

Vegetarianism and *Ahiṃsā* in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*

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Abstract: The *adhyāyas* 114 to 117 of the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (the 13th book of the *Mahābhārata*) introduce the topic of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and its relation to vegetarianism. All in all, the text enjoins that following a vegetarian diet is the greatest non-violent practice. However, several verses of this section allow practices related to Vedic sacrifice, which include meat offerings. In view of the principles of non-violence, such an “exception” to the *ahiṃsā* rule may be seen by some as a logical inconsistency. Instead, I argue that such apparent contradiction can be resolved if we consider that the *Mahābhārata* addresses different audiences. On one side, there are those leading a contemplative life (*nivṛtti*), aiming at spiritual upliftment, who follow the path of *ahiṃsā* and maintain a vegetarian diet. On the other side, those engaged in an active life (*pravṛtti*) perform Vedic rituals in view of worldly objects and relish the animals sacrificed to the gods. As a result of their class duty, Hindu warriors may also hunt and eat animals. In this article, I further implement my arguments and investigate the relation between non-violence and vegetarianism in the *Mahābhārata*.

INTRODUCTION

The main plot of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh) narrates the epic war between the Pāṇḍava and the Kaurava brothers. This narrative, together with the many episodes of warriors engaged in hunting trips, do not form a logical background to the discourse of non-violence and vegetarianism, as it figures prominently in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (AP), the 13th book of the epic.¹ How is it possible that the *adhyāyas* 114 to 117 of this book provide us with a eulogy to the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*? It is unanimously accepted that the MBh is the result of centuries of epos production. Dandekar (2009) speaks of the MBh as the outcome of contin-

¹ This article draws on research for my M.A. thesis, “Vegetarianism and *Ahiṃsā* in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (XIII.114–117)” submitted on the 18th of April 2018. The thesis was written under the invaluable supervision of Prof. Dr. Ute Hüsken and Dr. Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi. I am also thankful to Simon Cubelic and Kush Depala for their contribution in the revision of this article. All translations are mine, except where indicated otherwise.

uous literary activity stretching over many centuries. He dates the epic's composition in a time frame that ranges from 800 BCE to 200 CE. This period, also known as the early post-Vedic age, appears as an era of transition from the old Vedic society to new normative realms. The gradual decay of the Brahmanical order offers room for new reflections and re-interpretations of the ritualistic world. Dandekar argues: "Just as the *Mahābhārata* reflects the clear emergence of these forces of social and political change which transformed the later Vedic-society into the society of *Arthaśāstra* and the *Manusmṛti*, similarly the *Mahābhārata* also shows the beginning of that criticism and reinterpretations of orthodoxy [...]" (Dandekar 2009: 57). Against this background, Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of the god Dharma, plays the role of a hero constantly searching to define the right way of conduct. The Pāṇḍava's conflict between various moral and social issues finds its central stage in the 12th and 13th books of the epic, the *Śāntiparvan* (ŚP) and the AP respectively. The hero asks Bhīṣma to clarify the ethical problem of meat eating, which, at the time of the MBh's redaction, was an unresolved dilemma:

The doubt regarding the act of avoiding meat is arisen in us. What will be the crime of the one who eats and what the merit of the one who does not eat meat?²

The whole of the section XIII.114–117 deals with the relation between *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism. Alsdorf (2010) refers to this set of verses as the longest Hindu textual source on *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism known to us thus far. He describes these passages as a "squalid text", an "entangled mess with contradictions" and "literal repetitions" (Alsdorf 2010: 34). He also mentions that this section is probably a very late addition to the MBh corpus. Analysing the oldest extant list of the MBh's *parvans*, Schlingloff (1969) notices that the AP is not included there. For this reason, he also consents to the assumption that this set of verses was at that time unknown to the epos and that the entire book is probably a later addition. Kane (1968: 381) claims that the twenty-thousand verses contained in the ŚP and in the AP are inserted in the timeframe when Bhīṣma is wounded and near death. This, he argues, is a helpful camouflage for the later assimilation of additional textual material.

² MBh XIII.116.3: *jāto naḥ saṃśayo dharme māṃsasya parivarjane | doṣo bhakṣayataḥ kaḥ syāt kaścābhakṣayato guṇaḥ ||*

Both books XII and XIII do not seem to be directly linked to the main narration. It can be likely assumed that the discourse on vegetarianism is a section of a normative text inserted within the temporal hiatus created by Bhīṣma clinging to life. This juncture allows a narrative break introducing the two books containing the instructions of the great-uncle to his nephew Yudhiṣṭhira, namely the ŚP or “The Book of Peace” and the AP or “The Book of Instructions”³. Hence, we can assume that the section taken in account here is one of the most recent additions to the MBh’s corpus. In the course of this article, I will analyse the apparent contradictions of the verses under consideration, and I will attempt to produce a plausible reading-key to this section of the AP.

THE AP AND THE MS

In many instances, the MBh quotes the legislators Manu, Āpastamba, Mārkaṇḍeya, Nārada and Bṛhaspati to demonstrate that the rules given by its ślokas are positions already authorised by an earlier Hindu tradition. It is therefore useful to understand the relation between the AP and these legal texts, in order to analyse their mutual contexts and uncover additional information that may offer an interpretation of the apparent contradictions found in the epos. With the only exception of Manu, the compiler of the *Manusmṛti* (MS), I could not find the original textual references that the MBh boasts. For example, the *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* (Āpśś) does not match any quotation from the AP. However, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (2009) contains a section dealing with dietary customs, and passages XXIX.1–9; XXXI.31,49,58–59; XXXII.2–3 address the topic of meat-consumption. Although the MBh (XIII.116.36) lists the faults deriving from carnivorous habits as established by Mārkaṇḍeya, the verses from the *purāṇa* convey a few rules on which animals can or cannot be eaten, but they do not ban eating meat as such. The *Nāradaapurāṇa* does not match the statement attributed by the epos to its namesake.⁴ The same injunction is repeated in MBh XIII.116.34, but without

³ After the great battle, Bhīṣma is seriously wounded by all the arrows that struck him. He received by his father the gift to be able to choose the moment of his death. Before leaving the earth, he decides to give the last teachings on *dharma*.

⁴ MBh XIII.116.14: “Nārada, who has a righteous self, proclaimed that the one who desires to strengthen his own flesh by means of the flesh of another being perishes for sure” (*svamāṃsaṃ paramāṃsena yo vardhayitum icchati | nāradaḥ prāha dharmātmā niyatam so’vasidati |*).

the reference to Nārada. Furthermore, an equivalent rule is found in the MS V.52. The *Bṛhaspatismṛti* also does not match with the reference given in MBh XIII.116.15, where Bṛhaspati seems to declare the results of avoiding honey and meat.⁵ While most of the early legal texts are not of help in understanding the positions of the MBh, Manu stands apart.

It is a well-known fact that the AP and the MS share similar sets of rules on the topic of vegetarianism and that they even present a few identical verses (e.g. MBh XIII.117.34 and MS V.55). Winternitz (2015: 489f.) claims that the earliest parts of the MBh are older than the MS, whereas later insertions to the MBh are quoting a text that was not very different from the actual MS. The editors of the didactic sections of both works have often drawn elements from the old oral knowledge. Oldenberg (1903: 187) argues that the MS dates from the same time as most sections of the MBh. Furthermore, Bühler (1886) concluded that both MBh and MS drew on the same stock of popular wisdom, and Alsdorf (2010: 31f.) agrees with this assumption. Olivelle (2005: 23) remains guarded on that matter and observes that – if at all – one text is quoting the other, it is more likely that the epic draws from expert *śāstras*, rather than the opposite. Thus, we can hypothesise that the MBh's injunctions taken here into account either come from an oral patrimony that was also known to the compiler of the MS, or that they are directly quoted from the MS. Does the fact that the AP explicitly refers to Manu (XIII.116.12) date the AP as consecutive to Manu and, therefore, establishes the MS as the source of this portion of the MBh? Probably not. As a matter of fact, the MS itself quotes Manu (e.g. MS V.41). Olivelle (2012) explains that the authors of the *dharmaśāstras* from the 4th century BCE up to the beginning of the 1st century CE, namely Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha, cite 17 earlier legislators as textual authorities. Nothing much is left to us about them, apart from their names; among these, there is also one Manu, which is probably the reason why, in some instances, even the MS itself seems to quote its own author.

