thing which is to be eaten will feel suffering or not, it is often the case that other considerations are given precedence when we are faced with the question of whether to eat it or not. There is both continuity and discontinuity between 'sentient' and 'non-sentient', which corresponds to the continuity and discontinuity which exists between 'human being' and 'animal'. Furthermore, when we consider the continuity in ecology which includes continuity between plants, soil, microscopic organisms (germs), water and the air, then it becomes even more difficult to make a distinction even between 'plants' and 'soil'. Ecology is like a sliding scale upon which all these appear. In reality, the movement away from human domination to animal liberation, becomes a movement away from human domination, to the liberation of plants, liberation of rivers and liberation of nature (Nash, 1989: Ch.6). If we were to extend the liberation of human beings to the liberation of nature, and the rights of human beings to the rights of nature, all beings would become liberated. However, all beings having rights does not mean that the world will become a better place. There will always be conflict between the liberty of one being as opposed to the liberty of another, and the rights of one are bound to collide with the rights of another. Other considerations would take precedence over 'liberty' and 'rights' to such an extent that there could be no fundamental rule in practice. What is the difference between a world where the whole of creation, every being without exception, is accorded liberty and rights, and a world where there is absolutely no consciousness of liberty or rights? If we were to accord human beings the unilateral right to 'live in liberty' or the unilateral right to 'pursue extravagance', we would not only bring about the destruction of the environment, we would be increasingly limiting the rights and liberty of nature. In order to restore the liberty and rights of nature, it becomes necessary to greatly limit the liberty and rights of human beings. In certain contexts, the debate on liberty and rights is valid, at a certain level it may even be necessary and indispensable. However, rights alone do not provide a conclusive solution to the problem, and their existence makes it necessary to debate the order of superiority of conflicting liberties and rights.

Japanese people interpreted the idea that 'human beings possess Buddhahood' very broadly, extending it to encompass the enlightenment of all animate things, plants, trees and soil. Dōgen argued that 'the sun and the moon and the stars have a spirit: by reason of their having a spirit, these things are living, and by reason of their being living things, they possess Buddhahood' (Kobayashi, unpub: 18). This means that the concept of enlightenment is extended to the whole cosmos. Human beings and animate things, sentient and non-sentient, plants and rocks: take away the distinction between these groups and all that remains is continuity. It is difficult to comprehend the difference between a society which recognises that everything, without exception, is enlightened, and a society which does not recognise Buddhahood in anything at all. By teaching that plants, trees and soil are enlightened, we foster the sentiment in children that we should take care of nature. If this is done, the idea can also be seen as possessing educational value. However, if it does not possess a practical connection to the protection of the environment, then no matter what the religious significance of the teaching, as a source of education on the environment it has almost no meaning at all.

If the idea that plants, trees and soil are enlightened refers to a situation where nature is necessarily left untouched and as it is, then questions about our right to destroy nature, or our duty to restore the nature that we have destroyed, never arise. Some people preach that the plants, trees and soil are enlightened, but passively look on as the environment is destroyed by the industrial society in which they indirectly participate. Other people do not believe in the possibility of becoming Buddha at all, and even curse the environment with their words, but choose a lifestyle which does not destroy the environment. The attitude of the latter is far superior to that of the first. Preaching that the plants, trees, soil and their surroundings all possess Buddhahood is not a particularly useful concept when forming a conscious decision on this issue of whether it is better to change the environment of a certain region and develop it in order to make it conform to the needs of human beings, or whether it is better to leave nature as it is and protect it. In other words, this teaching does not have the capacity to become a standard upon which to base a decision, when people are forced to choose between two such courses. This is because this concept does not refer to 'nature as it ought to be'; it only acknowledges 'nature as it is'.

Based on their fearful recognition that contemporary environmental destruction has reached global proportions, Western scholars of ethics started a new school of investigation: environmental ethics. They began by criticising traditional anthropocentrism. A number of positions eventually arose in response to the question of how human beings should consider nature and how they should treat it. In contrast, the idea that plants, trees and soil are enlightened comes from an era when environmental dangers were unknown. It is quite natural that an idea such as this in its original form would be quite useless when applied to contemporary circumstances. Despite this, until the Japanese embraced modernisation and the Western anthropocentrism upon which modernisation is based, nature in Japan was comparatively well protected. It seems that the Japanese had a view of nature which was different to that of Western anthropocentrism. I think that it is correct to say that this view had a tendency to emphasise the mutual connection between human beings and nature. The concept of the plants, trees and soil being enlightened is merely one expression of this tendency.³

³ For further reading on the impact of this tendency on environmental ethics, see Yamauchi, 1994.

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