

# Consideration of the Idea of Reverence for the Lives of Animals in the Philosophical Discourse in the Pre-modern Age

## 1. On the Ideas of Descartes and Others

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**Abstract:** The idea of reverence for the lives of animals is essential when considering animal ethics, animal rights, and animal welfare. A central issue in these topics is the necessity of sacrificing animals' lives for industry and consumption. The sacrifice is made as a result of the utilization of animal resources in three main ways: the use of livestock animals for food, the use of animals as subjects for experiments and the use of wild animals for food and other purposes.

In Western philosophy, the existence of an animal's soul has been frequently debated. However, although animals have been associated with traditional rituals, sacred symbols of myths or religion, and the objects of worship for faith, it is not possible to clearly prove the existence of an animals' emotions and soul. In Greek philosophy and the philosophical discourse of Europe in the pre-modern age, animals were regarded as lower living creatures owing to their lack of an ability to reason. Humans, on the other hand, were considered to exist at a higher level due to their rationality and possession of mind with morality.

René Descartes's idea on animals is a remarkably representative theory of "animals as machines," and his contemporaries, Pascal and Spinoza, also regarded animals as lower beasts. Although the values and views on animals expressed by Descartes' are widely considered to be inappropriate in the 21st century, as the concept of animal right has taken hold, it is important to re-consider these philosophers' ideas about animals when considering another concept, animal ethics. Leibnitz provided a different outlook, recognizing the abilities of animals and considering the existence of their souls, paves thereby paving the way for animal ethics.

**Keywords:** Descartes, Pascal, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Reverence for life

### 1 Introduction:

#### On the importance of the reverence for life

It is apparent that at various times throughout their history, humans have had reverence for all forms of life, including animals. The views and values regarding animals have often been dependent on people's environment and religious faith. For example, with regard to religious concepts, animals were worshiped as the embodiment of

nature or as god-like beings in many regions in the world in ancient times. Humans regarded certain animals as sacred beings, and symbolized them as gods of nature. Ancient Egyptians worshiped wild animals as gods, and indeed they personified wild animals as many types of gods.

In India, ancient Eurasia, and Asia, animals were personified, implying that they had an essential aspect of humanity, and animals sometimes become the focus of awe and reverence, or were worshiped as the object of faith in ancient religions. These examples suggest that humans considered the existence of animals as expressions of the words of gods, or that animals conveyed the power of nature including

both the bounty of nature and disasters, such as epidemics. Animals whose physical forms are quite different from that of humans (arthropods are a good example) are easily personified as sacred or even dreadful beings. Considering the widely varying characteristics of animals in nature, it is understandable that ancient peoples deified them as gods of nature. Each living organism has its particular traits that have evolved to adapt to the environment, whereas humans may not have those traits. In ancient times people had no detailed knowledge of ecology, and the existence of some animals was thus veiled in mystery<sup>1</sup>.

In the 20th century, the idea of reverence for life was most famously advocated by the polymath Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). He pointed out that every living thing on earth coexists (and must continue to coexist) with all other living beings. He understood that even pathological bacteria are a component of nature, and that their great numbers and vast presence should be included in this concept. Schweitzer's views are thought to be derived from his medical career as a physician. The idea of reverence for life is common among all people who are concerned about animal rights and animal ethics, based on a fundamental respect for the lives of all living organisms.

Philosophical ideas related to animal ethics and rights have become more widespread since Schweitzer's lifetime, and these ideas are clearly based on reverence for animals. An important point in discussions of reverence for animals is the question whether animals have emotions and even a soul; in other words, whether they are sentient beings. This is an essential point when one considers animal ethics. The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras (c. 570-495 BC), who proposed the transmigration of every life, described a version of 'souls' of animals as part of his concept of all things in the universe. Aristotle (384-322 BC), who had studied many types of living things, regarded animals as living a totally different existence from humans, contending that animals have no 'reason.'

The purpose of this paper is to examine the ideas of 'animals as machines' in the philosophical discourse of the pre-modern age and to lend support to the concept of animals' souls proposed by the Enlightenment philosopher Leibnitz (1646-1716), which is opposed to the 'machine

theory' of animals. In *Monadology* and other works, including his letters, Leibnitz repeatedly suggests that animals have souls as humans do. Although Leibnitz recognizes there is a certain boundary between animals and humans as animals were not thought to be rational beings, he realizes that an essential source of life exists in every organism; in other words, all organisms have such a source of living energy which is inherent in 'Monad'<sup>2</sup>:

The passing state which involves and represents a multitude in the unity or in the simple substance is nothing other than what one calls perception, which should be distinguished from apperception, or consciousness, as will be evident in what follows. This is where the Cartesians have failed badly, since they took no account of the perceptions that we do not apperceive. This is also what made them believe that minds alone are monads and that there are no animal souls or other entelechies (Leibnitz, *Monadology* : 69).

This idea is different from that of René Descartes (1596-1650) who argued that animals are essentially beasts, implying that they should be regarded only as an organic type of machine. The main reason for Descartes' argument is that animals cannot reason and do not have a mind like humans who are regarded as rational creations possessing intellect. In this context, animals cannot possibly have sensations, emotions, consciousness or compassion.