⁵ Although prior research on these references was unsuccessful, I am aware of the fact that, before stating that these quotes are simply arbitrary, a deeper study to locate these references should be done. Therefore, it would be advisable to make a deeper inquiry to establish whether these references find correspondence in the early literature.

Olivelle (2012) explains that the work of Manu is characterised by a complex architecture which organises chapters and sub-chapters under thematic areas. The third section of this legal text is dealing with “the *dharma* of the four *varṇas*” (MS II.25–XI.266). The sub-section MS II.26–VI.97 clusters the verses dealing with the “fourfold *dharma* of a *brāhmin*”. The passages dealing with food regulations are located within the fifth chapter of the legal text, in the section devoted to the *dharma* of *brāhmins*. This seems to point out that these injunctions are established only for the members of the first *varṇa*. Although the MBh and the MS give similar guidelines on alimentation, a comparison of these two shows one main difference: in fact, while Manu directs his injunctions only to *brāhmins*, in the epos no specific *varṇa* is addressed. As a matter of fact, *adhyāyas* 114–117 do not enjoin *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism only to priests.

If we hold to the thesis that the MBh is quoting from the MS, or from a similar stock of popular wisdom, we could hypothesise that the rules of strict vegetarianism found in the epos are drawn from the rules specifically for *brāhmins*. Such specifications on diet are however lost in *adhyāyas* 114–117. Moreover, it should be taken into account that these teachings are propounded by Bhīṣma, a *kṣatriya*, to Yudhiṣṭhira, another *kṣatriya*,⁶ behavioural rules for kings and fighters would be expected here. However, if we look into Manu’s sub-section MS VII–IX.325 (which follows the one on the “fourfold *dharma* of a *brāhmin*”) on the “rules of action for a king”, we find neither praise of *ahiṃsā*, nor prohibition on meat-consumption. In the AP, before the section on *ahiṃsā*, Yudhiṣṭhira had already asked his uncle about the *dharma* of the four *varṇas*, and this subject was completed before *adhyāyas* 114–117. Therefore, it is highly improbable that this section is specifically addressing only to the first *varṇa* alone. Moreover, the fact that MBh XIII.113 introduces the importance of donations of food to *brāhmins*, and that the following chapters (XIII.114–117) do not show any explicit change in terms of the recipient, makes it less likely that *brāhmins* were formerly enjoined to gift themselves. While on one hand, the food rules established by Manu are guidelines for a well-defined group of people, on the other, the AP gives die-

⁶ On this matter, Kane (1941: 780) says that the *kṣatriya* have been meat-eaters since ancient times.

tary dispositions to all, without marking any apparent distinction. If one accepts the hypothesis that the MBh and the MS independently draw material from a stock of popular wisdom, it is possible to suppose that such rules were simply framed in different contexts, or that they came from slightly different sources. However, if we accept Olivelle’s statement and his hesitation in believing that an expert *śāstra* might have borrowed information from the epic, we can assume rather the opposite, namely that the AP has borrowed food regulations from the MS’s Brahminical section, standardising them and making them applicable to all. Since the nature of the relationship of these two texts has not been established yet, we cannot state with certainty which of these two hypotheses resemble reality.

Kane (1941: 780) argues that the compiler of the MS is a clear upholder of *ahimśā*. In addition, Manu cannot ignore the ancient custom of Vedic rituals, which include animal sacrifices and a presumably ancient habit of meat-consumption. In fact, a great portion of the early legal literature does not ban meat, but rather gives restrictions on which animals can or cannot be eaten (see *Gautamasamhitā*, XVII). The consumption of meat consecrated in sacrifice according to Vedic rules is generally not only permitted, but even enjoined both in the MS (e.g. V.31) and in the MBh (e.g. XIII.116.50). In the MS, the *ślokas* permitting meat-consumption are followed by others which prohibit it, and that creates a number of apparent contradictions within this section. Kane (1941: 777) sees in these discrepancies the witness of three historical stages of “development” towards vegetarianism. These correspond to the ancient habits of consuming meat and its eventual restriction to the Vedic arena, with further call to vegetarianism. Olivelle (2005: 279) hypothesises that the MS exhibits a dialectic pattern arguing against the omnivorous diet. Manu first introduces a *pūrvapakṣa*, the positions of the “adversaries”, which results in stating that the law of nature governs the world by means of a food chain, which lays down the rules between those who eat and those suitable for being eaten (MS V.30). The *uttarapakṣa*, receptacle of the correct doctrine, disagrees with that vision and contemplates only the consumption of meat within the boundaries of the sacrificial arena, or the absolute abstention from it.

The AP does not consider the idea that one may relish the flesh of other living beings outside the ritual context (XIII.116.50). *Adhyāyas* 114–117 allow and enjoin the partaking of sacrificed animals and, at the same time, strongly

recommend a vegetarian diet. In such instance, there is a coexistence of the Vedic sacrifice and strict vegetarianism, whereas the habit of arbitrary consumption of meat is not contemplated.

THE TEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF THE SECTION ON *AHIṂSĀ*

Adhyāyas 114 to 117 introduce the teachings on *ahiṁsā* and stress the importance of maintaining a vegetarian diet. *Adhyāya* 114 is introduced by Bṛhaspati, the teacher of the gods, who instructs Yudhiṣṭhira. He briefly explains the supreme relevance of the conduct based on non-violence. He emphasises the importance of *ahiṁsā*, but he never specifically comments upon diet. At the end of the first section (XIII.114.11), Bṛhaspati returns to heaven, and thus starts the dialogue between Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma, which characterises *adhyāyas* 115, 116 and 117. The Pāṇḍava's uncle is supine, supported by several arrows keeping his body lifted above the ground. The Kurukṣetra war is now over and a few winners gather around Bhīṣma, who, before passing away, explains the rules of good conduct. *Adhyāyas* 115 to 117 transmit a eulogy of *ahiṁsā* and the consequent food regulations, with the contemplation of the illustrious exceptions of *brāhmins* in the context of Vedic sacrifices and *kṣatriya* hunters. Overall, this section presents a dialogical structure dominated by Yudhiṣṭhira's questions to Bṛhaspati (XIII.114) and to Bhīṣma (XIII.114–117). Although the rhythm of the text is maintained by the conversation among these great warriors, the Pāṇḍava's doubts either remain unaddressed or are answered after long digressions. For example, one of the key inquiries introduced by Yudhiṣṭhira, which attempts at solving the dilemma generated by the coexistence of Vedic sacrifice and *ahiṁsā*, never reaches a proper answer:

First, the rule of the *śrāddha* ceremony is said by you as [requiring] many sorts of meat. In this way, is meat contradictory with “not having killed”?⁷

⁷ MBh XIII.116.2: *māṁsair bahuvividhaiḥ proktas tvayā śrāddhavidhiḥ purā | ahatvā ca kuto māṁsam evam etad virudhyate ||*

While translating *adhyāyas* 114–117, a few consistent topics have emerged.⁸ First, *ahiṁsā* is established as the best *dharma* and the conditions for its performance are presented and explained. It is made clear that the achievement of a non-violent conduct comes from the practice of meat-abstention. In addition to that, the rewards deriving from vegetarianism are listed as a supplementary reason to the endurance of this habit. Nevertheless, as a deterrent, punishments in this life and the afterlife are established for those who persist in meat-consumption. A brief philosophical speculation on the grade of crime related to the refusal of *ahiṁsā* is also introduced. The topic of the Vedic ritual is widely debated; victims that are sacrificed to the gods according to the rules of the sacrificial science are eligible to be eaten as well as the animals hunted by *kṣatriyas*. The entire section concludes with five *ślokas* (XIII.117.37–41) standing as the *śrāvaṇaphala* of this whole section.

THE RIGHT PATH TO FOLLOW

The MBh introduces the dilemma of identifying the correct way of living. The following *ślokas* open the AP's discussion on the *dharma* of non-violence and abstention from meat:

Yudhiṣṭhira said: what is better for a man? *Ahiṁsā*, Vedic ritual, meditation, restraint of senses, religious austerities or the service to the *guru*?⁹ [...] Look! I proclaim the highest and most excellent [*dharma*] of a human being. If somebody achieves the *dharma* based on *ahiṁsā*, he is indeed the true man.¹⁰

These verses not only highlight the importance of non-violence, but even state its supremacy over every other kind of action. For instance, ritual sacrifice and religious austerities are less relevant than *ahiṁsā*, which is here identified as a “way of conduct” (*dharma*). In line with this, the dialogue introduces the means and the requirements to achieve the performance of non-violence.

⁸ The text into account is the Critical Edition of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute published in Poona in 1966.

