

The Ethic of Interdependence: Exploring Ethical Vegetarianism in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and Animal Rights in Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty's *Flesh Phenomenology**

Su-Chen Wu
Fo Guang University

Abstract

Several of the Mahāyāna scriptures, in particular Chapter Eight of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, argue passionately in favour of vegetarianism. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* is celebrated for its doctrine of the consciousness-only school, which posits that all external objects are simply projections of our consciousness. The sūtra meticulously delineates the various levels of individual consciousness, culminating in the *tathāgata-garbha* (*ālayavijñāna*), which underpins one's profound awareness of and connection to the cosmos. The *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine can be interpreted as an expression of *pratītya-samutpāda*, also known as the doctrine of dependent co-arising. When beings purify their *tathāgata-garbha* and attain this enlightened state, they genuinely grasp the inherent relativity in human consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, or "flesh," illuminates

Su-Chen Wu is a professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Fo Guang University, Taiwan. She earned her PhD in English and American Literature from Tamkang University in 2009, with a dissertation titled *A Spiritual Ecology in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Wu's academic interests lie at the intersection of ecocriticism and religious studies. Her work has been featured in notable publications, including "Anthropocentric Obsession: The Perfuming Effects of *Vāsanā* (Habit-energy) in *Ālayavijñāna* in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*," which appeared in *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (2014) (AHCI). Currently, she is pursuing a second PhD at the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Chengchi University, with a focus on comparative religion, particularly Zen Buddhism and Daoism. Email: scwu@mail.fgu.edu.tw

*The author wishes to thank the Ministry of Science and Technology (R.O.C.) for financially supporting this study under Contract No. MOST 106-2410-H-431-022.

(Received 27 September 2023; Accepted 11 March 2024)

our authentic existence in the world. He sees the flesh as the quintessential element from which everything emerges. His ontology of flesh emphasizes the significance of the physical body and proposes a paradigm for ethical relations and for the world's body to flourish. He aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the world, others, himself, and their interrelations. His work offers a potentially significant contribution to ethical concerns, supporting contemporary efforts to gain new ontological insights into animal life. This study explores how the ethical vegetarianism presented in the sūtra, especially in its eighth chapter ("Do Not Eat Meat"), resonates with Merleau-Ponty's animal rights-inclined flesh phenomenology. It concludes that the religious teachings of the sūtra and Merleau-Ponty's flesh phenomenology provide a strong foundation for the aspiration of humanity to create a more ethical world for all species.

Keywords: *tathāgata-garbha*, unborn, ethical vegetarianism, perception, flesh, inter-subjectivity

Introduction

Mahāyāna Buddhism, often referred to as the Great Vehicle, stands as one of the principal branches of Buddhism and is acknowledged as the largest sect globally. Originating in the first century, it branched into various schools, each characterized by unique doctrines. It spread far and wide from its roots in India to regions such as China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan, and eventually emerged as the dominant form of Buddhism. Other notable branches include Theravāda and Vajrayāna (Harvey 189). A distinguishing feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism is its perception of the historical Buddha. Unlike Theravādins, who view him as a human teacher of truth, Mahāyānists regard him as an earthly manifestation of a celestial Buddha. Central to Mahāyāna practice is the veneration of bodhisattvas, important figures devoted to the pursuit of the salvation of all. The bodhisattva path is a quest for enlightenment with the goal of alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings. Compassion, a core virtue of the bodhisattva, is held in equal esteem to wisdom, which is emphasized in ancient Buddhist teachings (Monier-Williams 255). An important ethical stance in Mahāyāna Buddhism is the explicit and unequivocal prohibition of meat consumption in its scriptures. According to Schmithausen, by around 400 AD, Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures had integrated a vegetarian dietary code into its precepts, directly challenging existing practices related to meat consumption (Schmithausen 190). Several Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, *Aṅgulimāliya Sūtra*, and *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, ardently oppose meat-eating (Schmithausen 189-91). Additionally, the *Brahma Net Sūtra* mandates vegetarianism. Through its doctrinal developments and ethical stances, Mahāyāna Buddhism has significantly shaped the religious and cultural landscapes of the regions it has touched, promoting a path that emphasizes both compassion and wisdom.

The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* holds a pivotal position within Mahāyāna Buddhism. Officially titled *Saddharmalaṅkāvatāro nāma mahāyānasūtram* (A Mahāyāna Sūtra called *Laṅkāvatāra Containing the Noble Orthodox Teaching of Buddhism*), this scripture is instrumental in articulating the sect's orthodox teachings (Suzuki, *Studies* 3). The sūtra delves into numerous critical Mahāyāna doctrines, addressing them both philosophically and theologically. It is frequently associated with the Indian Yogācāra tradition due to its comprehensive examination of key doctrines fundamental to this school. Within the Mahāyāna Yogācāra school, the sūtra is of paramount importance as it forms the basis of the school's philosophical framework. One of the most profound teachings of the sūtra is how it identifies Buddha-nature (*tathāgata-garbha*) with *ālayavijñāna*, emphasizing consciousness as the ultimate reality.

According to the sūtra, all worldly objects, experiences, names, and forms are mere projections of the mind. This perspective underscores the mind-only principle, affirming the absolute essence of *ālayavijñāna* or *tathāgata-garbha* (Suzuki, *Studies* 179). Notably, the sūtra dedicates an entire chapter to the denunciation of meat consumption, asserting emphatically the importance of a bodhisattva, the ideal practitioner in the Mahāyāna tradition, abstaining from eating meat. This chapter is the focus of the discussion in this paper, highlighting the ethical implications of the sūtra's teachings on dietary practices. Through its profound philosophical insights and ethical directives, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* significantly contributes to the doctrinal and practical dimensions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, reinforcing its core principles and guiding the conduct of its adherents.