However, if the background of each era is considered, it is natural for people to think that animals have no emotions, intelligence, or means to communicate complex ideas. In Leibnitz' era, Europe (especially the Holy Roman Empire) was devastated by a long religious war. It was an age when differences among religious sects were ravaging many societies. Adherents of sects that were regarded by others as heresy were often mercilessly exterminated. Leibnitz was born in the Holy Roman Empire, and his writings indicated that he was a pious Christian with a tolerant personality. He proposed that animals have souls and emotions.

Our consideration of Leibnitz's philosophical discourse would lead to the concept of reverence for animals in the modern age. His ideas can provide a foundation for



Fig. 1 Leonard da Vinci, *Lady with an Ermine* 1489-90



Fig. 2, 3 The Limboug brothers, *The Month of July, The Month of November* in *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc De Berry* (15th century)

reverence and respect for all life on the earth, which will contribute to a sustainable future in every aspect of human life, including animal industries, resources, and the inter-relationships between humans and animals.

In the present argument, I focus on the concepts regarding animals in the philosophical discourse by Descartes, Leibnitz and others, clarifying the essence of the concept of rational beings described by Descartes and other philosophers. With respect to the ideas propounded by Leibnitz, I merely make a suggestion in this argument.

## 2 The background of the age and the meaning of taming an animal

The 17th century pre-modern period in Europe was a turning point with respect to religious conflicts. During the Thirty Years War (1616-1648), Descartes went to the front line with the French army. With such turbulent conditions in society, one might surmise that people living in the cities and villages that suffered from the war and other disasters led lives in which there was not sufficient room to consider the lives of animals. In those years, of course, animals were utilized in many ways; obvious examples are the use of dogs for hunting and as sheep herders. Large numbers of cattle and hogs were kept in cow sheds and pens, and sheep and goats grazed in pastures. Some dogs and cats, birds and other animals also lived as pets and were treated with care, similar to the way in which modern society values animals as companions. For example, one of Da Vinci's paintings shows

a tamed ermine held carefully in a lady's arms (Fig. 1)<sup>3</sup>.

As in all eras, wealthy people in the 17th century had the resources to keep and tame animals with care, yet the meat of cattle, pigs, sheep, and poultry was commonly consumed by all humans. It is difficult to infer the value of animals in every age and region, but art and literature provide clues to the treatment of animals. It seems likely that people have taken care of animals in proximity since the prehistoric age. The posture and demeanor of the wealthy woman in *Lady with an Ermine*, clearly holding her pet in her arms, is considered a symbol of a human's affection toward an animal.

In contrast, many livestock animals are described in the 15th century French illuminated manuscripts, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc De Berry* ('The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry') (Figs. 2, 3). Hogs, sheep, and other animals can be seen in fields used for agricultural purposes and in the woods. In Europe, keeping livestock animals, including draft animals, was common and enabled agricultural regions to prosper<sup>4</sup>. Small-scale agriculture was common in the pre-modern age in every region, of course.

Humans have been taming (and domesticating) animals for thousands of years, as many types of animals can be tamed by people. We can only speculate that over the millennia people have loved their pets with as much affection as we love them today. Affection for animals is associated with the feelings of relief, calmness, and comfort that animals can provide as companions. These feelings are not related to the age or region. In a Japanese picture scroll created in the 14th

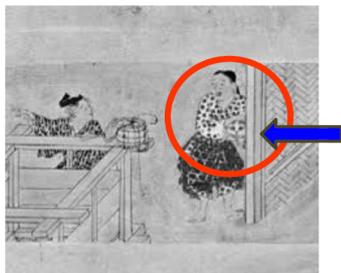


Fig. 4 石山寺縁起絵巻, a part of the volume No.5, 14th century (a boy holding a cat)



Fig. 5 Francesco Bacchiacca, *Woman with a cat* 1540s



Fig. 6 Ulrich Frank, *The armored rider* (1643)



Fig. 7 *The horseman's end* (1656)

century, we can recognize a boy holding a cat in his arms (Fig. 4). However, paintings that include a tamed pet and its owner are relatively scarce. During the Renaissance, Italian painter Bacchiacca (1494-1557) depicted several works that present the motif of ‘a figure holding a pet’ (Fig. 5).

We can also consider the situation when Descartes lived, in the 17th century. In that era, a terrible and seemingly unending war finally ended after massacres occurred across Europe. The Thirty Years War devastated many cities of the Holy Roman Empire, including present-day Germany. Although this war was first touched off by international religious strife due to conflicts between Catholicism and Protestantism, political and economic factors were also closely involved, affecting a vast area including regions such as present-day Germany, France, and even Sweden suffering irrecoverable destruction. Leibnitz was born and grew up in Leipzig, Saxony as the son of a professor of moral philosophy. The armies were invariably cruel and conducted merciless massacres and violence against the people living in cities, villages and farmlands. Such slaughters (including

those of animals) are recorded and expressed in paintings and etchings by artists such as Jacques Callot, or Hans Ulrich Franck (Figs. 6, 7).