⁹ MBh XIII.114.1: *yudhiṣṭhira uvāca | ahiṁsā vaidikaṁ karma dhyānam indriyaśamyaṁ | tapo'tha guruśūśrūṣā kiṁ śreyah puruṣaṁ prati ||*

¹⁰ MBh XIII.114.3: *hanta niḥśreyasaṁ jantor ahaṁ vakṣyāmy anuttamam | ahiṁsāpāśrayaṁ dharmam yaḥ sādhayati vai naraḥ ||*

HOW TO PERFORM *AHIṂSĀ*

Bṛhaspati explains in short how to practice *ahiṁsā* by achieving:

- a. Restraint of the three instruments (*doṣa*):
 - i. *manas* (“mind”)
 - ii. *vacas* (“speech”)
 - iii. [*kāya-*]*karman* (“bodily action”)
- b. Control of action and repulsion
- c. *Ātma-aupamyā*, “identification of others as oneself”

a. *The restraint of the three doṣas*

A man, after having restraint the three instruments (*doṣas*) towards all living beings and after having controlled attraction and repulsion, always attains perfection.¹¹

What does Bṛhaspati mean with “restraint” of the three *doṣas*? Could these three be intended as the humours of the body, or rather as the three *guṇas*, namely *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*, in relation to the qualities of food? Does that mean that a man should have a balanced diet in order to perform *ahiṁsā*? This seems unlikely. In fact, the apparatus of the Critical Edition informs us that instead of *doṣas*, the Bombay Edition of the MBh reads “the three *lokas*, or places” (B3, *trīṃllokān*), while the Telugu, Grantha and Malayalam versions¹² speak of “the three *ḍaṇḍas*, or triple control” (T2.3GM, *trīḍaṇḍam*), and there appears to be no alternative naming as “the three *guṇas*”. The same term *doṣa* is found again in XIII.115.9-10, and, according to the Critical Edition, in these instances there is no alternative reading of the word. However, we can probably assume that *doṣa* keeps the same connotation in its occurrences along the body of the text. I believe that here *doṣa* has the meaning of “fault”, or “badness” that sticks to the tools through which human beings engage with the world. One can perform *hiṁsā* (“violence”) by means of mind, speech and bodily action, but as a consequence to that:

¹¹ MBh XIII.114.4: *trīn doṣān sarvabhūteṣu nidhāya puruṣaḥ sadā | kāmakrodhau ca saṃyamya tataḥ siddhim avāpnute ||*

¹² For a detailed study on the editions and versions of the MBh, see *Ādiparvan* LXXII–LXXIII.

The living beings are tainted by action, speech and thought.¹³

The *doṣas* are here the faults deriving from the bad activities of *manas*, *vacas* and [*kāya*-]*karman* which taint human beings with the bias of the filthy action. Accordingly, when Bṛhaspati enjoins to restrain the three *doṣas*, he exhorts Yudhiṣṭira to exercise control over these three elements, that are those through which one engages in the world. The alternative reading “triple control” (*trīdaṇḍam*) found in the Telugu, Grantha and Malayalam versions endorses this hypothesis, since this could convey a similar meaning, referring to a “triple control” over mind, speech and bodily action.

As *doṣas*, mind, speech and bodily action are the recipients and the tools responsible for tainting human beings, and it seems that in XIII.114.4 they are named after their contents, as in a synecdoche. Mind, speech and bodily action are able to operate violence: one could have bad thoughts, utter cruel words and perform evil deeds. As a particular kind of action, eating is also a possible instrument of violence:

The *doṣas* abide in mind and speech, as well as in taste. For this reason, the wise ones engaged in religious austerities do not partake of meat. But, o king, you should learn from me the *doṣas* regarding eating meat. Stupid is the one who eats [it] knowing the simile of the flesh of the son.¹⁴

Dr. Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi¹⁵ presumes that “stupid is the one who eats knowing the simile of the flesh of the son” might bear a reference to a popular Buddhist story from the *Samyuttanikāya* (SN II 97), narrating the story of a family of three that, travelling across the desert, runs out of supplies. The parents decide to passively kill their son by making him run around until death, in order to eat his flesh and survive the crossing of the desert. The moral of the story is that one may eat meat, but without any craving or enjoyment of its taste. This tale is quite baffling even from the Buddhist point of view, since the

¹³ MBh XIII.115.7: *karmaṇā lipyate jantur vācā ca manasaiva ca* ||

¹⁴ MBh XIII.115.9–10: *manovāci tathāsvāde doṣā hy eṣu pratiṣṭhitāḥ | na bhakṣayanty ato māṃsaṃ tapoyuktā manīṣiṇāḥ || doṣāṃs tu bhakṣaṇe rājan māṃsasyeha nibodha me | pu-tramāṃsopamaṃ jānan khādāte yo vicetanaḥ ||*

¹⁵ Private conversation at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, in Heidelberg on 16.01.2018.

Vinayapitāka (VP I.218–220) prescribes to avoid ten kinds of meat, among which human flesh is the first mentioned. Nonetheless, the tale might also be intended as an extreme example of the demand of Buddha not to relish meat: in fact, the couple seems not to indulge in the taste of their son’s meat, and not to perform any direct violent act, since the boy is passively killed.

The AP, whose orientation is mainly vegetarian, clearly mocks such tale and labels as fools those who appreciate it. Apart from the atrocity of eating one’s own son, the whole argumentation of the importance of eating meat without relishing it is a nonsense in the MBh’s perspective. Indeed, the tongue has its own realm of existence and therefore, it remembers the taste of flesh notwithstanding its source, and eventually demands for more:

As in the union of a mother and a father arises the sonship, in the same way, the knowledge of the tongue is produced in case of taste. According to the *śāstras*, the desire will always arise from what has been enjoyed. As uncooked or cooked, salty or not-salty, in the same way, when the emotions appear, the mind gets fixed [on the desired objects].¹⁶

The AP apparently implies the existence of food’s intrinsic qualities able to cause bewilderment in the eater’s mind. “The knowledge of the tongue” reminds the relish of tasty food and, whenever it is stimulated, the desire of experiencing the same flavour arises. Therefore, those who believe in the story of the flesh of the son are fools twice. The MBh acknowledges that meat is the tastiest type of food and a delicacy hard to avoid:

Bhīṣma said: O long-armed one, this is so as you say, O Bhārata. It is known on the earth that, according to the taste, here there is nothing better than meat.¹⁷

According to Bhīṣma (XIII.116.19), because of its flavour, flesh is easily craved for, and therefore becomes a receptacle for desire: this should be avoided, in order to be able to control the instruments (*doṣas*) of one’s own body. Taste has the power to perturb the mind’s state of tranquillity:

¹⁶ MBh XIII.115.11–12: *mātāpitṛsamāyoge putratvaṃ jāyate yathā | rasaṃ ca prati jihvāyāḥ prajñānaṃ jāyate tathā | tathā śāstreṣu niyataṃ rāgo hy āsvāditād bhavet || asaṃskṛtāḥ saṃskṛtās ca lavaṇālavanaś tathā | prajñāyante yathā bhāvās tathā cittaṃ nirudhyate ||*

¹⁷ MBh XIII.117.6: *bhīṣma uvāca | evam etan mahābāho yathā vadasi bhārata | na māṃsāt param atrānyad rasato vidyate bhuvī ||*

The act of avoiding meat is very difficult for the one who knows the taste. The best vow to keep is this gift of safety to all the sentient beings.¹⁸

Accordingly, the dietary Āyurveda advices gathered by Singh (2011: 134) place meat among the aliments of the rajasic diet, advised for kings and fighters because it causes excitement and confidence. Meat from big tamed animals is considered tamasic and therefore causes anger, stupidity and decreases the chances of spiritual progress. These two qualities, and the effects they bring about, do not fulfil the requirements of *ahiṁsā*; rather, they distance a person from the capacity of controlling one's own feelings and thoughts, speech and bodily actions.¹⁹

b. Control of attraction and repulsion

The second prerequisite to perform the *dharma* of *ahiṁsā* is to have control over one's own feelings (XIII.114.4). By controlling *kāma* and *krodha* ("desire" and "anger"), a person reaches equilibrium and does not act with interest, in view of love and hate.

c. Ātma-aupāmya as prerequisite and driving force

Ātma-aupāmya ("likeness to self", cf. MW, s.v. *ātmopāma*) is the identification of oneself with another. I believe that in the AP this term has a double application: *ātma-aupāmya* is a prerequisite to perform the *dharma* of *ahiṁsā*, but, at the same time, it also stands as one of the reasons to pursue that rule. The former perspective on *ātma-aupāmya* refers to a person who has the inner awareness that every living being is identical with one's own self and therefore can hardly act with egoistic purposes, without ever conflicting with the sphere of other individuals. The second definition, then, adduces that we are all equal and that, as one suffers, so do others. For this reason, a man should feel compassion for every being in discomfort, and therefore should not inflict additional pain by killing and eating any creature. The following verses illustrate the first type of *ātma-aupāmya*:

¹⁸ MBh XIII.116.19: *duṣkaram hi rasajñena māṁsasya parivarjanam | cartuṁ vratam idaṁ śreṣṭham sarvaprānyabhayapradam ||*

¹⁹ Also the *Bhagavadgītā* (XIV.7–8) describes the implication of the element *rajas* and *tamas*.