In this paper, I also explore the phenomenological discourses of prominent twentieth-century French philosopher Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Although he did not write extensively about animals, his work offers significant contributions to the ethical considerations underlying contemporary efforts to develop new ontological insights into animal life. His body of work remains influential in contemporary European philosophy, providing a framework for examining the diverse meanings and experiences inherent in the natural and animal world through his phenomenology. Two of his notable works, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), challenge conventional philosophical perspectives and offer ontological and epistemological tools necessary to describe the world and our place within it. Through his phenomenological approach, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ethical and ontological dimensions of our interactions with the animal world. In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, he states, "True philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world" (xx). For Merleau-Ponty, the aspects of an object revealed to an individual are dependent upon their bodily position. He seeks to transition from a phenomenology of consciousness to a philosophy of being, initiating a relational ontology centered on human beings' direct and embodied existence in the world. *Phenomenology of Perception* introduces his concept of existential phenomenology, emphasizing a "rediscovery" of the body and advocating a return to the essence of things (198-99). Unlike traditional consciousness-centered phenomenology, his approach focuses on a hermeneutical phenomenology of the body. This perspective aims to look at things themselves, emphasizing the fundamental role of the body in our perception and understanding of the world. In his final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, he introduces the concept of "the flesh," which he posits as the fundamental substance that constitutes both the body and the world. To him, the human body is merely a fold in the flesh of the world, emphasizing the

intrinsic interconnectedness between the individual and their environment: “[The flesh] is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body” (146). The body is composed of the flesh, through which we perceive both the world and ourselves. By focusing on the concept of the flesh, he bridges the gaps between mind and body, and self and others, moving away from a metaphysical perspective centered on the individual. Instead, he promotes a relational ontology that highlights our direct, bodily interaction with the world. Despite stopping short of dictating ethical principles, his phenomenology provides a foundation for rethinking humanity’s relationship with nature, encouraging a more holistic worldview and profoundly influencing the way we reflect on our existence and our interactions with animals. Through his insights, we are invited to reconsider our ethical and ontological positions, fostering a deeper and more integrated understanding of our place within the natural world.

Merleau-Ponty’s insights have profoundly shaped my understanding of the human condition and our relationship with non-human animals, and have led me to re-evaluate our ethical responsibilities towards animals. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* fervently advocates for vegetarianism in an entire chapter dedicated to condemning meat consumption. As a Buddhist and vegetarian, I am deeply influenced by Buddhist teachings on moral obligations, which emphasize a profound concern for all forms of life. By synthesizing the teachings of the sūtra with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, we can establish a solid foundation for striving towards a more ethical world that prioritizes the welfare of all species. In this study, I explore the parallels between the *tathāgata-garbha* concept from the sūtra, which encompasses the cosmic body and the notion of Buddha-nature as the seed of compassion, and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, highlighting how these ideas underscore the interconnectedness between human and non-human realms. An examination of these concepts makes clear how Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy can be critically applied to discussions about vegetarianism found in the sūtra. Furthermore, this study examines how the sūtra’s endorsement of vegetarianism is intricately connected to Buddhist thought on the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

Between approximately 420 and 704, the sūtra was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese four times.¹ Two Tibetan translations and a version of

¹ The earliest one is attributed to Dharmarakṣa in the fifth century (Suzuki, *Studies* 5). The first extant Chinese translation is 楞伽阿跋多羅寶經 [Taishō Tripitaka 670], translated by Guṇabhadra in 443 and divided into four fascicles (Nanjio viii-ix). The second is 入楞伽經 [Taishō Tripitaka 671], translated by Bodhiruci in 513 (Suzuki, *Studies* 6). The third is 大乘入楞伽經 [Taishō Tripitaka 672], translated by Śikṣānanda from 700 to 704 and divided into seven fascicles (Nanjio viii-ix).

the Sanskrit text are preserved in Nepal (Suzuki, *Studies* 13-15). It was also rendered from Sanskrit into Japanese by the eminent Zen master Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Additionally, Suzuki translated it from Sanskrit into English, which is the version predominantly referred to in this study.

Literary Review of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Philosophy and Animal Rights

Several studies on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy and animal rights suggest that humans comprehend the world through interactions with other animals and non-sentient entities. These works provide valuable insights into the connection between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and animal rights. Ted Toadvine, an authority on Merleau-Ponty's ideas, delves into phenomenology's focus on animality and emphasizes the animal aspect of human existence and the intricate relationship between animals and humanity in "The Time of Animal Voices." In "Merleau-Ponty and the Generation of Animals," Bryan Smyth argues that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological insights reveal an underlying ontology of interspecificity, which projects a normative vision of decentered humanism. Simon P. James, in "Phenomenology and the Problem of Animal Minds," published in *Environmental Values*, illustrates that the human mode of existence is inherently a "being-with" non-human animals, paralleling our "being-with" other humans, demonstrating how a phenomenological approach can reveal the diverse ways we relate to non-human animals. Louise Westling's *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language* is an interdisciplinary exploration that integrates Merleau-Ponty's philosophy with evolutionary biology, animal studies, and literature. Westling claims there is evolutionary continuity between human cultural and linguistic behaviors and the semiotic activities of other animals. David Dillard-Wright examines Merleau-Ponty's texts through the lens of animality in *Ark of the Possible: The Animal World in Merleau-Ponty*, arguing that Merleau-Ponty's concept of "interanimality" elucidates the connections between humans and other creatures, suggesting new directions for philosophical anthropology, environmental ethics, and animal philosophy. Regarding the intersection of Buddhist philosophy and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Jin Y. Park and Gereon Kopf's *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* explores a novel mode of philosophizing through a comparative study of Merleau-Ponty and such prominent Buddhist thinkers as Nagarjuna, Chinul, Dogen, Shinran, and Nishida

Kitaro. While the book states that Merleau-Ponty offers a philosophy where traditional opposites encounter mutual penetration, it does not address animal rights and vegetarianism.

Literary Review of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and Vegetarianism

The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* firmly establishes Buddhism as a tradition free from meat consumption. Several studies have examined the vegetarian ethos presented in the eighth chapter of the sūtra, highlighting its challenge to the previously accepted meat-permissive dietary code and its efforts to counteract opposition within the Buddhist community. In “Manipulating the Memory of Meat-Eating: Reading the *Laṅkāvatāra*’s Strategy of Introducing Vegetarianism to Buddhism,” Hyoung Seok Ham supports the assertion that vegetarianism in Indian Buddhism is mainly a response to external criticism rather than an intrinsic Buddhist doctrine (136). This work examines how the sūtra introduces a new dietary standard, which conflicted with the existing monastic regulations that permitted monks to consume meat considered pure under specific conditions. Karam Tej Singh Sarao, in his presentation “Buddhism and Animal Rights” at the Fourth Chung Hwa International Conference on Buddhism: The Role of Buddhism in the 21st Century (2002), argues that the Mahāyāna school was a key advocate for active compassion towards animals and vegetarianism. His paper quotes from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* to emphasize the imperative of vegetarianism within this tradition. Śraddhāpa Welsh’s master’s thesis, *Food for Bodhisattvas: An Intertextual Study of the Māṃsabhakṣaṇaparivarta of the Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, provides a detailed examination of the sūtra’s chapter on meat consumption (entitled *Māṃsabhakṣaṇaparivarta*) alongside related Indian texts to offer a comprehensive analysis of its teachings. Stephanie Kaza’s “Western Buddhist Motivations for Vegetarianism” explores two studies based on survey data to reveal a broad spectrum of practices regarding meat consumption among Western Buddhists and Buddhist centers. These surveys indicate that Buddhist principles often conflict with Western justifications for meat-eating and thus lead to differing conclusions about dietary choices. Bronwyn Finnigan’s “Buddhism and Animal Ethics,” which offers a philosophical exploration of key Buddhist perspectives and arguments concerning animal welfare, discusses the Buddha’s teachings on nonviolence and reconstructs five arguments from early Indian Buddhism that aim to extend the principle of nonviolence to animals. Through these various studies, we can see that the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*’s advocacy

