



Module 27

Religion and Animal Welfare

Student Activities

Questions

Because the topics raised in this module are of a religious and philosophical nature, it is likely that there will not be clear 'right' and 'wrong' answers to these questions. It is intended that the questions allow the student to use the examples to describe 'views' and 'interpretations' of the cases rather than to reiterate factual answers. In this context, the sample answers provided should be seen as a best practice guide.

- 1. Briefly describe two animals who are viewed as sacred by some communities and religions. Does their special status necessarily mean that they receive high levels of care?**

(4 marks)

Sacred monkeys, originating from 'temple' populations, are seen in many Asian countries. They may reach high populations in urban areas and may have a complex and sometimes incompatible relationship with the local people. They are likely to be well fed, but may not demonstrate 'natural' behaviours, and some 'wild' forest populations who come to feeding sites may become completely dependent on humans.

Cows in India – milking cows are protected from slaughter in many states, but can be killed in others. They may be transported long distances to states where slaughter is permitted, presenting a number of welfare issues. Population pressures of cattle in some areas may lead to poor conditions.

- 2. Briefly describe the features of Muslim and Jewish slaughter of cattle, sheep and goats. What process is not used during Muslim and Jewish slaughter that is widely adopted in most other cultures?**

(4 marks)

Muslim slaughter (*dhabh* or *zabiha*) is carried out by any 'sane' Muslim (male or female) and produces halal meat. It requires the use of a sharp knife and for the slaughterman to utter Allah's name at the moment the animal's neck is cut.

Jewish slaughter (*shechita*) is carried out by a trained slaughterman (*shochet*) who is licensed by a shechita board, and produces kosher meat. The animals must be healthy and without any prior injury. The knife is regularly sharpened and severs the arteries and veins in the neck to cause death by exsanguination.

In many countries, stunning (by electrical or mechanical means) is used to bring about insensibility of the animal within a very short time before death is caused by bleeding out, but this is generally not done in *dhabh* and is not permitted at all in *shechita*.

- 3. Name a religion that includes the sacrifice of animals in its practices. Briefly discuss the implications of religious killing by decapitation or neck-cutting in countries where farmed animals, or companion animals, would not be permitted to be killed by these methods without regulation or stunning.**

(4 marks)

Santeria (also known as La Regla Lucumi) originated in West Africa, and is practised in many countries, but most commonly in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Trinidad, Puerto Rico and the USA. Sacrifices or offerings (*ebó*) of chickens, goats, doves and pigeons are used to mark significant events.

In the USA, a number of legal actions have been brought by the government to try to stop Santeria sacrifices because the animals are killed by methods not permitted for farm animals at a slaughterhouse. The proponents of Santeria, and of other religions that sacrifice animals, including Islam, state that prevention of ritual sacrifice impedes a human right to express religious beliefs.

- 4. Briefly describe an act of ritual slaughter. How does the method of killing used for this animal compare with the methods available commercially in your country?**

(4 marks)

In many parts of the world, sacrifice of sheep, goats, buffalo, oxen and birds is carried out to seek blessings, for festivals, to appease gods, or to mark visits by important guests.

During the Eid-El Kabir festival, Muslims kill sheep and goats by public neck-cutting. The animals are killed by decapitation, or by severing the blood vessels in the neck. This method of killing is very poorly controlled in comparison for the requirements for killing of farmed livestock. In countries where this is unlawful, local legislators have experienced difficulty in enforcing slaughter legislation in the face of claims that this interferes with religious rights.

5. Briefly describe three different cultural/religious views on animals.**(6 marks)****Buddhism**

- Buddhists believe that humans are not more significant than other animals.
- The central tenet of Buddhism is compassion for all life: people are holy if they have pity on all living creatures. *Ahimsa* follows from this, and meat-eating is forbidden.
- Buddhists believe in reincarnation.