The man who compares the living beings [with] himself, sets aside the stick and overcomes anger, prospers [in] happiness after death. Even the gods get confused on the way, while searching the footsteps of the one whose footsteps are invisible [because] he sees all the living beings [with the heart] in which all beings become his own [and, in this way, transcends the world].²⁰

I believe that in this context, *ātma-aupamyā* reveals a mental state deriving from the realization of oneness with all living beings. Here, there is no relation to the concept of compassion (*dayā*). There are indeed no emotional connotations when we consider the term as a prerequisite to *ahiṃsā*. Rather, it implies a sort of permanent awareness that does not leave room for any violent action whatsoever. Moreover, if one identifies himself with every being, he will not act in view of *kāma* and *krodha* and will not perform violence by means of mind, speech and bodily action. Thus, *ātma-aupamyā*, although it is formally the last requirement to attain the greatest *dharma*, is one which also includes the prior two.

However, the following verses highlight *ātma-aupamyā* as the reason and driving force for abstaining from violence:

One should not bestow on another that which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the *dharma* in short. Everything else is as you wish. By comparing with oneself, one obtains harmony in rejection and acceptance, in happiness and unhappiness, in liking and disliking.²¹ There is no gift superior to the gift of life, nor there will [ever] be. Nothing is dearer than one's own self. To every living being the death is indeed unwished, o Bhārata. In the moment of death, in that very moment, a tremor is born in the beings.²²

²⁰ MBh XIII.114.6–7: *ātmopamaś ca bhūteṣu yo vai bhavati pūruṣaḥ | nyastadaṇḍo jitakrodhaḥ sa pretya sukham edhate || sarvabhūtātmaabhūtasya sarvabhūtāni paśyataḥ | devā'pi mārgē muhyanti apadasya padaśiṅgaḥ ||*

²¹ MBh XIII.114.8–9: *na tatparasya samdadyāt praktikūlaṃ yadātmanaḥ | eṣa samkṣepato dharmāḥ kāmādanyaḥ pravartate || pratyākhyāne ca dāne ca sukhaduḥkhe priyāpriye | ātmaupamyena pūruṣaḥ samādhim adhigacchati ||*

²² MBh XIII.117.25–26: *prāṇadānāt paraṃ dānaṃ na bhūtaṃ na bhaviṣyati | na hy ātmanaḥ priyataraḥ kaścid astīti niścitam || aniṣṭaṃ sarvabhūtānāṃ maraṇaṃ nāma bhārata | mṛtyukāle hi bhūtānāṃ madyo jāyati vepathuḥ ||*

In this latter connotation, *ātma-aupamyā* is matched with the value of life. Living beings hold their own life as the most precious good. The process of putting oneself in the others' shoes brings to the inevitable conclusion that every creature desires to live and fears to die. The awareness that all beings dread death should prevent anyone from being the cause of such distress. This is indeed the most outstanding reason to avoid the killing of sentient beings. In this context, *ātma-aupamyā* implies the essential meaning of compassion. Alsdorf (2010: 35f.) translates *ātma-aupamyā* as “to-respect-others-as-oneself” and introduces the term as the chief guiding principle of the MBh section on *ahiṁsā* as a whole. He does not consider the ambivalent meanings expressed within “likeness to one's self” and interprets the concept only from a moral-ethical perspective related to the precept that “one should not do to others what one abhors oneself”.²³

Ātma-aupamyā is the fundamental understanding for the one who performs *ahiṁsā*, as well as the greatest emotional reason that should lead everyone to vegetarianism. In this light, “likeness to one's self” is both the prerequisite and the driving force to *ahiṁsā*.

THE “FOURFOLD DHARMA”

The AP states that *ahiṁsā* is a *dharma* having four characteristics. These four are all equally important to the point that, if one of them is missing, the whole concept collapses. A few *ślokas* repeatedly mention this fourfold structure, but none of them lists or explains them.

Bhīṣma said: by the proclaimer of the Vedas *ahiṁsā* is defined as fourfold. If even only one of these is gone, o destroyer of the foes, there is no [*ahiṁsā*]. As every quadruped cannot stand by means of three feet, so, o guardian of the earth, in the same way is this [*ahiṁsā*]. That is explained by three causes.²⁴ [...] O great king, in this manner, this [*ahiṁsā*] is provided with four causes.

²³ This is Alsdorf's translation of MBh 113.8 (MBh 114.8 in the edition used here): *na tatparasya saṃdadyātpratikūlaṃ yadātmanaḥ* ||

²⁴ MBh XIII.115.4–5: *bhīṣma uvāca | caturvidheyam nirdiṣṭā ahiṁsā brahmavādibhiḥ | eṣaikato'pi vibhraṣṭā na bhavaty arisūdana || yathā sarvaś catuṣpādas tribhiḥ pādair na tiṣṭhati | tathaiveyam mahīpāla procyate kāraṇair sribhiḥ* ||

Ahiṃsā is enjoined by you as conformable to all sorts of *dharma*.²⁵

I have searched for an explanation to this description in the canonical literature, but I could not find any reference. A great help came from the Southern Edition of *Śrīman Mahārṣi Vedavyāsa Mahābhārata*, which reports the same set of *ślokas* on the fourfold *dharma* and includes the above-mentioned verses, with correspondent Hindi translation by Paṇḍit Rāmanāyaṇadatta Śāstrī Pāṇḍeya “Rām”. In rendering the term “fourfold *ahiṃsā*”, Paṇḍit Śāstrī Pāṇḍeya opens parentheses and explains that *hiṃsā* is not to be performed by means of mind, speech, action and non-eating of meat (AP, Southern Edition, XIII.114.4). These points are all equally important, and, if somebody ignores one of the four, then he or she fails to practice *ahiṃsā*. Other verses common to both the Southern and the Critical edition (e.g. XIII.115.7) state that restraint of mind, speech and physical action is prerequisite and consequence to the performance of non-violence. The *ślokas* XIII.115.4–5 and 16 are not satisfied with this rule and put one more condition to the followers of *ahiṃsā*. In this way, “non-eating meat” is paired with the control of *manas*, *vacas* and [*kāya*-]*karman*. One could argue that a dietary rule is quite inconsistent with the restraint of the three faculties of the body. Indeed, the supplement of this fourth element could easily shine as a forcing temptation to include vegetarianism as one of the fundamentals of *ahiṃsā*. However, the *śloka* XIII.115.11 seems to support the explanation of the four pillars of *ahiṃsā* given by Paṇḍit Śāstrī Pāṇḍeya. Here, Bhīṣma uses the expression “knowledge of the tongue” (*jihvāyāḥ prajñānaṃ*) to express the independence of this muscle from the other means of action. The tongue has its own domain of action in reference to taste (*rasaṃ ca prati*), in the same way as the mind, for instance, has jurisdiction over thoughts. In this outlook, *jihvā* gains individual authority and can be paired with *manas*, *vacas* and [*kāya*-]*karman*. It is now relevant to recall the topic of the necessity to restrain the three means of action (see XIII.114.4): in order to maintain the status of equilibrium required for *ahiṃsā*, it appears clear that a person should restrain the tongue and should have control over it, in order not to commit any faulty action. Such control over the tongue is automatically rendered with “non-

²⁵ MBh XIII.115.16: *evam eṣā mahārāja caturbhiḥ kāraṇair vṛtā | ahiṃsā tava nirdiṣṭā sarvadharmārthasaṃhitā ||*

eating meat". In this way, the concept of "fourfold *dharma*" creates a strong link between *ahimśā* and vegetarianism and establishes the ban on meat-consumption. Vegetarianism becomes a *conditio sine qua non* for *ahimśā*. This attitude creates an apparent strong contradiction when, later on, the text enjoins to partake of the flesh of animals sacrificed according to the Vedic rules. I will now attempt to provide an explanation to this apparent contradiction by analysing the matter from a historical point of view, and by considering it in relation to the existence of two different addressees of the verses.