for vegetarianism was not only a major doctrinal shift but also a reflection of broader ethical considerations within Buddhist practice.

The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

The foundational principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism are encapsulated in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, a seminal text from around 400 AD. The eighth chapter, titled “Do Not Eat Meat,” is particularly renowned for its strong advocacy of ethical vegetarianism as the Buddha unequivocally prohibits the consumption of animal flesh under any circumstances. The interlocutor, Mahāmāti, a bodhisattva-mahāsattva, seeks instruction on vegetarianism to better equip himself and other bodhisattvas in guiding sentient beings toward the ultimate goal of Buddhahood. He begins by criticizing the Buddha’s earlier allowance of meat consumption, questioning its compatibility with the practice of vegetarianism if it were to become a dietary standard. He states:

Blessed One, even those philosophers who hold erroneous doctrines and are addicted to the views of the Lokayata such as the dualism of being and non-being, nihilism, and eternalism, will prohibit meat-eating and will themselves refrain from eating it. How much more, O World Leader, he who promotes one taste for mercy and is the Fully-Enlightened One; why not prohibit in his teachings the eating of flesh not only by himself but by others? (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 211-12)

In this questioning of the existing Buddhist canon, Mahāmāti is clearly confused by the Buddha’s own diet and the perceived endorsement of meat-eating. The Buddha responds by asserting that the consumption of meat by himself or his disciples is inconceivable: “If, Mahāmāti, meat is not eaten by anybody for any reason, there will be no destroyer of life. Mahāmāti, in the majority of cases the slaughtering of innocent living beings is done for pride and very rarely for other causes” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 217). He refutes the notion that he ever sanctioned meat-eating, declaring, “Thus, Mahāmāti, I have not permitted meat-eating to anyone, I do not permit it, and I will not permit it” (219). The Buddha then lists thirteen reasons for abstaining from eating animals (219-21), many of which explicitly connect vegetarianism to Buddhist doctrines and principles.

Chapter Eight of the sūtra offers perhaps the most compelling argument for vegetarianism within the Buddhist tradition. It begins with a brief introduction to the sūtra, which I will analyze in order to elucidate its main arguments in favor of vegetarianism. In *Buddhist Scriptures*, Edward Conze observes that the sūtra is renowned for its doctrine of *cittamātra*, or the consciousness-only

school (Conze 164).² “Consciousness-only” refers to the idea that all objects in the external world are merely representations of our consciousness. That is, they do not exist independently in reality but only within the mind (*cittamātra*); hence, they are “consciousness-only.” Since the world is perceived as “consciousness-only” (also known as “mind-only”), all phenomena are void, devoid of self (*ātman*), and thus illusory. This consciousness-only doctrine forms the cornerstone of the Yogācāra school (also known as the *Vijñānavāda* school), positing that all things in the world, including names and forms of experience, are merely manifestations of consciousness. The principal theories of the Yogācāra school are: “the sole existence of consciousness (*cittamātra*, *vijñaptimatra*); the mental, illusory, unreal character of the empirical world; the structure of mind; the subconscious (*alayavijñāna*) and the subliminal impressions (*vāsanā*), both of which have an important function in the theory of cognition” (Tola and Dragonetti 455). Within this framework, Mahāmāti praises the Buddha and poses 108 questions, exploring the implications of the consciousness-only doctrine and its ethical dimensions, including the advocacy for vegetarianism. This section provides more nuanced understanding of the way in which the sūtra interweaves metaphysical concepts with practical ethical teachings. The Buddha responds by asserting that all things are nothing but mind:

Further, Mahāmāti, according to the teaching of the Tathāgata of the past, present, and future, all things are unborn. Why? Because they have no reality, being manifestations of Mind itself, and, Mahāmāti, as they are not born of being and non-being, they are unborn. (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 55)

To the Blessed One, the objective world, akin to a vision, is a manifestation of the mind itself. This statement highlights the intricate interplay between consciousness, mental states, physical actions, and their repercussions. As Lusthaus notes, “Yogācāra never denies the existence of sense-objects (*visaya*, *artha*, *ālambana*, and so forth), but it rejects the notion that cognitive objects exist independently of cognitive acts” (71). He elaborates on the interaction between sense organs and objects:

When a functioning eye comes into contact with a color or shape, visual consciousness is produced. Similarly, when a functioning ear comes into contact with a sound, auditory consciousness is produced. Consciousness does not create the sensory sphere; rather, it is an effect of the interaction between a sense organ and its proper object. (72)

² In Buddhism, consciousness-only (or mind-only) refers to a theory in which unenlightened conscious experience is viewed as nothing but false discrimination or imagination. In this study, the term “consciousness-only” is used instead of “mind-only.” This usage corresponds with the primary argument of the study, which stresses the critical role of consciousness.

Ordinary beings perceive objects through a complex interplay of articulation and organization by consciousness. We perceive the world through our eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body, and mind, each associated with a specific type of consciousness and a corresponding sensory object domain (72). There can be no awareness of a sensory object without its respective sense organs. As part of the consciousness-only tradition of Yogācāra Buddhism, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* teaches that all things are nothing but thought. Due to its emphasis on the primacy of mental processes, Yogācāra Buddhism is often regarded as a form of idealism in the Western philosophical context. Chatterjee states that “idealism as an epistemological doctrine means that knowledge is constructive. . . . It does not reveal; it creates. . . . The Yogācāra holds that consciousness is the sole reality. The empirical world reduces itself . . . to ideas” (xii). According to the Yogācāra perspective, all objects in the external world are merely representations of our consciousness. In Buddhism, the mind is understood as a continuous flow or succession of *viññanas* (conscious states), cognitive acts, representations, thoughts, volitions, and similar elements. These *viññanas* and other components make up the mind; there is nothing beyond them. The mind, as a whole, is an abstract mental construct, with no independent or separate existence apart from these elements.