What these works imply is merciless disaster caused by the war and brutal soldiers on both sides of the conflicts (Protestant and Catholic). The lands and towns in Germany were hard hit, with the war's destruction extending to almost all of Germany, and causing irrecoverable devastation to societies, the economy, and peoples' lives. The works by Franck and Callot indicate that there was no humane compassion extended to society, but rather merciless violence and massacre. Soldiers often did not obey any military discipline and repeatedly plundered and violated both the property and physical bodies of city dwellers and farmers. A war that had its origins in the ideas of religious justice degenerated into a display of crude and cruel power. Morals and ethics even in regard to human life were beyond consideration. The early part of the 17th century thus showed a Europe convulsed in a state of agony.

Despite this man-made disaster, this pre-modern period

was simultaneously the age that produced philosophers like Descartes and Blaise Pascal (1623-1704), Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) in Amsterdam, England's John Locke (1632-1704), and Leibnitz. Each of these men described humanity's moral and ethical rules and emphasized the importance of human reasoning.

The pre-modern age of Europe spanning the 17th and 18th centuries is considered the age in which reason was highly respected. The certainty of science was emphasized. Religious faith dwindled, and proper observations and measurements of the physical world were recommended. The pre-modern civilization of Europe was thus supported by the certainty of human dignity and scientific demonstration. The development of technology enabled European countries to expand their lands and colonies and to market their products on a global scale. With the progression of the power of each country, the sense of ancient culture related to animals and nature became estranged from human consciousness. The more that human dignity and rights were emphasized, the lower animals' status became.

With regard to livestock animals, it is natural that most people did not take the well-being of industrial animals into account. In Europe's Christian societies, it was recognized that livestock animals were a benefit and common resource for peoples' diets and as raw material. Religious beliefs and values even supported the system of livestock production for western cultures. The concept of livestock's well-being was not considered, since animals were a crucial source of food and of products such as fur, hides, tallow, shellac and more. Animals were not an object of ethical discussion during this age.

When one thinks of the treatment of animals by humans in the pre-modern era in Europe, philosophical thoughts by Descartes are referred to most frequently. However, Descartes' thoughts about animals have been criticized in many corners. For example, the philosophers Angus Taylor (b. 1966-), Gary Francione (b. 1954-) and others refers to the logic of Descartes's idea on animals, especially regarding animal rights. Taylor suggests that "Animals, says Descartes, are to be understood in purely mechanical terms. By this, he does not mean merely that animals are in some ways like machines. He means that they are machines, no different

in principle from clocks" (Taylor, 2009: 38). He also points out Descartes' dualism: "Even so, Descartes admits in the course of his argument that animals have feelings of fear, hope, joy anger and hunger, ....The attribution of feelings to animals is thus apparently inconsistent with Descartes' dualist division of the world in to mind and matter and his accompanying claim that animals have no minds" (Taylor: 39). Gary Francione argues that "we are obliged to extend to animals only *one* right — the right not to be treated as the property of humans " (Francione, 2000: xxxi). Thus, in this modern philosophy too, animals are like machines, with no reason and souls. Although Francione's suggestion seems severe, its implication seems appropriate.

Descartes maintained that animals are nothing more than automations, or robots, created by God. According to Descartes, animals do not possess souls, which are required for consciousness, and therefore lack minds altogether and cannot experience pain, pleasure, or any other sensation or emotion. Descartes reasoned that animals lack consciousness because they do not use verbal or sign language. If Descartes is correct, then we can no more speak sensibly about animals having interests than we can about clocks having interests. If animals are not sentient and cannot experience anything, then by definition they have no interests and it would be absurd to believe that we have any moral or legal obligations to them (Francione, 2000: 104).

It is not certain that most people in Europe thought that animals did not possess souls and emotion. Of course, some people tamed and treated pets as if they were family members; others were offhand and indifferent to animals. Regardless of whether people think of the emotions or sensibility of other living things, the majority of humans have lived without any consideration of animals' rights. It is easy to consider that cattle, pigs, sheep, or chickens are only sources of meat, milk, and raw materials. Until relatively recently, livestock have been treated as being first and foremost resources to meet human needs and demands in daily life. In the past, there was no room to take the well-being of

animals into account. (In Christian cultures, livestock were simply sources of food and helpers as draft animals. In other cultures, for example in India, cows are sacred beings; in Islamic cultures people were banned from eating the meat of livestock without gaining religious permission first. Some sects of Buddhism basically recommend a vegetarian life.

In the Medieval Age and other pre-modern periods, livestock might have been raised with care, but this was not a concept of welfare. Pain and suffering, hunger and thirst have always been a threat to animals whether they were in the wild or domesticated. Early human who engaged in agriculture often had little knowledge of hygiene, sterilization, and parasites. They had little or no understanding of zoonotic diseases. People rearing livestock concentrated on what value they could extract from the livestock, and in such circumstances, we can surmise that common people gave little thought to the reverence for animals' well-being. The few people who were wealthy enough to tame and keep pets were a clear minority.