Examining the text from a diachronic perspective, we could claim that the discrepancy arisen from the initial presentation of three means of action (XIII.114.4), followed by the introduction of a fourth one, suggests different layers of composition. In this outlook, the control of mind, speech and bodily action are the means through which a person may have bad thoughts, insult, or harm someone. Vedic science is also very keen to swear the consequences of slaughtering animals. The pronunciation of magic formulas, together with the sprinkling of water over the offerings, pacifies the bad outcomes of a violent action, which is rendered devoid of its violent nature by this purification process. In this way, the Vedic sacrificer does not incur the sin of faulty actions and can still satisfy the three prerequisites to *ahimśā*. If *mantras* and drops of water had the power to neutralise the killing of animals, and the partaking of sacrificial meat was a convenient custom, the slow decline of this science leads to the necessity of new means for self-defence from the outcomes of violent deeds. In this way, restrained bodily actions are again advised, and a ban on meat-consumption is enjoined. Indeed, if animal slaughtering is not accompanied by the Vedic science, then the flesh of the dead animal is a vehicle for bad influences, and its partaking is an unlawful action (XIII.116.45). Therefore, the concept of a "fourfold *dharma*" could arise from a society that has lost part of its bond with the Vedic ritual. The lack of an instrument capable of forswearing the outcomes of violent actions would create the necessity of a new stratagem for self-defence, such as the forgoing of meat-consumption. However, we could also consider the "fourfold *dharma*" as an instruction given to those aspiring to good conduct and religious uplifting. These are the people who have renounced the sacrificial science and engage themselves in a contemplative life. The latter hypothesis

better matches the words of the Śāṅkarācārya of Jyotirmaṭha and Dvārka Maṭha, Svāmī Svarūpānanda Sarasvatī on the importance of food:

There are three types of food: a sattvic one, a rajasic one, and the tamasic one. Aliments such as fruits, vegetables, rice and beans (*anna*) which are full of nutrients, less harmful for the health and tasty are the sattvic elements. Seasoned and chilly foods, very salty, sour and dry elements, without any juice are rajasic and may cause stomach-acid. The tamasic food is first of all the rotten food, the food prepared and then left for many days which has become rancid, as well as the smelly food such as eggs, meat and fish, and the so-called *jūṭha* food, that which has been contaminated by saliva or by something else.

The food we are eating has three main effects on us. The solid parts of the food become our excretions, as faeces and urine are expelled from the body. The inner part of the food becomes liquid and it is mixed up in the blood, and the subtlest part of the food nourishes the mind. Thus, our mind is structured and works accordingly to what we eat. The mind of the one who eats pure food becomes pure. By eating pure food, our inner organs, mind and intellect are purified and that has an effect on our conduct. Pure food strengthens us and makes us steady on our path. Even our memory is fortified, and by strengthening that, the tangles of our mind open up and release.

The first thing the one following a *sāadhanā* has to engage with, is to eat pure food. If you want to walk on the dharmic path, the good path, first of all it is necessary to eat pure food.²⁶

²⁶ A talk registered by me in December 2018 in the Narsinghpur District of Madhya Pradesh, India.

PRACTICAL REASONS NOT TO EAT MEAT

So far, we have analysed the right way of conduct established for those aiming at a good behaviour and spiritual upliftment. The AP's argumentation in support to meat-abstention, however, appears to take into account also those who are not driven by a sincere desire of *dharma*. *Ahiṁsā* is here presented as a very convenient path for everyone: a very pragmatic line of thinking lists the rewards and the punishments for those who eat and do not eat meat, and compares several ways of conduct in order to identify the most convenient behavioural choice.

a. The rewards of being vegetarian

The *ślokas* enumerating the advantages of avoiding meat are scattered all over *adhyāyas* 116 and 117. There are, all in all, 17 verses listing the rewards resulting from vegetarianism. Overall, by avoiding meat, one may obtain invincibility, credibility, esteem, absence of fear, wealth, glory, longevity, good fortune, intelligence, beauty and every happiness in life. Heaven (*svarga*) and *brahmaloka* are the rewards in the afterlife:

The self-governed supreme seers proclaim that non-eating meat is a great thing bringing to wealth, leading to glory, giving longevity, granting heaven and causing good fortune.²⁷

The non-consumption of meat throughout life is the most desirable condition, but it is not the only option contemplated in the text: the AP speculates also on the opportunity of undertaking periods of vegetarianism. For instance, during the month of *kārttika* (October–November), every type of meat should be avoided (XIII.116.60) in order to gain beauty, honour, splendour, and the company of a thousand women (XIII.116.71). With this system of karmic retribution, Bhīṣma provides a very pragmatic approach to the topic. Vegetarianism appears here to be a very convenient choice. Every sort of reward is granted to those who avoid meat even for small periods of time; this is probably stated to persuade even the most reluctant ones that renouncing animal flesh is in-

²⁷ MBh XIII.116.35: *dhanyaṁ yaśasyaṁ āyusyaṁ svargyaṁ svastyayanaṁ mahat | māṁsasyābhakṣaṇaṁ prāhur niyatāḥ param ṛṣayaḥ ||*

deed an ever-rewarding practice. In fact, within these verses, there is no mention of compassion, nor allusion to ethical principles. Vegetarianism is here clearly presented as a practice leading to personal gain.

b. The results of ahimsā compared to Vedic ritual and tapas

The argument in favour of vegetarianism develops further when the avoidance of banned aliments is compared to Vedic rituals and religious austerities. In XIII.114.1, Bṛhaspati asserts that non-violence (*ahimsā*), Vedic ritual (*vaidika-karman*), meditation (*dhyāna*), restraint of the senses (*indriya-samyama*), religious austerities (*tapas*) and service to the *guru* (*guru-śuśūṣā*) are all valid doors to *dharma*, but, among them, *ahimsā* is the best one. A few verses scattered in *adhyāyas* 16 and 17 compare the results deriving from the practice of non-violence/meat-abstention with those gained by Vedic sacrifices and religious austerities. The abstention from meat and honey is first said to be equal to the monthly performance of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice (XIII.116.10), and then, the only abstention from meat would be equal to the monthly performance of the horse sacrifice for a hundred years:

The one who will sacrifice by means of the *aśvamedha* every month for a hundred years and the one who does not eat meat, that [i.e. the two actions] is considered equal by me.²⁸

And again, in XIII.116.18, vegetarianism is a practice more rewarding than the study of the Vedas and the ritual sacrifices:

[The study of] the entire Vedas and all the ritual sacrifices will not accomplish the same result of the one who, after having eaten meat, turns away from it.²⁹

The AP compares profits of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice³⁰, one of the most complex and expensive rituals of the Vedic culture, to the vow of non-consump-

²⁸ MBh XIII.116.16: *māsi māśyaśvamedhena yo yajeta śataṃ samāḥ | na khādati ca yo māṃsaṃ samam etan mataṃ mama ||*

²⁹ MBh XIII.116.18: *sarve vedā na tatkuryuḥ sarvayajñāś ca bhārata | yo bhakṣayitvā māṃsāni paścād api nivartate ||*

³⁰ See Ranade 2006: 95: “The horse sacrifice, recorded in the RV [*Rgveda*, A.S.]1.162 and 163 to be performed by a sovereign (*sārvabhauma*) or a crowned king though not yet sovereign,

tion of meat. The MS (V.53) conveys the same concept and equates the abstention from meat with the sacrifice of the horse performed once a year for a hundred years.³¹ Overall, the MBh first enhances the good effects of a vegetarian diet, equating it to the performance of 1200 horse sacrifices (XIII.116.16) and then, in XIII.116.10, to monthly *aśvamedhas*. Manu claims that the avoidance of meat and the performance of the *aśvamedha* every year for a hundred years are equally rewarding. Considering the extreme complexity and the huge cost of this Vedic sacrifice, together with the fact that its implementation lasts one full year and that only kings can undertake it, we can assume that the comparison proposed here is nothing but a hyperbolic euphemism to stress the wondrous outcomes deriving from the *ahiṁsā* rule. However, the proposed image seems strongly contradictory, because it puts on the same level the avoidance of meat and the killing of a great number of horses. Such inconsistency is highlighted also by Chakrabarti (1996: 261) and Framarin (2014). The former one attempts an explanation of this oxymoron by explaining that the two terms of comparison are probably directed to two different publics. In his view, abstention from meat is the path of those seeking liberation, while the example of the horse sacrifice addresses those pursuing material desires. Thus, the above mentioned *ślokas* not only illustrate the comparison between two *dharmas*, but also address two classes of people: those who want to withdraw from the world (followers of *ahiṁsā*) and those who are engaged in the world (performers of the *aśvamedha*). That would endorse the hypothesis of different rules enjoined to people having different life goals. However, within the common imaginary, the *aśvamedha* is one of the rituals *par excellence*, and comparing the outcomes of the horse sacrifice with the rewards deriving from vegetarianism could simply be a way to stress the extraordinariness of *ahiṁsā*.