Tathāgata-garbha, Pratītya-samutpāda, and Unbornness

Among the many Mahāyāna scriptures, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* distinctly embodies the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine. This scripture elucidates the various levels of individual consciousness, culminating in the *tathāgata-garbha*, the foundation for profound awareness and cosmic connection. Ruegg asserts that “Mahāyāna sūtras do not derive their prohibition of meat-eating directly from the principle of *avihiṃsā*” (238) and that Buddhist vegetarianism was not imposed by external influences but developed from the “specific religious and philosophical teaching: the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine” (237). He further notes that in the *Aṅgulimālīya Sūtra*, the “intimate connection” between vegetarianism and the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine is “explicitly mentioned” (236). The term “*tathāgata-garbha*” frequently appears in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. The word “*garbha*” translates to “embryo” or “womb-like.” Suzuki observes that “*Garbha* is generally translated into Chinese as 藏 (*tsang*), similar to *ālāya*, but it literally means ‘womb’ (胎, *tai*)” (Suzuki, *Studies* 177). The *tathāgata-garbha* may be likened to a storeroom or receptacle where the seeds of *tathāgata-hood* are preserved. “*Tathāgata*,” a title of the Buddha, means “originally pure and

immaculate” (105). The *tathāgata-garbha* represents the Buddha-nature, the inherent potential within all beings to attain Buddhahood.

The Buddha describes the *tathāgata-garbha*, or “womb of the Buddhas,” as “pure, [resting] in quietude in the most excellent patience [or recognition of truth]; it is productive of excellent sense and is devoid of purposiveness (*samudācāra-varijitam*)” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 136-37), indicating that the *tathāgata-garbha* can be tainted by erroneous projections of greed, anger, and delusion (Suzuki, *Studies* 68-69). The Buddha informs Mahāmāti that “the *Tathāgata-garbha* holds within it the cause for both good and evil, and by it all forms of existence are produced” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 190) and further advises, “Mahāmāti, let those Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva who are seeking after the exalted truth effect the purification of the *Tathāgata-garbha*, which is known as *Ālāvijñāna*” (192). The concept of the *tathāgata-garbha* plays a crucial, though subtle, role in the mental evolution presented in the sūtra. It refers to the potential or cause leading toward enlightenment rather than an actual state or reality. Once liberated from the defilements of ignorance that obscure it, the sole, true existence is the original, pure mind—everything else is an illusion. Consequently, the *tathāgata-garbha* is free from misjudgments and discriminatory efforts that stir up various defilements. When their *tathāgata-garbha* is purified and they have attained the state of *tathāgata-garbha*, enlightened beings genuinely realize that the relativity of all things is inherent in human consciousness. Brian Brown explains, “Interpreted as ‘the embryo of the *Tathāgata*,’ the term denotes the inherent potential within all living beings to achieve the ultimate perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood; essentially, all beings are nascent Buddhas (*Tathāgata*) due to their intrinsic possession of the *Tathāgata-garbha*.” Progressing from embryonic self-awareness (awareness of the *tathāgata-garbha*) to complete self-consciousness is an integral part of the human journey to enlightenment and the path to refine consciousness and attain wholeness through the mind.

Mahāyāna texts provide a profoundly ethical perspective on nonmeat-eating, linking it not only to compassion but also to the interconnectedness of all sentient beings, known as *pratītya-samutpāda* (“dependent origination” or “dependent co-arising”). The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* emphasizes that the *tathāgata-garbha* embodies a system of thought based on this principle, underscoring that no individual or action exists in isolation (Robinson and Johnson 23-29). The *tathāgata-garbha* has been interpreted as an embodiment of the doctrines of *pratītya-samutpāda* and emptiness.³ With a pure mind and the wisdom of non-

³ If we examine the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine more carefully, we will find that it can be interpreted

discrimination, enlightened beings enter the realm of ultimate truth and grasp the concept of the *tathāgata-garbha* through the principle of *pratītya-samutpāda*, a fundamental Buddhist idea. The eminent Japanese scholar Susumu Yamaguchi sees *tathāgatagarbha* as an expression of the concepts of *pratītyasamutāda* and *śūnyatā* (86-87). The essence of Buddhahood is neither eternal nor transient, neither created nor uncreated, and neither describable nor indescribable. It transcends all forms of measurement and defies categorization, as articulated in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* through the concept of being “unborn”:

Mahāmati, according to the teaching of the *Tathāgata* of the past, present, and future, all things are unborn. Why? Because they have no reality, being manifestations of Mind itself, and, Mahāmati, as they are not born of being and non-being, they are unborn. Mahāmati, all things are like the horns of the hare, horse, donkey, or camel, but the ignorant and simple-minded who are given to their false and erroneous imaginations, discriminate things where they are not; therefore, all things are unborn. (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 55-56)

The Blessed One declares, “All things [are] unborn.” Everything in the universe is inherently unborn because all phenomena rely on causes and conditions, which means that every effect is the result of a cause and that there is no initial or “original cause.” This perspective highlights that ultimate truth transcends the relative categories of being and non-being. The concept of “unbornness” asserts that nothing has ever come into existence independently of causal relationships, embodying the principle of *pratītya-samutpāda*. When one understands the essence of unbornness, recognition of the equality and unity of all phenomena naturally follows. In this enlightened state, one becomes free from desires and abandons notions of dualities such as self and others, and existence and non-existence. Realizing the unborn nature of all phenomena marks a significant advancement on the path to liberation. *Nirvāṇa* is attained when the boundary separating the finite self from its surroundings dissolves, along with all mortal cravings (Smith 125). In this state, non-discriminative knowledge is obtained, and non-duality is penetrated. In the sūtra, the *tathāgata-garbha* is also equated with the dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) of the Buddha. Mahāmati requests the Buddha teach the bodhisattvas gathered on Mount Malaya in the city of Lanka: “Teach them regarding the *dharmakāya*, which is praised by the *Tathāgata* and which is the realm of the *Ālāyavijñāna* which resembles the ocean with its waves” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 40). The *tathāgata-garbha* manifests as the cosmic body (*dharmakāya*) of the Buddha. Nicholas F. Gier states, “The Mahayanist interpretation would be that we all possess a Buddha nature that intimately relates

as an expression of the concepts of *pratītya-samutpāda* and *śūnyatā*. See Yamaguchi.

to the *dharmakāya*, the cosmic ‘body’ of the Buddha” (185). Buddhism views the universe as the cosmic body of the Buddha, also known as the innately pure mind. Identifying the *tathāgata-garbha* as the *dharmakāya* is crucial for articulating the concept of cosmology within the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.