Francione's suggestion is completely appropriate in regards to the point that Descartes did not recognize the existence of animal's emotions and souls. Now in this age, the 21st century, zoological animal science has been studied widely and popular science concerning animals and other living things has developed rapidly among non-scientists. A great deal of knowledge has been gained about animals and their incredible diversity of behaviors including communication, teamwork and parenting. Many animal methods of communication is much more complex than was assumed, and the ways to communicate vary significantly among species. Scientists have confirmed that animals possess sensation; the presence of consciousness, emotions, and souls remains unclear but is a thought-provoking topic in recent research. Mammals nurse their offspring with care, protecting them from every type of danger and enemies. Birds also take care of their chicks with great diligence. If eggs or chicks are lost due to an accident or attack by natural predators, parent birds of some species exhibit signs of disappointment and even grief. Even insects (for example, earwigs) protect their larvae and eggs from predators. Honey bees and ants organize their social group and work to maintain both their elaborate social structures

and nests. It was a surprise that such simple organisms treat their offspring, larvae and pupae with care. However, Charles Darwin himself (1809-1882) suggested that even lower animals have emotions, and it thus seems that insects, mollusks, and other invertebrates show amazingly technical strategies for survival and reproduction<sup>5</sup>.

It is plain that living things on earth experience various types of sensations and consciousness; birds and mammals are especially involved in raising their young, nursing and fostering them until they can fend for themselves. Animals surely possess a robust and positive will for survival and life. The present day's accumulation of knowledge about living things is recognized among those who think about the lives of organisms. Even common people who are interested in biology and ecology are now aware of the complexity of animals, brought to us by popular books, television, and the Internet. Although the abuse and neglect of animals still abounds — particularly in livestock industries — people generally have a greater reverence for the lives of animals today.

### 3 Discriminatory ideas about animals in the philosophical discourse

As described above, philosophy in Europe flourished several centuries ago, with publications by many thinkers. Descartes remarkably proclaimed evidence of the absolute power of recognition of the human mind. During his lifetime, mind and reason were highly respected. However, that metaphysical trend had been supported since the Renaissance, and philosophical ideas were inherited from the ancient Greeks; Aristotle's ideas on animals particularly affected western thought. The Italian scholar Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) posited that even if humans and animals have physical mechanisms in common, they differ fundamentally based on the presence of reason and intellect in humans. The Renaissance nobleman and philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) placed importance on human dignity, as humans are rational beings and have the independent will to realize their desires. He felt that the fundamental difference between humans and animals is the independent will of humans.

The 17th century and the subsequent 100 years reflect a deep respect for reason. Human activities based on reason and morality were trusted above everything. Common sense and justice based on morals and ethical value were encouraged as desirable. In the cultures of that era, art, literature and music that supported values and rational senses were preferred among the common people and upper classes. Individualistic, emotional perception and subjective senses were less valued or even discouraged. One of the main philosophical discourses in this age was on self-recognition. A humanistic way of thinking and morals emerged in the age of religious wars. Michel de Montaigne, a philosopher and moralist before the age of Descartes, criticized the old religious way of thinking that persistently adhered to intolerant theological values, and was also critical of the interminable religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. As he opposed the conquest of the New World by Europeans, Montaigne placed importance on the morals and tolerance of humans, and held skeptical ideas about human essence. In *Les Essai*, Montaigne compared humans and animals from the point of view of his skepticism (he did not think that humans were not necessarily superior to animals). Furthermore, he recognized the existence of animal communication and a kind of ‘understanding’ similar to that of humans. Although Montaigne’s ideas influenced Descartes or Pascal in the later age, the development of philosophy in the pre-modern era and science tended to focused on ideas of Descartes, Pascal, Spinoza and other philosophers<sup>6</sup>.

Descartes claims that “we ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our reason. And it must be noted that I say of our reason, and not of our imagination or of our senses...” (Descartes, *Meditation*: 32). He thought that all ideas are faulty unless their truth is demonstrated by reason and understanding, and the human mind is the most reliable arbiter of truth. “I readily discover that there is nothing more easily or clearly apprehended than my own mind” (Descartes, *Meditation*: 94).

Thinking is another attribute of the soul; and here I discover what properly belongs to myself. This alone

is inseparable for me. ...I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind (*mens sive animus*), understanding, or reason, — terms whose signification was before unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing? The answer was, a thinking thing (Descartes, *Meditation* : 88).

It is clear that every human is a thinking animal. Recognition of self, perception of knowledge, and activities based on the mind are all human characteristics. Human reason is the fundamental center of the system of ‘thinking.’ This was absolutely true for Descartes, who felt that humans were bestowed with the ability to think as a benefit from God. Pascal, who rather criticized Descartes, also focused on human essence, mind and reason. Stating that “the nature of man is wholly natural, omne animal” (Pascal, *Pensées* : 190), he defined humans by stating that “the man is obviously made to think. It is whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now, the order of thought is to begin with self, and with its Author and its end” (Pascal, *Pensées* : 200). Thus, what is important point is to think, which is an idea similar to those of Descartes. A human is an animal, but there is a difference between them; to think is a decisively unique activity of humans, and of merit. Pascal described animals as “brutes” that cannot think. “I can well conceive a man without hands, feet, head (for it is only experience which teaches us that the head is more necessary than feet). But I cannot conceive man without thought; he would be a stone or a brute.” (Pascal, *Pensées* : 233). Plainly, Pascal regarded animals with some contempt. Descartes also used the word “brute,” which may be considered a discriminatory expression for an animal. “Man is neither angel nor brute, and the unfortunate thing is that he who would act the angel acts the brute” (Pascal, *Pensées* : 235). In his essay, *Pensées*, Pascal develops his ideas through the use of very cynical and ironic phrases. Essentially, he proposes that a man, as an animal, can be a vulgar, contemptible being because of his greedy and evil personality. Pascal plainly uses the word ‘brute’ as a metaphor. Although it is not clear whether Pascal considered all animals as contemptible beings, he did not appear to

consider animals as important beings. The most significant phrase in this essay is as follows:

The brutes do not admire each other. A horse does not admire his companion. Not that there is no rivalry between them in a race, but that is of no consequence; for, when in the stable, the heaviest and most ill-formed does not give up his oats to another, as men would have others do to them. Their virtue is satisfied with itself (Pascal, *Pensées* : 240-1).

In the present age Pascal would be criticized for his claim. He regards a horse as stupid animal that does not have intellect nor any consideration; in other words, a horse does not have emotions or sensations. Pointing out one essence of humans as “abject and vile,” Pascal implies the essential aspect of human virtue; a man can think, and have faith based on reason and an active mind. “That man without faith cannot know the true good, nor justice” (Pascal, *Pensées* : 243). Pascal’s philosophical discourse intends to introduce the morals and ethics of humans. The cynicism in his discourse involves a dualistic argument. The essence of a human can become either good or evil. Thinking humans should believe in and respect God, and seek happiness by doing good based on their faith. Only morals can lead people to true good.

He (God) only is our true good, and since we have forsaken him, it is a strange thing that there is nothing in nature which has not been serviceable in taking His place; the stars, the heavens, earth, the elements, plants, cabbages, leeks, animals, insects, calves, serpents, fever, pestilence, war, famine, vices, adultery, incest. And since man has lost the true good, everything can appear equally good to him, even his own destruction, though so opposed to God, to reason, and to the whole course of nature (Pascal, *Pensées* 244).

In Pascal’s discourse, animals and anything else could never take the place of God. This was a quite natural argument for that era. Animals in nature, livestock, and all

domesticated or tamed animals are mere brutes and no more than that for him. A horse is a horse that has no consideration and emotion. The most important thing to Pascal was faith and morals, which animals could not possess. Faith and goodness are stressed in his philosophical discourse, and in his argument the existence of animals is subtle and hardly referred to; he nevertheless indicates that animals are somewhat contemptible beings. Contrary to this, Descartes’ view on animals is more serious. Again, in the context of his Discourse on *Method*, which is considered one of the most influential works in modern philosophy, the following are well-known passages referred to by many experts on animal rights and animal ethics.

And here I specially stayed to show that, were there such machines exactly resembling in organs and outward form an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals; but if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain two most certain tests whereby to know that they were not therefore really men. Of these the first is that they could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others.... (Descartes, Discourse on *Method* : 44).

For it is highly deserving of remark, that there are no men so dull and stupid, not even idiots, as to be incapable of joining together different words, and thereby constructing a declaration by which to make their thoughts understood; and that on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect or happily circumstanced, which can do the like....And this proves not only that the brutes have less reason than man, but that they have none at all (Descartes. *Discourse on Method* : 45).

Descartes’ statements are so severe that people today find them discomfiting. Animals, ‘brutes,’ are stupid and have less reason than any human being. Today, it is well

established that several species of mammals and birds are highly intelligent, and have means of communication among conspecifics. Even some insects which form a kind of society (e.g., honey bees and ants) are confirmed to have well-developed communication systems and highly organized communities. This type of knowledge and information about animals continues to increase and spread among people worldwide. Cultural movements such as vegetarianism are due partly to the expansion of the knowledge concerning all living organisms and the respect for life.

Not only Descartes and Pascal thought of animals as machine-like. As mentioned above, feelings and values regarding animals' lives are diverse, and in the pre-modern age many people simply did not have the concept of reverence for life. We can find some statements on reason, mind, and virtue by another philosopher who lived in the age of Leibnitz, that is, Spinoza who put a boundary between reason and emotion. He contended that human emotions were influenced by temporal feelings, desire, impacts, and transient passion, whereas human reason is supposedly never affected by emotion, and Spinoza considered reason as highly important for a person to judge and understand things based on morals and ethics. From the viewpoint of Spinoza and other philosophers of his day, reason is the highly respected essence of human beings.

Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage (Spinoza, *Ethics* : 128).

What we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding; nor does the mind, insofar as it uses reason, judge anything else useful to itself except what leads to understanding.

...But the essence of reason is nothing but our mind, insofar as it understands clearly and distinctly. Therefore, whatever we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding. Next, since this striving of the mind, by which the mind insofar as it reasons, strives to preserve its being, is nothing but understanding... (Spinoza, *Ethics* : 128).