Avoidance of meat is also matched with a hundred years of very hard religious austerities:

Āp. Śr [Āpśś, A.S.]10.1.1. It is a soma sacrifice with 3 pressing days (the core), but the preparatory rites are extended over a year or two. Actually, it is a combination of animal sacrifices, *soma* and various other popular features. Participants are, besides the king, his four wives, 400 attendants and several priests”.

³¹ MS V.53, transl. Olivelle 2005: “A man who abstains from meat and a man who offers the horse sacrifice every year for a hundred years—the reward for their meritorious acts is the same”.

The one who will perform for a hundred full years very hard religious austerities, and the one who will only give up on meat, I consider them as equals.³²

Śloka XIII.116.17 equals abstention from honey and meat to the perpetual performance of *soma* sacrifice, the donation of riches and ascetic practices.

By avoiding honey and meat, he continually sacrifices by means of a great *soma* sacrifice, he continually offers riches, he continually becomes an ascetic.³³

It is interesting to note that *ahimsā* is compared to the ascetic practices. Schmidt (2010) contemplates the hypothesis that *ahimsā* was originally a rule addressed only towards ascetics. The renouncing stage implies the abandonment of rituals. This means that such person is deprived of the only instrument able to nullify the bad outcomes of the everyday life actions, which, of necessity, include even accidental violent deeds. Probably also for this reason, the last ritual of a renouncer-to-be consists in the declaration of safety to every living being. Meat and honey are aliments generally prohibited to the *saṃnyāsins* (and also to the *brahmacārins*). I believe that this is supported mainly by two points. The renouncer is supposed to dedicate his own self to the attainment of liberation and, therefore, he needs to maintain control over the senses; the consumption of honey and meat might stand as an obstacle to this aim, as their taste is able to bewilder minds. The second motivation is the refusal of sacrifice, which implies the loss of the only instrument capable to correct the accumulation of bad *karma*. In the same way, a *brahmacārin*, being a student, is supposed to remain focused on his studies. Thus, the aliments bewildering the mind are prohibited to him. Moreover, a young boy who still lacks a full knowledge of the Vedas and is still unmarried, is also unable to perform sacrifices. In both cases, the inability to neutralise impure actions and the need of mental clarity cause a ban on meat-consumption.

With these premises, a possible explanation in view of a historical development to vegetarianism is that the gradual disappearance of the Vedic ritual, accompanied by a contemporary rise of renouncing traditions, has led to

³² MBh XIII.116.59: *yas tu varṣāsatam pūrṇam tapas tapyet sudāruṇam | yaś caikam varjayen māṃsam samam etan mataṃ mama ||*

³³ MBh XIII.116.17: *sadā yajati matreṇa sadā dānam prayacchati | sadā tapasvī bhavati madhumāṃsasya varjanāt ||*

a universal appropriation of the *dharma* based on *ahiṃsā*,³⁴ as a refuge from actions leading to bad karmic consequences. In other words, when the instrument through which one erases the outcomes of offensive actions is not accessible anymore, the only remedy is the reduction, or the extinction, of such actions. In the same way, Schmidt (2010) believes that a society slowly forgetting the Vedic science needs to reduce the occasion for sinful deeds, such as the killing of living beings, and thus begins to foster the path toward vegetarianism.

I argue that the passages enumerating the benefits that derive from a vegetarian diet have the clear intention of persuading the listener/reader to follow that rule. However, if one of the crucial reasons to avoid meat is that of withdrawing from the jaws of desire and the bewilderment of senses, then why are all these verses encouraging vegetarianism and the performance of non-violence in view of a fulfilment of every worldly desire? Once again, the only plausible explanation to absolve the text from the charge of contradiction is that it addresses different audiences. On one side, there are high-minded individuals who desire to withdraw from the world of desire. They are the recipient of the first teaching, enjoining the restraint of the three *doṣas*, the control over attraction and repulsion and the awareness of *ātmā-aupamyā*. On the other side, there are those who are not naturally inclined to this path, but are persuaded to non-violence because of concrete compensations. In this view, those aiming at self-restraint and liberation are destined to the supreme worlds and follow the rules of a contemplative life (*nivṛtti*). While, those engaging in an active life (*pravṛtti*) do not have awareness of *ātma-aupamyā* and need to be instructed and motivated by the description of the rewards and punishments following the rules of a karmic payback.³⁵

³⁴ Similarly, Lubin (2005) argues that as response to the spreading of Buddhism and Jainism, the Brahminical tradition expanded and universalised itself around the 6th and 4th centuries BCE.

³⁵ MBh XIII.116.76: *etat te kathitaṃ rājan māṃsasya parivarjane | pravṛttau ca nivṛttau ca vidhānam ṛṣinirmitam ||*

c. *The fault and the punishments*

Besides the rewards resulting from a vegetarian diet, the MBh lists the punishments for those who instead eat meat. This postulation imposes a reflection on the different types of actions implied in the process of meat-production: the eater, the killer, the butcher, the cook, etc. are all participating in sinful actions.

THE FAULT

Buddha gave the rule that a monk may eat an animal if he has not previously seen it alive and if he believes that such animal was not killed specifically for him (VP II.171). Is it possible to identify a similar rule in the MBh's setting analysed here? Is the one who kills a living being guilty as much as the one who merely eats it, or buys it, or just cooks it? Yudhiṣṭhira expresses a need for solving this dilemma and asks about the different degrees of misconduct revolving around the consumption of meat:

Is (the fault) of the one who, having killed, eats, or, of the one who is offered (meat) by another? Is it that a man may kill for the sake of another or is it that the one who, having bought meat, may eat it?³⁶

After a short digression praising the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*, Bhīṣma affirms that killing and eating are equally sinful acts (XIII.116.37). However, the killer, performing the violent action, and the eater, who is the cause of the slaughter, are not the only sinners. Whoever promotes or supports the actions of these two main characters is guilty to the same degree because he or she tacitly allows such filthy action³⁷:

The one who fetches, the one who supports, the one who is cutting up, the one who buys and the one who

³⁶ MBh XIII.116.4: *hatvā bhakṣayato vāpi pareṇopahṛtasya vā | hanyād vā yaḥ parasyārthe krītvā vā bhakṣayen naraḥ ||*

³⁷ Manu reports the same opinion: "The man who authorizes, the man who butchers, the man who slaughters, the man who buys or sells, the man who cooks, the man who serves, and the man who eats—these are all killers" (MS V.51, transl. Olivelle 2005).

sells, the one who cooks, the one who eats and the one who kills, they are all the same.³⁸

In addition to this, in XIII.116.44, Bhīṣma considers the possibility of different grades of fault, according to the role of those engaged in meat-consumption and meat-production: the promoter of the killing is guiltier than the one who actually kills (XIII.116.44). This leads to strongly ethical implications in the definition of guilt. It is not just the factual action that leads to karmic consequences, but also the intention and the circumstances play a role in the degree of sin a person incurs in, while engaged in the process of meat-production/consumption. In this regard, Srinivasan (2014: 34f.) reflects on the idea of fault conveyed by the MBh's *śloka*s and remarks that ethical concepts are always characterised by the impossibility of empirical validation. However, it may appear controversial that the AP (together with the MS) places a deed of killing and the action of cooking a non-vegetarian meal on the same footing (XIII.116.47). It is perhaps easier to share the view that, if someone kills an animal because someone else has required it, the promoter of the action is more responsible, and therefore guiltier, than the killer. Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that vegetarianism is a fundamental expression of the *dharma* of non-violence, assuming here a universal value. For this reason, it is not startling to read here that whoever participates in the production of meat breaks the rule of *ahimśā* and shares the guilt of the killing.