Merleau-Ponty’s Perception

In the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the Buddha asserts that all objects in the world, along with their names and forms, are manifestations of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty similarly believes that consciousness, the world, and the human body as a perceiving entity are intricately intertwined and mutually engaged. He proposes that the roots of consciousness lie within the body and its embeddedness in the world. His phenomenological perspective on the body-soul relationship offers valuable insights into discussing animal rights. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he claims that the world is a field of perception and that human consciousness assigns meaning to this world. Rejecting Edmund Husserl’s abstract concepts of “universal essences” and the transcendental ego, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes what Husserl identifies as the core of the life-world: perception (Langer xiv). Perception is seen by Merleau-Ponty as the foundation of experience and guide of every conscious action. Believing all knowledge to be gained within the horizons revealed by perception, he states, “The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. . . . Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* xi). Perception involves the perceiving subject in a situation. “Primary perception is a non-thetic (non-positing), pre-objective and pre-conscious experience” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 242). This suggests that the perceiver shares a fundamental connection with the perceived world, belonging to it while simultaneously perceiving and being perceived. Merleau-Ponty believes that the basic structures of perception permeate the entire spectrum of human experience. He understands “the experience of truth” as self-evident, asserting that “to seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is not presumed true, but defined as access to truth” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* xvi). David Abram encapsulates Merleau-Ponty’s insights by noting that we “implicate our own sense, and indeed our own sentience” in every perception (48). For Merleau-Ponty, sensation is the most fundamental form of perception, and “each act of perception appears to itself to be picked out from

some all-embracing adherence to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 241). He envisions perception as a moment of the world’s self-revelation, where the world’s essence intertwines and reflects upon itself. Moni-ka M. Langer further elucidates Merleau-Ponty’s perspective in suggesting that “perception is not an imposition—whether of an objective datum on a passive subject or a subjective structure on an external object—but rather, a pre-reflective communication (dialogue) between the perceived world and the perceiving body-subject” (158). Human beings cannot dissociate themselves from their perceptions of the world. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach reveals that our primary concern is not with ontology itself, but with ontological faith—an inherent, pre-cognitive belief in the reality of our experiences. His phenomenology is ecologically oriented, promising an intimate relationship between humans and the non-human animal world.

Merleau-Ponty’s Body as Flesh

Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology, which emphasizes the centrality of bodily perception, posits the human body as the source of expressive movement and an indispensable medium for perceiving the world. He asserts that no realm of thought can exist in complete isolation; rather, the foundation of knowledge lies in humanity’s palpable connection to the world. It is this connection that gives the body its meaningful function. The body organizes experience by means of its inherent motility and perceptual synthesis. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty stresses that the body should not be perceived merely as an object or material entity within the world but as “the fabric into which all objects are woven” and an “instrument of my ‘comprehension’” (235). This placement of the body at the core of philosophical inquiry is a significant contribution to the field. Arguing that the body image is not just a mental representation of the physiological body as an externally related mechanistic system, he accordingly notes, “Our bodily experience of movement . . . provides us with a way of access to the world and the object . . . which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function’” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 140-41, 164). The body is essential to the concept of genuinely communicative rationality and is “the person who, in sensory exploration, gives a fresh significance to my life. The person who, in sensory exploration, gives a past to the present and directs it towards a future, is not myself as an autonomous subject, but myself insofar as I have a

body and am able to ‘look’” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 240). The bodily experience infuses perception with a significance that surpasses mere intellectual understanding. As Bannan notes, “The body is construed as its vehicle and is transformed by its role in the giving of meaning and by its resulting intimacy with consciousness into a distinctly ‘subjective’ dimension” (14). Merleau-Ponty also points out that “objective thought is unaware of the subject of perception” (*Phenomenology* 207). An object “is an object only insofar as it can be moved away from me. . . . Its presence is such that it entails a possible absence. Now the permanence of my body is entirely different in kind” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 90). To him, the body-subject and the world are two inherently connected entities: “Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 235). Because human beings are in touch with the world through their bodies, the appearance of objects is always inseparable from a particular body posture.

The human body is an expressive space that contributes significantly to the meaning of personal action. It should not be seen merely as an organizing agent of experience or as the basis of a transcendental constitution. Merleau-Ponty claims, “The senses are distinct from each other and distinct from intellection in so far as each one of them brings with it a structure of being which can never be exactly transposed. We recognize this because we have rejected any formalism of consciousness and made the body the subject of perception” (*Phenomenology* 225). He contends that it is precisely through the body that we access the world, so we must acknowledge our body as both a thing among things and as the entity that sees and touches those things (*Visible* 137). For our body to move toward an object, the object must first exist; thus, our body cannot belong to the realm of the in-itself (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 139). Martin Dillon believes that Merleau-Ponty “delivers a devastating blow to the idealisms generated by transcendental philosophy” (Dillon 148). According to Merleau-Ponty, the body must be reconceived as neither exclusively mechanistic nor entirely intentional, but as incorporating both aspects. The phenomenon of the lived body becomes “the clue to a new ontology” (Dillon 131). Dillon considers this ontologically significant because it forms the basis of the subject-object dualism that Merleau-Ponty aims to overcome in his philosophy (148). Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on the lived body are dynamic and evolutionary. He regards the body as the central locus of all life, all knowledge, and, consequently, all science and philosophy.