Spinoza proclaims that "the greatest thing the mind can understand is God, that is a being absolutely infinite, without which nothing can either be or be conceived. And so, the mind's greatest advantage, or good is knowledge of God." He proposed that "insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things which are good for human nature" (Spinoza, *Ethics* : 132). These ideas on reason and mind are understandable, showing similar aspects to those common among philosophers of his age, but Spinoza's discourse includes some points on animals. First, he was inclined to negate the emotion of "pity." "Pity, in a man who lives according to the guidance of reason, is evil of itself and useless" (Spinoza, *Ethics* 142). However, the emotion of pity felt toward animals is not unknown to Spinoza. The emotion of tolerant pity is rather necessary to protect weak animals. It is not a matter of shame to feel pity about the life of another being; rather, human ability to reason needs such an emotion for the reverence of life. Spinoza refers to the treatment of animals and their essence as follows:

...it is clear that the law against killing animals is based more on empty superstition and unmanly compassion than sound reason. The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us to establish a bond with men, but not with the lower animals, or with things whose nature is different from human nature. We have the same right against them that they have against us. Indeed, because the right of each one is defined by his virtue, or power, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men. Not that I deny that the lower animals have sensations. But I do deny that we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us. For they do not agree in nature with us, and their affects are different in nature from human affects (Spinoza, *Ethics* :135).

The idea of reason by Spinoza does not include emotional concepts like compassion, sympathy, tolerance or pity. His concept of reason is centered on the human mind, which

plays a role in considering, realizing, and recognizing God, based on human understanding. Human virtue in this mental activity is attributed to God. The most remarkable point in Spinoza's ideas is his denial of the feeling of pity. The concepts of animal welfare and animal rights places importance on a careful consideration of living things that are weaker than humans in some sense. Careful consideration is never imitated by superficial and emotional sentimentalism. The treatment of animals requires tolerant and patient care that provides protection and safety and a comfortable life, and such sound management is supported by honest human emotions. Compassion, an emotional aspect of caring for animals, includes a degree of pity. Animals under the care of humans are at a disadvantage compared to the humans. Since the domestication of livestock, these animals have always been at a disadvantage compared to their managers, who may or may not feel some pity or compassion for animals.

Although his ideas about animals are not as severe those espoused by Descartes, Spinoza seems to despise animals to some degrees. His philosophical discourse focuses on the ways of the human mind, the importance of reason, and attribution to God, which was the main philosophy of his age. Pascal, Descartes, and Spinoza thus indicated that animals do not exhibit an existence which humans should respect. They felt that animals are not rational beings and do not have emotions, a soul, or dignity to consider. The philosophers of the pre-modern age focused on establishing the concept of human dignity supported by reason, mind and understanding. Humans have goodness if they nurture their moral values. Such philosophical discourse did not include the idea of reverence for animals' lives.

#### 4 After Descartes, and on the reverence for animals' lives

The emphasis on the dignity, mind and reasoning of human beings is not only a characteristic of the pre-modern age; the origin of this way of thinking can be traced to precursors such as the theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who synthesized Greek philosophy and Christian ideas and emphasized human dignity in his

*Summa theologiae*. Theology is an intellectual source of the pre-modern Western philosophy, and Aquinas categorized living organisms as follows. God is the entity of the entire universe and created life, including that of each human being. Vegetation is placed in a lower position than that of animals, since animals consume vegetation; animals occupy a middle category, and humans are the most highly placed. Animals are, in the context of this ranking, made use of by humans. The order of deity is justified by the theory and the tradition of Greek philosophy: humans are beings with reason and rational life<sup>7</sup>. In Christian theology, the rank of a human was guaranteed by religious and philosophical arguments. In pre-modern times, the boundary between humans and animals was further expanded on the grounds that humans, a "rational animal", were capable of engaging in philosophical discourse<sup>8</sup>. Descartes stresses that the existence of a human is perfectly distinguishable from those of other organisms:

...for after the error of those who deny the existence of God, an error which I think I have already sufficiently refuted, there is none that is more powerful in leading feeble minds astray from the straight path of virtue than the supposition that the soul of the brutes is of the same nature with our own; and consequently that after his life we have nothing to hope for or fear, more than flies and ants; in place of which, when we know how far they differ we much better comprehend the reasons which establish that the soul is of a nature wholly independent of the body, and that consequently it is not liable to die with the latter; and, finally, because no other causes are observed capable of destroying it, we are naturally led thence to judge that it is immortal (Descartes, *Discourse on Method* : 46-7).

Here Descartes clearly defines the immortal mind of a human. He is confident that a human's soul is more deserving of respect than an animal; they are beyond comparison. Human dignity and the status of humans as rational beings is established in his philosophical discourse. In Descartes' view, since animals are not sentient beings and do not have

souls or emotion, humans have the right to make use of animals efficiently for all kinds of purposes. Ever since Aristotle advanced his views on animals, animals have been thought not to be rational beings. Livestock animals are specifically regarded as a resource for human society, although pets are treated with special care as a different type of family member. Unless religious faith or philosophies demand the protection of specific animals or living things generally, animals have usually not been treated with care. The worship or persecution of animals vary among geographic regions and throughout history. In India, a zebu (humped cow) is a respected and sacred being, but a water buffalo is considered a devil. The wolf is a messenger of the god of mountains in Japan, but its presence is persecuted in Europe. Cats were regarded as deities in Egypt in ancient times, but they were persecuted as devils in parts of Europe in the medieval age. In the regions influenced by Christian faith, living things were classified and ranked according to the philosophical theory presented by Aquinas.