THE KARMIC CONSEQUENCES OF EATING MEAT

The MBh's list of the gain deriving from meat-abstention has the clear aim to persuade the audience to vegetarianism. A further incentive to follow this prescription is found in the description of the bad outcomes following the transgression of *ahimśā*. The AP repeatedly states that the man who eats meat and does not follow the fourfold *dharma* will suffer without chances of releasing from sorrow (XIII.116.33, XIII.117.29). The fine resulting from violent deeds follows some sort of "poetic justice", similar to a law of *contrapasso*, presiding over the criteria turning into motion the mechanisms of the

³⁸ MBh XIII.116.47: *āhartā cānumantā ca viśastā krayavikrayī | saṃskartā copabhoktā ca ghātakāḥ sarva eva te ||*

punishment. Following the line of this assumption, the next verse introduces an interesting etymology of the word *māṃsa*:

As he eats me, I will eat him too. Here, you are the meat
of the meat. Hence, o Bhārata, be aware of that!³⁹

Even if the English translation cannot convey the same wordplay, the original Sanskrit structure aims at revealing the reading key of the word meat. *Mām-sa* is composed of *mām* (“me”, in accusative) and *sa* (as *saḥ*, “he”). The first half of the verse, *mām sa bhakṣayate*, explains that “the one who eats me” *mām sa*, is the meat-to-be, *mām-sa*. Similarly, the same English word “meat” can be read backwards as “eat-me”. Manu (MS V.55, transl. Olivelle 2005) introduces the same wordplay: “Me, he (*mām sa*) will eat in the next world, whose meat (*māṃsa*) I eat in this world—this, the wise declare, is what gave the name to and discloses the true nature of meat (*māṃsa*)”. This etymology of the term “meat” is a clue to understand the inner workings of a sanction system, called *karma*. Lipner (2012) refers to *karma* as a generator of a “chain of lives” which are regulated by the adage, “as one sows, so one reaps”. Accordingly, Bhīṣma explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction:

The killer is always killed, as well as the tier is tied. The
one who has abused is abused, o king, the one who eats
undergoes odiousness. With whatever body whatever
action one makes, with that very body that very result
he obtains.⁴⁰

A very similar image is found already in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (XII.9.1, transl. Eggeling 1900): “Verily, from this sacrifice the man is born and whatever food a man consumes in this world, that (food), in return, consumes him in yonder worlds [...]”. Both the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (XI.6.1–12) and the *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa* (I,42–44) report the story of the young *brāhmin* Bhrgu. This tale illustrates the karmic results of eating that reap in the yonder world. The core of the story’s teaching is that the results of one’s own actions always

³⁹ MBh XIII.117.34: *mām sa bhakṣayate yasmād bhakṣayiṣye tam apy aham | etanmāṃsasya māṃsatvam ato budhyasva bhārata ||*

⁴⁰ MBh XIII.117.35–36: *ghātako vadhyate nityam tathā vadhyeta bandhakaḥ | ākroṣṭākruṣyate rājandveṣṭā dveṣyatvam āpnute || yena yena śarīreṇa yadyatkarma karoti yaḥ | tena tena śarīreṇa tat tat phalam upāśnute ||*

come back. For instance, the one who cuts the limbs of the cattle is eventually going to be cut by the very same cattle, in the very same manner. Accordingly, a lumberjack cutting a tree will be cut by that very tree in the next life. Bodewitz (1990: 99–102) does not understand Bhṛgu’s story as a depiction of a doctrine of re-birth, but only gives it a symbolic value, teaching the fundamentals of action and its indissoluble link with the supreme law of karmic retribution. There is no moral judgement, but a clear verification that a deed brings to its correspondent result. The fact that Bhṛgu asks for an atonement which may prevent a person from such destiny is, according to Bodewitz, the proof that there is no “matter of principle” here, but only a pragmatic issue. This tale and the AP clearly share the same point of view on the matter of “turning back actions”. Moreover, the above reported section of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* provides the only instrument of atonement which may grant safety even to those who “cut up the limbs of the animals”: the Vedic sacrifice. The AP fully acknowledges that instrument.

THE EXCEPTIONS TO THE *DHARMA OF AHIṂSĀ*

a. *Ahiṁsā and meat-consumption in the Vedic ritual*

Adhyāyas 114–117 establish a link with the Vedic world and restrict the whole discourse of the guilt and the punishments related to meat-consumption to the outside of the sacrificial arena. The Vedic ritual is described as a positive-connotated instrument that provides for the prosperity of the world and permits one to feed forefathers. Bhīṣma explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that ritual offerings are of primary importance, as they ensure the proper functioning of the inner processes of the world:

By the high-minded Agastya, desirous of benefitting people, with religious austerity, wild animals are sprinkled and addressed to all deities. The sacrificial acts devoted to the forefathers and deities are not abandoned in this way. The forefathers are indeed pleased as they are satisfied with meat according to rule.⁴¹

⁴¹ MBh XIII.116.56–57: *prajānām hitakāmena tvagastyena mahātmanā | āraṇyāḥ sarvadai-vatyāḥ prokṣitās tapasā mṛgāḥ || kriyā hyevaṃ na hiyante pitṛdaivatasamśritāḥ | priyante pitaras caiva nyāyato māṃsatarpitāḥ ||*

If we relate the contents of these verses with the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*, we face a number of controversies. Heesterman (1984: 119) writes about the coexistence of the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā* and the Vedic sacrifice as an unresolved conflict within the normative scriptural tradition itself. It appears that the completion of animal sacrifices leads to beneficial effects, even if such performance implies violent actions. The arbitrary act of slaughtering an animal brings indeed negative consequences, which can be cancelled by *mantras* and other apotropaic gestures used by the Vedic science to pacify the outcomes of cruel deeds. Yudhiṣṭhira expresses the need of explanation about the apparent contradictions between killing in the sacrificial arena and the exhortation to *ahiṃsā* (XIII.116.2). Along the text, Bhīṣma never answers his nephew's question. The only words he spends on the matter reveal that eating the meat that is consecrated to the forefathers according to the rule is not a sin:

It is said that, after having eaten that oblation which is sprinkled in the sacrifices to the forefathers, with the formula approved by the Vedas, [a man] does not commit sin.⁴²

The solicitude in sprinkling and pronouncing the correct formulas during the offerings suggests a certain concern in neutralising the act of killing through a set of acts intended to appease bad influences (Schmidt 2010: 118). As regards to the controversies between *ahiṃsā* and Vedic sacrifice, the AP speculates only about meat-consumption and does not deal with the problems of killing living beings. Here, the whole argumentation focuses on the explanation that the consumption of animal flesh is the righteous concluding act of a sacrifice. Although, at the very beginning of *adhyāya* 114, *ahiṃsā* was established as the best *dharma*, whose performance is linked to the act of non-eating meat, the Vedic sacrifice bends that rule of non-violence. The logic authorising this exception lies within the belief that the negative karmic results of partaking meat are “neutralized” by the sacrificial science. In particular, it appears that the sprinkling of water and the recitation of the proper *mantras* are able to dispel the inauspicious outcomes that naturally derive from killing and eating meat. Moreover, it is believed that the animals offered to gods and ancestors are reborn in higher existences and therefore

⁴² MBh XIII.117.14: *pitṛdaivatayajñeṣu prokṣitaṃ havir ucyate | vidhinā vedadṛṣṭena tadbhuk-tveha na duṣyati ||*

their slaughter is considered beneficial to them too (Schmidt 2010: 117–121). The main idea is that through the sacrificial fire, the victim acquires great merits and, at the same time, the sacrificer is able to pursue his desired fruits and eat meat without committing sin. For this reason, the ritual action of killing is indeed described as a non-violent slaughter. Manu explains (MS V.39–40, transl. Olivelle 2005) that “the Self-existent One himself created domestic animals for sacrifice, and the sacrifice is for the prosperity of this whole world. Within the sacrifice, therefore, killing is not killing. When plants, domestic animals, trees, beasts, and birds die for the sake of a sacrifice, they will in turn earn superior births.” Accordingly, Bhīṣma affirms that animals exist for the sake of the sacrifice and implicitly advises to kill and eat only according to the Vedic rules:

The cattle/animals are created for the sacrifice. In this way, the sacred knowledge is heard. The rule says that the demons are among those who engage in a manner different than this.⁴³