The body simultaneously generates and is generated by the enveloping flesh. Through the body, one begins to understand the world. The body serves

as the site where flesh folds back upon itself, becoming both the seer and the seen, the subject and object of visibility, thereby uniting these dual properties. The world is flesh because our bodies are flesh. The different sides of being are inseparable, with each side “calling for the other” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 137). Merleau-Ponty argues that the sensible world is the necessary source for experiencing and understanding beings with physical bodies. He claims that the fission of flesh is fundamental to perception: “[T]he fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible . . . makes the organs of my body communicate” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 143). His philosophy of flesh applies to human and non-human animals, as well as nature, as the “dehiscence or fission of its own mass.” This concept refers not to mere lifeless matter but to an “element,” a “concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 137). All beings share a common flesh, which Merleau-Ponty uses to reconcile the mind, body, self, and “other” (other beings). He defines this universal flesh as the link connecting mind, body, and all beings in the world. Therefore, his ontology and epistemology should not be interpreted as subject-centered metaphysics. His use of the term “flesh” refers to the corporeal element that both unites and distinguishes all beings in the world.

Bodhisattva Mahāmati and the Seed of Compassion

In the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the Buddha vehemently condemns the consumption of meat, and naturally advocates vegetarianism in his discourse with the bodhisattvas. Mahāmati, a prominent bodhisattva, says to the Buddha, “I am Mahāmati, Blessed One, and am well versed in the Mahāyāna. I wish to ask one hundred and eight questions of thee who art most eloquent” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 23). Numerous bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, led by Mahāmati, gathered from all Buddha-lands, along with a large assembly of *bhikṣus*. The Buddha responds to Mahāmati’s inquiries, thus elucidating many core teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as inner enlightenment beyond duality and the self-realization of the *tathāgata-garbha* inherent in all beings. A bodhisattva needs to have sensitivity, work toward enlightenment for oneself and others, and be committed to the salvation of all beings (Waldau 138). In addition, a bodhisattva must cultivate immense mercy and compassion. Suzuki highlights that Mahāmati, serving as the Buddha’s interlocutor, emphasizes the Buddha’s transcendental wisdom (*prajñā*) and profound compassion (*karuṇā*) (Suzuki, Introduction xii). Compassion for animals can be exhibited by refraining from killing them, liberating them from captivity, and abstain-

ing from meat consumption. For those on the bodhisattva path, avoiding meat is an essential means of practicing compassion for all sentient beings, as clearly articulated in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*: “Therefore, do not eat meat which will cause terror among people, because it hinders the truth of emancipation; [not to eat meat—] this is the mark of the wise” (221). Meat consumption fosters cruelty and sensuality, which contradicts the Mahāyāna path, and encouraging others to consume animal-derived food undermines the principles of non-violence and compassion central to Buddhism. The sūtra further states: “For the sake of love of purity, Mahāmati, the Bodhisattva should refrain from eating flesh which is born of semen, blood, etc. For fear of causing terror to living beings, Mahāmati, let the Bodhisattva who is disciplining himself to attain compassion, refrain from eating flesh” (213). Therefore, those who choose to walk the bodhisattva path must embrace vegetarianism. Instilling terror in sentient beings is also contrary to the bodhisattva’s essential value of cultivating compassion: “Mahāmati, let the Bodhisattva, who is disciplining himself, to abide in great compassion, because of its terrifying living beings, refrain from eating meat” (213).

The sūtra emphasizes that all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature, or Buddha seed, which is the potential for full enlightenment. The journey to becoming a Buddha involves awakening this compassionate Buddha-nature and fully cultivating universal compassion, which is intrinsic to the Buddha-nature itself. The sūtra warns that consuming meat extinguishes the seeds of compassion within humans: “the Bodhisattva, whose nature is compassion, is not to eat any meat” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 212). By renouncing the desire for the taste of meat, bodhisattvas cultivate the great compassion necessary to progress towards full enlightenment. Vegetarianism is therefore a prerequisite for following the bodhisattva path. The Blessed One instructs,

Mahāmati, the food I have permitted [my disciples to take] is gratifying to all wise people but is avoided by the unwise; it is productive of many merits, it keeps away many evils; and it has been prescribed by the ancient Rishis. It comprises rice, barley, wheat, kidney beans, beans, lentils, etc., clarified butter, oil, honey, molasses, treacle, sugar cane, coarse sugar, etc.; food prepared with these is proper food. (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 249-50)

Described as a mindset driven by deep concern for other living beings and a sincere desire to alleviate their suffering, compassion is a fundamental virtue in Buddhism. It is regarded as “one of the essential conditions for liberation” (Kushner 148). Teachings on compassion, including empathy towards non-human animals, are of great importance in Buddhist literature. In Mahāyāna

Buddhism, compassion is especially emphasized due to its central role in the life of a bodhisattva. The primary spiritual practice of a bodhisattva is not the pursuit of personal liberation, but the cultivation of boundless compassion, manifested through non-violence towards all beings. The Buddha recommends that pure bodhisattvas follow this ideal:

Even, Mahāmati, the Rākshas, listening to the Tathāgata's discourse on the highest essence of the Dharma, attained the notion of protecting [Buddhism], and, feeling pity, refrains from eating flesh; how much more those who love the Dharma! Thus, Mahāmati, wherever there is the evolution of living beings, let people cherish the thought of kinship with them, and, thinking that all beings are [to be loved as if they were] an only child, let them refrain from eating meat. So with Bodhisattvas whose nature is compassion, [the eating of] meat is to be avoided by him. (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 212)

A bodhisattva, as a follower of Buddha, should embody a compassionate mindset and actively engage in the practice of liberating sentient beings. Abstaining from eating meat as a means of cultivating compassion is very much in line with the teachings of the sūtra.

The Law of *saṃsāra*

The emphasis placed on vegetarianism in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* is intimately connected with the Buddhist concept of *saṃsāra*. A compelling reason for vegetarianism within Buddhism is the belief that every sentient being has, at some point in the endless cycles of samsaric transmigration, been one's kin (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 212). The doctrine of *saṃsāra* posits that humans can be reborn as animals if they commit grievous acts, and animals can be reborn as humans if they strive to perform virtuous deeds (McDermott 269). This cyclical nature of *saṃsāra* underscores the potential for humans and animals to exchange forms based on their actions, thereby reinforcing the ethical imperative of compassion and non-violence towards all beings. Therefore, Buddhism teaches the proper relationship humans should maintain with non-human animals. When humans slaughter animals, they are effectively killing their own relatives and consuming flesh that was once their own:

Mahāmati, in this long course of transmigration here, there is not one living being that, having assumed the form of a living being, has not been your mother, or father, or brother, or sister, or son, or daughter, or the one or the other, in various degrees of kinship; and when acquiring another form of life may live as a beast, as a domestic animal, as a bird, or as a womb-born, or as something standing in some

relationship to you; [this being so] how can the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva who desires to approach all living beings as if they were himself and to practise the Buddha-truths, eat the flesh of any living being that is of the same nature as himself? (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* 212)