However, there have long been outliers who perceived that animals have a certain intellect and sensations. George Arabatzis refers to a Byzantine philosopher, Michael of Ephesus (mid-12th century) who thought that animals (and plants) “speak and ask for the attention of humans” (Arabatzis, 2009: 107). Like the idea of Pythagoras, those who think that animals have a soul or at least human-like abilities (for example, communication) did not consider animals to be ‘lower’ or inferior beings and did not despise them. People in ancient times personified animals as being aligned with a deity, or were simply in awe of some animals as leading a mysterious and fear-inducing existence. Wild animals, especially those such as wolves, bison, elk, pumas, jaguars, and other wild feline species, snakes, and many other living things which seemed stronger or superior to humans in other ways were the objects of awe and sometimes worship. As suggested in the Introduction, ancient Egyptians created many deities based on animals living in the region. In Japan, wolves, deer, a tortoise, a snake, monkeys, crows, and others were symbols of religious deities in various regions. In many other countries, animals have served as symbols or deities based on their appearance and characteristics in nature.

Times passed, and in the 14th century, since the cause of the bubonic plague and other infectious diseases were not fully understood, people feared epidemics and their overwhelming destructive power. Technology and science gradually progressed, and with this progression the superstitious, mysterious, and respectable aspects of animals began to lose their influence on humans. Human morals and ethics became indices of the progress of human societies, and the religious aspects of life dwindled. In the pre-modern age, philosophers developed their arguments using metaphysical and humanistic logic.

The discourse on animals by Descartes was one of the most impressive and influential theories. In such discourse, the concepts of the sentience and emotion of animals were completely denied. What should be emphasized is that animals were excluded from the range of ‘ethics,’ which should include essentially all organisms on earth. The most important implication of a reverence for life was not considered in the ‘machine theory’ argument. The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) is considered to have inherited and expanded the ideas of Descartes.

For example, the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) recognized that animals are sentient and suffer, but he denied that we can have any direct moral obligations to them because they are neither rational nor self-aware. According to Kant, animals are merely a means to human ends; they are “man’s instruments”; they exist only for our use and have no value in themselves. ... The view that we have no direct moral obligations to animals was also reflected in the law. Before the nineteenth century, the law did not recognize any legal obligations to animals (Francione, 2000: 3).

It is a fact that in many countries, regulations and penal codes related to animal abuse or killing are not strict: rather, many cases are settled with lenient punishment and fines. This is because animals are not under legal protection, and are excluded from the range of human morals and rights. There is a contradiction in Kant’s idea suggested by Francione. Kant recognizes that animals are sentient beings.

The truth that animals are not “rational beings,” which is the pre-modern philosophical view, cannot be avoided. However, sentience is an idea in the category of sensitivity, emotion, and sensation, which are closely related to the senses of organisms. If animals are sentient, they certainly feel pain and distress. Sentience is one of the most important factors when we consider animal ethics, animal rights, and animal welfare. It is our obligation and responsibility as humans to protect animals from pain, discomfort, and stress to the extent possible.

Roughly 200 years after the age of Descartes, the English social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) took account of this point in his argument and applied it to his own theory of morality. In a way, Bentham moved the focus of the argument away from reason and toward suffering. According to the philosopher Rosalind Hursthouse (b. 1943):

The question is not, Can they *reason*? Nor Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*? We have seen how, from Aristotle to the present day, the faculty of reason and the faculty of discourse have been viewed as inseparable, part of the same package which draws a hard and fast line between us and all other animals (Hursthouse, 2000: 71).

The utilitarian argument has developed since Bentham’s discourse. The issue of the suffering of animals became the driving force for the ideas underlying animal ethics and animal rights. Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza did not take into consideration the important issue of animals’ suffering<sup>9</sup>. The implication of sentience is significant when we consider animals’ lives, as they can suffer in the same way as humans do. The idea of reverence for life is based on the realization that animals feel things, and they are sentient beings. This is the most important point that should be emphasized in this argument.

It should still be borne in mind that Leibnitz suggested in his works that animals may have souls, as described above. This idea is opposed to that of Descartes. Leibnitz recognizes a form of dignity in every being’s life. Although he did not define the intellect of animals based on evidence, his discourse indicates ‘divine’ souls of animals. In Leibnitz’s

context, there are some points which indicate an animal’s soul and sentience.

The body belonging to a monad (which is the entelechy or soul of that body) together with an entelechy constitutes what may be called a living being, and together with a soul constitutes what is called an animal (Leibnitz, *Monadology* : 77).

There are many explications about what Leibnitz’s ‘monad’ and ‘entelechies’ meant but there is evidently much likelihood that he thought animals have souls and respected their lives. It is therefore worthwhile to examine and consider Leibnitz’s ideas on life and animals in greater detail. If as he indicated, animals are sentient beings, and experience emotions, we are obliged to evaluate and place his philosophical thoughts on life and animals more explicitly in the history of animal ethics, because the idea of reverence for animals’ lives is essential to considerations of animal ethics.

