

## REPLY

(IN RE: E&A IV/1, Loftin's review of Kapleau's  
*To Cherish All Life*)

Robert Loftin's review of my book *To Cherish All Life* is disturbing, not because it avoids comment on the central issues of the book but because it is bad criticism. Instead of a critical analysis of the book's objectives and how well or how poorly they were accomplished, Loftin takes refuge in *obiter dicta*, such as "In general, the book is marked by a lack of intellectual sophistication," and "The level of argumentation does not meet the standards of a professional philosopher."

Anyone with half an eye can see that the book was not put together for professional philosophers, so why should it be judged by their standards? The aim of the book was to shake and move readers to renounce flesh eating so as to reduce the suffering and destruction of animals. An appeal to the readers' sense of pity and compassion seemed to me a surer way to accomplish that than resorting to rational arguments couched in precise philosophical terminology. I did not exclude reasoned argument, but I believe with Lord Dunsany that "Logic, like whiskey, loses its beneficial effect when taken in too large a quantity."

As proof of my ignorance of the standards of a professional

philosopher, of whom presumably he is one, Loftin incredibly cites this passage: "It is safe to assume that most of the 7 to 10 million who are vegetarians in this country are such for humane reasons as opposed to health ones." By elevating what is obviously a minor point into a major one, Loftin reveals the nit-picking level of his criticism. And why does he object to the passage quoted? It's undocumented. Presumably a professional philosopher would never err in such fashion. Even though the statement is undocumented, it is not based on mere conjecture. As the head of a Zen Buddhist Center with many branches in different parts of the world, I have talked with hundreds of people practicing vegetarianism, or trying to. Most have told me that their refusal to eat flesh foods was grounded in feelings of compassion for the sufferings of animals, and not out of a concern for their own health. But I will concede that such limited experience does not justify my generalization.

Mr. Loftin also faults the book for what he calls its "fundamentalist air," and because it "sometimes seems to rely on *argumentum ad autoritarium*. . . . Some of the arguments seem quite dubious to anyone trained in the

Western tradition of scientific thought." My Webster defines fundamentalism as "religious beliefs based on a literal interpretation of everything in the Bible and regarded as fundamental to Christian faith and morals." That he is unable to cite even one passage in the book that fits that description only shows how "unscientific," or should we say "unphilosophical," his criticism is. Presumably Mr. Loftin has been trained in the the "Western tradition of scientific thought" that he admires so much. Why, then, this woolly reference to fundamentalism—a word that he puts in quotation marks, which makes his use of it only woollier.

Equally ambiguous is his statement, "and sometimes it [the book] seems to rely on *argumentum ad autoritarium*. What does he mean by "seems"? Either it relies on authority or it doesn't. And what is the authority? The Buddha? If so, he hasn't read the book attentively, else he would have discovered this sentence: "Ultimately the case for shunning animal flesh does not rest on what the Buddha allegedly said or didn't say. What it does rest on is our innate moral goodness, compassion, and pity which, when liberated, lead us to value all forms of life."

The passage Loftin cites to support his contention that some of the arguments "seem quite dubious to anyone trained in the tradition of Western scientific thought" is this one:

How is it possible to swallow the carcasses of the slain creatures, permeated as they are with the violent energy of the pain and terror experienced by them at the time of their slaughter, and not have hatred, aggression, and violence stimulated in oneself and others.

The fact is, it has been

demonstrated that eating large quantities of meat produces an excess of uric acid in the blood and that this condition causes irritation and even aggression. It is also known that the mental vibrations of a cook get into the food he or she is preparing, and that if such a person is in an angry or deeply resentful mood, that food will cause in a sensitive person who eats it stomach upsets, headaches, and the like. This explains why in the Zen monastery only disciples most advanced in their training—that is, those with the most equable minds—are allowed to do the cooking. Such subjective knowledge is indigenous to many cultures. In *To Cherish All Life* I quoted this ancient Chinese verse:

For hundreds of thousands of years/  
the stew in the pot/  
has brewed hatred and resentment/  
that is difficult to stop./  
If you wish to know why there  
are disasters/ of armies and  
weapons on the world/ listen to  
the piteous cries/ from the  
slaughterhouse at midnight.

The foregoing may offend Loftin's scientifically trained Western mind, but only if he refuses to acknowledge that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy.

Although Loftin makes no effort to discuss the moral and ethical issues of the book, he complains that "the book lacks biological sophistication. We are told that 'whales' are 'an endangered species.' Whales are an order, and within that order are many species, only some of which are endangered ..." In the face of such a demonstration of one's appalling ignorance, what can one do except hang his head in shame.

Elsewhere in his review Loftin writes: "Then too, Kapleau assumes a reincarnation theory to argue against

eating animals. ... This argument will carry weight with a confirmed Buddhist, but it makes little impression on those who regard reincarnation as problematical at best." Buddhism does not speak of reincarnation but of rebirth, or re-becoming, which is something else again. The law of conservation of energy states that no energy is ever lost, only transformed. What, then, happens to the energy that is myself upon the death of the physical body? Is it more reasonable to suppose that it reappears in a form conditioned by one's karma, that is, causes and conditions set in motion by oneself, or that that energy disappears permanently? Buddhists—and they are not the only ones—affirm the first. For isn't birth, growth, decay, disintegration, rebecoming, the cycle of natural events? Anyone who denies it denies the evidence of his senses and his deepest intuitions.

One more criticism of Loftin's needs to be addressed: "Many of the better points [of the book] are taken directly from Peter Singer and have a

strongly derivative flavor." True enough. And where did Singer get most of his better points? From proponents of animal rights of an earlier generation—namely, Henry Salt, Jeremy Bentham, and others. This is not meant as a put-down of Singer's book, which I greatly admire; it's simply an affirmation of the truism that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. After all, is there any first-rate painter after Cezanne who is not indebted to him? As I pointed out in the second edition of *To Cherish All Life* that was published by Harper & Row, the arguments and rationalizations of those seeking to justify the exploitation of animals, and the counter arguments of Henry Salt and others, have scarcely changed since almost a century ago.

Despite Mr. Loftin's criticisms, I am heartened to have him say in his conclusion that he agrees with the aims and conclusions of *To Cherish All Life*, and that he hopes its readers will take its message to heart.

Philip Kapleau

The Zen Center  
Rochester, New York