The awakened being understands that throughout the infinite past, all beings have been each other's parents, siblings, friends, or lovers. This interconnectedness and interchangeability of life states, which are constantly reborn after the death of each specific form, is the law of *samsāra*. Consequently, animals in the present may have been one's kin in the past, so consuming meat may be akin to consuming a loved one. Those who have taken the bodhisattva vow commit a great sin by eating the flesh of sentient beings who were their parents in previous lives. Therefore, awakened beings, the Buddhas, abstain from consuming flesh. Human beings and non-human beings share the same essence. For most Buddhist practitioners, moral cultivation and the improvement of personal karma are primary concerns. As Jennifer Eichman notes, "[N]ot killing was a means to accrue sufficient merit to ensure material advantages in this lifetime and a good rebirth" (217). Buddhist ontology emphasizes the continuity of life from one form to another through reincarnation, underscoring the foundational significance of compassion for all creatures in the Buddhist faith (Chapple 143). The law of *samsāra* weaves all sentient beings of the six realms into an interconnected web of life, and understanding this interconnectedness makes compassion essential, as it embodies a profound loving concern and the wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering.

***Tathāgata-garbha* versus Bodily-flesh Phenomenology**

In this section, I undertake a comparative analysis of the teachings of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body and flesh, both of which emphasize the dynamics of human consciousness. The sūtra, as previously discussed, is renowned for its consciousness-only doctrine, an assertion that all external objects are mere representations of our consciousness. The Blessed One declares that the objective world, much like a vision, is only a manifestation of the mind. The five grasping elements constituting the aggregates of personality—form, sensation, perception, discrimination, and consciousness—perceived as either good or bad, arise from the habit-energy of the mind-system. This mind-system encompasses the five sense-organs and their corresponding sense-minds (*vijñāna*), all unified within the discriminating mind (*manovijñāna*). Typically, the sense-mind grasps elements of the external world,

resulting in sensation and perception in each sense-organ and sense-mind, which then grasps the whole field as a mirror reflecting objects, yet failing to realize that the external world is merely a manifestation of the mind. The sūtra defines various levels of consciousness within an individual, culminating in the *tathāgata-garbha*, the foundation of one's deepest awareness and connection to the cosmos. When one's *tathāgata-garbha* is purified and reaches its ultimate state, the enlightened being truly comprehends the relativity of all things inherent in human consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty places significant emphasis on the role of human consciousness in his phenomenology as central to this philosophical approach, grounding it in what he terms “ontological faith.” He distinguishes between two types of consciousness: the “pure-for-itself” (or solipsistic rational ego) and perceptual consciousness as “being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 137). As beings-in-the-world, humans are inherently embodied, possessing the capacity to sense and be sensed by others. This mutual capacity forms the foundation from which all consciousness—of the world, others, or self—emerges, both visibly and invisibly. According to Langer, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy asserts that “any act of reflection is based on that pre-personal, anonymous consciousness which is incarnate subjectivity” (xv). Merleau-Ponty's primary aim is to make us aware of our existence as embodied subjects with a consciousness intertwined with the world. He conceptualizes the body as a dynamic synthesis of intentionalities that continually generate perceptual structures through an unceasing dialectic in which both body and objects are constituted (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 149). Every lived experience is a communion of body and world; neither can exist or hold meaning without the other. As we cannot step “outside” of our experiences (of the body, its eyes, its hands, and so forth) to perceive the world, we necessarily experience it through the human body (Low 24). The perceiver is not merely a pure thinker but a body-subject. Merleau-Ponty concludes that the subjective aspect of being, traditionally understood as separate, is in fact inseparable from the body and the world. Subjectivity involves an awareness of oneself as an active and distinct entity. Through his exploration of sense phenomenology, he discovers that subjectivity is intrinsically linked to the body and the world (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 408).

The *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* elucidates the intricate levels of consciousness within an individual, culminating in the *tathāgata-garbha* (*ālāyavijñāna*), which represents the foundation of one's deepest awareness and connection to the cosmos. The *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine is also an expression of the concept of *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent origination). When one's *tathāgata-garbha* is purified, the enlightened being fully realizes that the relativity of all

things is inherent in human consciousness. According to the sūtra, everything in the universe is inherently unborn because all things depend on causes and conditions. Understanding the essence of unbornness leads one to recognize the equality and sameness of all phenomena. In this state, one becomes free from desires and transcends the dualities of self and others, as well as existence and non-existence. The concept of unbornness suggests that all beings are fundamentally equal, which implies a personal commitment to respect life in all its forms. This understanding that there is no difference between the self and others provides a theoretical basis for the principle of nonkilling. With a pure mind and the wisdom of non-discrimination, enlightened beings enter the realm of ultimate truth, grasping the concept of the *tathāgata-garbha* through the doctrines of the unborn nature of things and the non-duality of sentient beings embodied in the principle of *pratītya-samutpāda*. The notion that all beings are unborn and interconnected through causal relations has been used to advocate for abstaining from meat. The sūtra encapsulates the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine, which serves as a foundation for opposing all forms of mistreatment of animals. This doctrine liberates individuals from the restrictive notions of the self, fostering a greater awareness and sensitivity towards the needs and well-being of other people, animals, and the elements, all of which mutually depend on each other. The promotion of vegetarianism in the sūtra is not merely a dietary preference; it embodies ethical considerations against killing, which ethical vegetarianism upholds.