## 5 Conclusion

In 1648, the terrible religious strife had ended. As theological restraints dwindled, the fields of science developed. Descartes, Pascal, Leibnitz and Francis Bacon were essentially scientists. The development of science enhanced the progress of expertise in various fields, returning their outcomes to societies. Philosophy and morals on human reason and ethics also developed, focusing mainly on self-recognition and existence (recognizing the existence of God). It is well known that Descartes regarded animals as a kind of machine. Pascal or Spinoza also expressed discriminatory ideas about animals in their discourses. The important point is recognition of the existence of the emotion and soul of animals. Some philosophers realized that animals could communicate, and others realized that animals possessed a kind of language. However, recognition that animals are ‘sentient beings’ is the more important essence. It is to be expected that philosophy based on homocentric values made little of animals’ abilities and dignity. From the point of view of animal ethics, the age was still under development. While

science and technology or medicine developed in Europe, more sophisticated ideas on ethics emerged later. Bentham applied utilitarian thought to animals. He considered animals' perception of pain, and thought the issues of suffering animals are more important than the presence and absence of 'reason.' In the 18th century, a different view on the treatment of animals emerged through arguments on perception of pain<sup>10</sup>. In the 20th century, Bentham's way of thought was applied to the discussion of animal rights as utilitarianism. Yet, it is necessary to consider another philosopher who lived almost in the same age as Descartes. Leibnitz was a philosopher who realized that a kind of soul existed in animals. While Leibnitz's expressions such as 'monad' or 'entelechies' present difficulties in comprehension, it is certain that he opposed the ideas of Descartes and realized the existence of souls, emotion, and sentience in animals. There is some important essence in Leibnitz's discourses which are associated with the idea of reverence for lives and all organisms. This is due to his personality, or deep insights into living things.

One of the most important factors of the discussion on animal ethics, animal rights, or animal welfare is placing values on animals. The idea of reverence for lives is at the core of a consideration of animal ethics. Leibnitz's ideas of respect of 'life' may form a basic view on this problem. A future article will explore this discussion in more detail.

#### Notes

1. A huge number of locusts or leafhoppers had destroyed crops and grasses; they devastated farm lands and caused irreversible damage to old agriculture. Bacteria, viruses, and parasites infected humans who did not have any knowledge of medicine or immunity and could not survive in insanitary environments without medical support. People in ancient times probably feared nearly every type of organism in nature. One cause of bubonic pests was thought to be a vague 'miasma.' Humanity in general has been severely threatened with by nature and disease, at least until the modern age when industry, technology and medicine developed to the point at which some protection against these threats has been provided.
2. It is necessary to note that Leibnitz first recognizes the reason of a human above the potential soul of an animal. In clause 29 of his *Monadology*, he suggests the following:
 

"But the knowledge of eternal and necessary truths is what distinguishes us from simple animals and furnishes us with reason and the sciences, by raising us to a knowledge of ourselves and of God. And that is what we call the rational soul, or mind, in ourselves." (Leibnitz, *Monadology*: 29)
3. The title of this work is 'Ermine,' but there is a suggestion that this animal is a different animal, possibly a ferret.
4. The scale of animal husbandry was far smaller than that of modern intensive agriculture. Most farms were small-scale with few animals.
5. It is uncertain whether invertebrates have emotions and compassion. Some ants carry corpses to a cemetery-like spot, but this activity is likely based on hygiene rather than compassion; the ants avoid infection from the dead bodies of their comrades. Some spiders and scorpions protect their eggs or young, but this is driven by instinct. Motherhood and compassion to conspecifics are characteristics of mammals and birds.
6. In 1676, *Les Essais* was added to a list of prohibited books. The contents were regarded as atheism. Montaigne cynically criticized human essence. His skeptical viewpoint led him to consider the differences and common ground between humans and animals, recognizing both sides' similarity. Pierre Charron, a theologian, who formed a friendship with Montaigne also compared humans with animals in his work, *De la sagesse*. Charron, in a sense, followed the ideas of Montaigne on this point. The ideas of both men are regarded as having had some effect on the thought of utilitarianism and 'animal rights' in the later age.
7. References to Aquinas' statement are frequently made with regard to arguments in animal ethics. For example:
 

"...as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore, it is in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be master over animals." (Hursthouse, 2000: 62) The justification of the utilization of animals is understood in this clause. People can eat the meat of livestock and use milk for dairy products. Yet, the important point is that human is the master over animals, on the grounds that humans are rational beings.
8. Francione made quite an impressive reference associated with Darwin's comments.
 

"Charles Darwin made quite clear that there are no uniquely human characteristics when he wrote that "the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind." Darwin had no doubt that dogs, cats, farm animals, and other animals are able to think and possess of same emotional responses as do humans: "the senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity,

imitation, reason, &c., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.” Darwin maintained that female animals exhibited maternal affection and he noted that “associated animals have a feeling of love for each other” and that “[m]any animals...certainly sympathise with each other’s distress or danger.” (Francione, 113-4)

9. John Locke who developed the empirical argument, was not tolerant of animals.
10. Nicolas de Malebranche followed Descartes’ idea on animals, and thought that animals had no perception or reason. Later, Kant made light of animals, and did not regard them as sentient beings.

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