Heesterman (1984: 122) highlights the Vedic “overwhelming concern with the technical-ritualistic means to take away the stigma of sacrificial death and to undo the injury”. In this light, it is interesting to notice that, when Bhṛgu asks about the atonement for killing living beings, Varuṇa enjoins the ritual performances that imply specific actions (*prāyaścitta*) devoted to expiate the outcomes of violent procedures. Following this line of thought, the AP stresses very much the importance of sprinkling (*prokṣa*) the flesh of immolated animals as *sine qua non* for its consumption. This act, aided by the pronunciation of the proper *mantras*, is believed to extinguish the bad influences deriving from the animal slaughtering:

One may make an oblation in the fire perfected by *mantras* and sprinkled and besprinkled according to the standards proclaimed in the Veda for the forefathers also in the ceremonies. In a manner different than that, meat is not to be eaten at will. Manu said that.⁴⁴

⁴³ MBh XIII.117.15: *yajñārthe paśavaḥ sṛṣṭā ity api śrūyate śrutiḥ | ato’nyathā pravṛttānām rākṣaso vidhir ucyate ||*

⁴⁴ MBh XIII.116.50: *haviryat saṃskṛtaṃ mantraiḥ prokṣitābhyukṣitaṃ suci | vedoktena pramāṇena piṭṛṇām prakriyāsu ca | ato’nyathā vṛthāmāṃsam abhakśyaṃ manur abravīt ||*

However, a priest engaging in sacrifices because of a meat desire will be tainted by a small fault (XIII.116.43). Besides the egoistic nature of his actions, if he offers according to the Vedic rule, sprinkling the victims with water and pronouncing the right *mantras*, the major sin of killing a living being is tamed by the sacrificial science and only a *peccadillo* of intention is added to his “karmic baggage”. That shows a total disregard for whatsoever ethical principle and proves the pragmatic nature of the discourse of the Vedic science.

It appears that the consumption of meat within the ritual arena is a natural custom and that even the animals’ existence is strictly related to their role in the sacrifice (XIII.117.15). What if these statements were valid in a time when consecrated meat was unanimously allowed for consumption? That would validate Kane’s theory on the different historical stages of development towards vegetarianism. However, this assumption is contradicted when Bhīṣma explains that, formerly, men did not eat meat:

As demons who do not belong to heaven and who are bringing infamy, o best among the Bharatas, according to rule, formerly, men did not eat meat, o king.⁴⁵

Instead, they did sacrifices by means of animals made of rice:

It is heard that in the former age, among men, the sacrificial animal was made of rice. By means of that, the sacrificers who were absorbed [in the desire of going to] heaven, made sacrifices.⁴⁶

These verses cannot clearly solve the issue whether the AP testifies ancient vegetarian habits, or, if it rather states reasons for the avoidance of animal-eating by means of a fabrication of history. Could it be the case here that ancient vegetarianism customs are recalled to mind in order to accredit the offering of cereals and vegetables over the killing of living beings?

Moreover, is the discourse on the Vedic rituals contradicting the whole concept of the “knowledge of the tongue”? There is no such mention of ritual actions able to dispel the meat’s power to bewilder minds. Once again, it is only the hypothesis of the two types of recipients, namely the ones seeking

⁴⁵ MBh XIII.116.51: *asvargyam ayaśasyaṃ ca rakṣavad bharataṛṣabha | vidhinā hi narāḥ pūrvaṃ māṃsaṃ rājan na bhakṣayan ||*

⁴⁶ MBh XIII.116.53: *śrūyate hi purākalpe nṛṇāṃ vrīhimayaḥ paśuḥ | yenāyajanta yajvānaḥ puṇyalokaparāyaṇāḥ ||*

spiritual liberation and the lay people, that can explain what otherwise seems an unresolvable discrepancy in the subject of the text. Those not aiming at the spiritual path, who are engaged in the active life, may eat meat sacrificed to the gods and the forefathers. In this way, they nourish their ancestors and dispel the karmic consequences of killing an animal through the Vedic science. Alternatively, those engaged in the contemplative life, having put aside the ritual science, follow the rule of the “four-fold *dharma*”.

b. The exception of the kṣatriyas

Vegetarianism is enjoined outside the sacrificial arena, but one more exception is given to this rule. Bhīṣma claims that a *kṣatriya* hunting in the forest does not commit sin by eating meat gained by his strength:

Without giving up yourself, there is no hunting. Being in the same condition, one may kill an animal or not, o king. Hence, all the royal seers go hunting, o Bhārata. They are not tainted with sin and they do not consider that as a crime.⁴⁷

In order to comprehend this statement, we shall try to pursue an ethical understanding of the concept of “wrong action”. The connotation of “bad” and “wrong” derives from an unequal relation of power between a subject and an object. For instance, two equally strong individuals who confront each other are not tainted by sin, as they fight on equal terms. Instead, the employment of power in a situation of conscious predominance is what defines an act as “violent” and “wrong”. For instance, a man with a sword will easily kill a cow. That is because the cow does not have any chance of defending itself from the slaughterer, a cow is not provided with means that enable it to do so. An individual who is conscious of being able to overcome another individual and still approaches him or her with bad intentions does commit a punishable act of violence. Yet, when a man fights against a tiger, the outcome of the battle is unpredictable and, for this reason, none of the two are practicing violence upon the other. However, this is probably not the meaning portrayed by the epos here, as I believe that a MBh’s expert warrior with

⁴⁷ MBh XIII.117.18–19: *nātmānam aparityajya mṛgayā nāma vidyate | samatām upasaṅgamyā rūpaṃ hanyātra vā nrpa || ato rājaṣayāḥ sarve mṛgayām yānti bhārata | lipyante na hi doṣeṇa na caitatpātakaṃ viduḥ ||*

bow and arrow pointing from far away to a deer does not count as fair fight. The Sanskrit term to designate “animal” in XIII.117.18, *mṛga*, does not generally point to wild and dangerous animals. The MW (s.v. *mṛga*) translates the term as “a forest animal or a wild beast” and, very commonly, this word is used to denominate a “deer”. I believe that the only possible explanation for the above verses is that the *kṣatriyas* have the license to kill as a consequence of their *svadharmā*. I believe that these *ślokas* (XIII.117.16,18,19) recall to the special duties of the *kṣatriyas*, who cannot possibly follow the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*. The main task of a warrior is to protect the world (MS VI.2), and that implies the occasional necessity to resort to arms. The license to fight, hunt and kill without committing sin is necessary for a *kṣatriya* who fulfils his duties. In addition to that, the textual context in which the AP is inserted cannot be ignored: in fact, the MBh depicts perhaps the most epic war within Indian mythology, where numerous *kṣatriyas* fight and kill each other. It is a dying Bhīṣma who pronounces these verses, just after the conclusion of the Kurukṣetra grand battle. How could he extend the injunction of *ahiṃsā* to all those warriors?

CONCLUSION

The AP seems to reveal the coexistence of two apparently incompatible religious practices: animal sacrifices and strict vegetarianism. The AP may stand here as a mirror of the conflicts between strong upholders of meat-abstention and Vedic religious exponents. An evidence of the social urgency to answer this dilemma is given by Yudhiṣṭhira who, claiming to be confused about the right path to follow, namely violent Vedic rituals or *ahiṃsā*, asks about the apparent contradictions between these two *dharmas* (XIII.116.2). There appears to be no direct answer to that. However, this text might lead us to a plausible solution to this problem. I believe that Bhīṣma addresses two different audiences in his teachings: on one side, there are those engaged in a contemplative life, who wish to restrain their senses and follow the “fourfold *dharma*”. They aim at the spiritual liberation and, thus, do not indulge in the performance of Vedic sacrifices for the desire of worldly or after-worldly results. On the other side, one finds those engaged in the active life, who aspire to riches and prizes and can either follow the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā* with the

intention of karmic rewards, or perform Vedic sacrifices with the aim of feeding their forefathers and getting desired objects.

The issue regarding the *kṣatriyas*, who may partake of meat, irrespectively of the “fourfold *dharma*”, is of a different kind. That is because such exception is not made on the ground of religious practices, but it rather mirrors the needs of a particular social group. Outside the Vedic arena, *kṣatriyas* are warriors whose duty is to fight and kill when necessary: as fighters, they cannot follow the rule of *ahiṃsā*, as it is here described, because that would go against their social duty as good soldiers.

ABBREVIATIONS

AP	<i>Anusāsanaparvan</i>
Āpśś	<i>Āpastambaśrautasūtra</i>
MBh	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
MS	<i>Manusmṛti</i>
MW	Monier-Williams, <i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i>
ŚP	<i>Śāntiparvan</i>
VP	<i>Vinayapiṭaka</i>

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