The sūtra emphasizes the significance of human consciousness in advocating for the transcendence of the physical body, referred to as the sense-organ. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology centralizes the body within perceptual consciousness, a consciousness deeply rooted in being-in-the-world and our sensory experiences. He posits that "fundamental fission" allows one's body to communicate and find transitivity with another body (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 143). This emphasis on the body highlights its intrinsic value in his philosophy, as his bodily-flesh phenomenology captures our actual existence in the world. He asserts that we must recognize our body, on one hand, as a thing among things and, on the other, as something that sees and touches things (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible* 137). According to his phenomenology, the body—both our own and others'—along with the perceptual world, creates a sense of self-coherence and mutual connection. The ethical significance of his work lies in his portrayal of the relational and bodily nature of the self, and the ambiguity, openness, creativity, and transcendence in mind-body relations. In his final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, he describes in detail the body's (flesh's) existence, viewing the flesh as the primary element

from which everything originates. He believed that this being sustains both the world and the self, presenting them to each other from within. Central to his concept of flesh ontology is a deep appreciation for the physical body and a framework for ethical relations and the flourishing of the world. His ontology moves us away from dualistic separation, emphasizing the intimate connection among human life, the human mind, and the world. Crucially, the potential for transforming relationships is deeply rooted in bodily interactions and the physical embodiment of beings. Merleau-Ponty offers an alternative perspective on the structure of existence, where his phenomenology acknowledges and elucidates diverse modes of being in the world. This approach enhances individuals' awareness and sensitivity to their direct, embodied interrelationships with non-human animals, facilitating the recognition of non-human animals as "others" and, importantly, as ethical others. Morality must begin with recognizing the inherent value of others, which involves behavioral relationships between human and non-human beings and the genuine acknowledgment of each other's worth. To establish a morality that encompasses all living beings, humans must explore means through which they can come to understand others' values. This involves cultivating an appreciation for the physical embodiment of other beings and the entirety of the physical world. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the lived body opens up the possibility of people identifying a historically distinct relationship among the self, the world, and others because it posits that human and non-human beings share a common flesh. For him, the world should be comprehended in intercorporeal terms, aligning with ethical considerations that drive contemporary efforts to develop new ontological insights into animal life.

Conclusion

Throughout human history, animals have often been perceived as mere components of an anthropocentric ecosystem, influenced by speciesism—a hierarchy established by humans for their own benefit. Consequently, humans have discriminated against and exploited animals (Nouët 11). Through my studies, I have come to understand that humanity must shift from the dominance of human speciesism to the recognition of interspecific egalitarianism. This study seeks to demonstrate the parallels between the *tathāgata-garbha* concept in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which encompasses the cosmic body and the notion of Buddha-nature as the essence of compassion, and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the bodily-flesh. It underscores how these concepts illuminate the interconnectedness between human and non-human aspects of existence. By

examining these ideas, it becomes evident how Merleau-Ponty's philosophical framework can be effectively applied to discussions on vegetarianism as advocated in the sūtra. Furthermore, it explores how the sūtra's promotion of vegetarianism is deeply connected with Buddhist beliefs about the cycle of *samsāra*. Ethical vegetarianism arises from a profound moral aversion to the slaughter of animals, championing compassion and non-violence toward non-human creatures. Henry Salt (1851-1939), vegetarian, anti-vivisectionist, and pioneer in raising awareness about ethical issues concerning animals, argues, "We must discard the outdated notion of a 'great gulf' between [non-human species] and mankind, and must recognize the common bond of humanity that unites all living beings in one universal brotherhood" (74). Similarly, Warwick Fox asserts, "we can make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence," meaning that "there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the non-human realms" (196). Buddhism offers a vision of radical inter-identification, wherein all living beings are interconnected with all other entities. This vision not only conveys that we are all interconnected but also emphasizes that we "rise and fall as one living body" (Cook 229). Ethical vegetarianism transforms one's core perspective from an anthropocentric to a biocentric view. To make this shift, a significant change in awareness and behavior toward other living beings is required. Princeton professor Peter Singer's ethical theory articulated through the principle of "equal consideration of interests" (35) posits that non-human animals should not be exploited as mere means to ends because they, too, experience pleasure and pain: "If a being suffers, there is no moral justification for disregarding that suffering. The principle of equality mandates that such suffering be weighed equally with similar suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made with any other being" (8). Although they approach the bodily-sense position in the world from different angles, the fundamental teaching of Chapter Eight of the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* on vegetarianism and Merleau-Ponty's bodily-flesh phenomenology share a similar belief: to be truly human is to hold a deep respect for sentient animal lives. Through the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine of the sūtra and the integrated perspective of Merleau-Ponty's bodily-flesh phenomenology, one can come to realize that every living being is interwoven into and sustained by a web of relationships among the community of humans, animals, plants, and everything else in the world. Both philosophies hold an ethical ideal to alleviate suffering and provide a rich diversity of resources for people to reconsider their relationship with non-human animals. The interconnectedness and interdependence of life fundamentally justify the protection of all forms of life. To truly embrace our humanity, we must exhibit deep respect for all life forms just as we respect our species, which

implies we should refrain from acts of violence against other sentient beings. For ethical vegetarians, consuming meat is emblematic of violence. Given the alarming environmental degradation and the extinction of numerous animal species, it has become crucial for humanity to reassess its stance towards non-human animals. By redefining and broadening our self-concept, we can become aware of the self-imposed limitations stemming from our epistemological perspectives. This awareness will encourage self-reflection on our relationship with the natural world and the meaning of our existence.

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相互依存的倫理： 探究《入楞伽經》的倫理素食主義與 梅洛-龐蒂肉身知覺現象學的動物權利

吳素真
佛光大學

摘要

以大乘「唯心」教義聞名的佛教經典《入楞伽經》其第八章強調素食主義。該經指出世界現象只是意識的表象，唯心所現。《入楞伽經》描述意識各層次的內涵，尤其指出一切眾生本自具有如來藏識，其為本自清淨的心性，等同宇宙法身。如來藏識亦具「緣起」的法義內涵，同時表達了共生相依的佛法教義。當修行覺悟者淨除煩惱後，了悟一切事物的相對性來自人類意識的分別作用，其如來藏識將恢復其本具的清淨性。二十世紀來自法國的梅洛-龐蒂其知覺現象學描述了人如何以身體的知覺來實現、經驗著世界。他認為肉身是一切事物產生的最基本元素。在本質上他的肉身知覺現象學是對色身存在的高度尊重，並形成肉身與世界的倫理關係。梅洛-龐蒂建構關於自己、他人與世界之間互為主體性相互依存的哲學思辨。梅洛-龐蒂的肉身哲思有如提出新的本體論，其對動物生命倫理關注的努力做出了相當的創見貢獻。本研究爬梳《入楞伽經》第八章〈斷食肉品〉提出的倫理素食主義，如何與梅洛-龐蒂倡導尊重動物權利的肉身哲學現象學呼應相扣。本研究結果將呈現來自東方古老的佛教教義與西方二十世紀現代知覺現象學哲學論述的對話，為人類開展更具倫理關係的相存相依世界。

關鍵字：如來藏識、無生、倫理素食主義、知覺、肉身、互為主體性