Hinduism

- Hindus believe that humans are not more significant than other animals.
- Hindus believe in reincarnation. This means that humans may have been animals in past lives and may be reborn as animals in future lives. So for Hindus animals are human souls in a different bodily form. Not killing animals is important for personal purity and to prevent punishment in one's next incarnation.
- Ahimsa, which means not harming any living creature, is central to Hinduism.
- Related to ahimsa is the concept of *aghnya*, which means not killing other beings.
- Because of these concepts, most Hindus are vegetarian.

Judaism

- Working animals, like people, should be allowed rest on the Sabbath.
- Cruelty to animals is forbidden, as is hunting animals for sport.
- Jews are forbidden to hunt, but meat-eating is left to the individual conscience.
- Jewish religious scholars disagree on whether eating meat is permissible.
- Some argue that because humans are created in God's image we have a responsibility to be kind to animals and that this requires us not to kill them.
- Others argue that because humans are created in God's image, human life has more value than animal life. Therefore, any evidence that human activity harms animals must be weighed up against whether the alternatives would still meet human needs. In this view, slaughtering using the methods required under religious law is humane when it is performed correctly, and eating animals is acceptable.

Christianity

- The subsequent theological view has been that because humans are made in God's image, human life has more value than animal life. Also, the influential Christian scholar Thomas Aquinas argued that because humans are rational but animals are not, this entitles people to use animals. Note that neither he, nor other scholars, ever called for cruel treatment of animals. Rather, specific guidance on the treatment of animals was generally lacking in core Christian teaching through the centuries, although some notable Christian teachers called for compassion for animals.

- In recent decades, the treatment of animals and the natural world has received more attention by scholars of the Christian denominations. For example, one view which overlaps with that of some Jewish scholars is that God's ultimate will is for peace but the world is not yet perfect. As part of that imperfection, killing animals has been permissible but is harder to justify today, in light of increased knowledge of animals' capabilities.
- There are many different Christian denominations. In some of them, abstaining from red meat or from all animal products is required on certain days of the year. Some communities of monks have a vegetarian diet.
- In all cases, these dietary restrictions are primarily for spiritual purification.

Islam

- Islam has core teachings on the humane treatment of animals.
- The Qur'an informs Islamic law (known as sharia law) and Islamic tradition (*hadith*). Those indicate that certain things are permitted to humans – they are *halal* – whereas other things are harmful to humans and therefore not permitted (*haram*). For example, the Qur'an requires that followers of Islam should not eat “carrion, blood, pigs, animals not killed in the name of Allah, animals that die from a violent blow, from a fall, from goring or by being savaged by a wild animal”. All those foods are haram.
- The Qur'an requires humans to be “kind, compassionate, merciful and charitable to all living beings”.
- Some other examples of Islamic teaching about animals are:
 - not killing animals for sport
 - providing pack animals with sufficient rest and food
 - not keeping certain species such as dogs, but not mistreating them either
 - slaughtering animals humanely, according to strict guidelines.

In-class activities

Discussion

A number of suggested discussions are presented here (suggested time, 35 minutes). To align with the teaching in this module, the questions are relatively open and are there to provide a starting point for further explorations of the themes presented here. It is suggested that discussions are initiated in small groups before bringing the whole class together for further feedback.

1. Discuss the status of animals in each of the major religions and how this applies in everyday life with respect to the way animals are treated by different societies.
2. Should the state pass laws to protect animals, even if these laws mean that the beliefs of the some sectors of the population are not respected (for example, banning slaughter that does not involve stunning)? How would *you* reach consensus on the issue of the welfare aspects of religious slaughter?
3. What is the main religion in your home area? Do you think this affects how animals are treated? Why?

Projects

1. Visit your local church, mosque or temple and write down (or photograph if permitted) all references to animals as statues, icons, deities or written references that you can find. Would you classify any religions that you look at as 'inclusive' of animals as religious beings?
2. Some animals are considered sacred. In your local area, are any animals given special religious or protected status? How does this affect the way these animals interact with humans? Is the interaction always a positive one? (If this is not applicable to your area, choose a country/region where this occurs and examine these issues.)
3. Find out about the sacrifice of animals in your area, if any. If you are aware of animals being sacrificed in your community, what method is used to kill the animals? (If this is not applicable to your area, choose a country/region where this occurs and examine these issues.)