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***Tokyo Ghoul* and the Trouble with Cannibalism**

Tony Milligan

Ken Kanecki wanders the streets of Tokyo, hungry and disconsolate. Food has turned to dust in his mouth. Burgers cannot be eaten. Suddenly, he wonders, what is that glorious smell? When he turns the corner and sees that it is a corpse. It is a moment of visceral realization. He has become a ghoul (Ishida 2015, p.21).

The scene above is from Sui Ishida's *Tokyo Ghoul* (2011-14), one of the most successful manga to have transitioned from Japan to the West. Available also in a sequel, *Tokyo Ghoul: Re* (2014-2018), in some slightly less-convincing novellas for teenagers (not written by Ishida), in a three series anime, and more recently as a live action film, the plotline has held together through several formats and sharp transitions. Not easy in a genre notorious for discontinuation and mid-story publisher cut-offs. Superficially, it is an inversion tale, a world turned upside down, where we humans are on the menu. In what follows, I do not want to focus upon this aspect of the tale, but rather to use it as the backdrop for some comments about cannibalism as a dietary practice and, more particularly, observations about the concept of 'cannibalism.' These observations will tend to reinforce a sense of the strength of the the practice as prohibited even where practitioners are sympathetically understood. There will be a 'not just inversion' argument, but this is primarily a structuring device, a way of proceeding, and not the main thing that is going on.

I. Ishida's Ghouls

The crux of the story is simple: ghouls walk among, and sometimes eat, the inhabitants of modern Tokyo. Cannibalism is just around the corner. For most of the time, these beings look like everyone else. But they are not us. Indeed, the series opens with a fairly sharp contrasts of ghoul and human, with the latter preyed upon for food, for revenge, and occasionally for psychopathic pleasure. The latter theme strengthens as the series progresses and key characters discover the even darker side of the ghoul community.

Some ghouls, like Kanecki and the slightly more experienced Touka, are young, naïve and vulnerable. Their portrayal is sympathetic. They care for one another and they avoid or limit their harm to humans. Under the guidance of a wiser older ghoul, they prepare suicide meat, rather than reluctant victims, for distribution to the desperate and tormented. And they cluster around Anteiku café, where the only normal thing that a ghoul can consume is served, i.e. coffee. These are the good ghouls who fight an intermittent, hidden or open, battle with their ghoul side. In the case of Kanecki and Touka, the inner struggles are superimposed upon the regular problems of growing up, with its ambiguities and associated loss of moral certainties. They are not exactly good, but better than the other ghouls. Just who these better ghouls are, becomes less clear over time, as loyalty to friends and dependents tends to displace any absolute sense of right and wrong. What helps to sustain the broader narrative during these developments is a reluctance to engage in moralism or superficial nihilism. There may well be a right and wrong to these matters, a right or wrong about what to do in this awful predicament, but Kanecki and Touka are poorly placed to know what it is. Instead, they respond to immediate events and turns of fortune.

Kanecki, even more than the others at Antikeiu, bridges the worlds of ghoul and human, having transitioned from ordinary human to Ghoul following an accident while

defending himself from a ghoul (Rize). The subsequent transplanting of Ghoul organs into his body contaminate, then take over and help to reconstitute his being. Kanecki's ghoul predicament is not, then, his fault although it may be someone's fault. The status of his accident is later brought into doubt (Ishida 2016: pp.172-183). Yet, although this transformation sets him apart from those born into ghouldom, his status as a being caught between two worlds is also typical. The story may begin with a sharp ghoul/human contrast, but this erodes over time. These non-human ghouls are, in multiple respects, still very much human in the broader sense. Biological differences are limited, and they share many of our vulnerabilities and longings. They can be emotionally wounded and crave love and companionship. Without this, any sense of ghoul community would be impossible. They may not be, strictly, homo sapiens, but might easily fall within a non-biological conception of 'a shared humanity,' albeit with exaggerated capability for recovery and special fighting strength. This proximity to us is required in order to their consumption of biological humans to be truly cannibalistic. Their status as cannibals is then reinforced by predation within the ghoul community, and by occasional self-consumption in order to gain strength.

Touca attends high school, officially to fit in, because she is angry at the humans and not looking for friends. Unofficially, because of her yearning for a life more ordinary. The relationship with Kanecki is complex. At a feeding site that opens the story he says 'I'm not like you monsters,' which causes her eyes (already manga-sized) to widen in shock. 'I can't eat human flesh!! Don't confuse me with...monsters like you guys' (Ishida 2014, pp.142-43). She, in turn, lambasts him for a reluctance to truly accept what he is, for his cowardice in refusing to eat meat. "There's no place for someone who can't decide...between being one or the other" (Ishida 2014, p.146). But still, she eats alone in the shadows or in her room, hidden away from colleagues at Anteiku. Touka wants her unavoidable flesh-eating to be

strictly off stage. Others, such as the ghoul members of the more rapaciously cannibal Aogiri tree, live more in the way that she only speaks of, and it is terrible. They are less torn. Loyal among themselves, up to a point, but contemptuous of humans as food, pets and inferiors. Their presence makes the picture of Kanecki and Touka's otherwise monstrous cannibalism more sympathetic, more palatable.

The limited inversion aspect to this story is simple and familiar. The reader is invited to imagine would it be like if we were on the plate, the hunted, the consumed. However, pressed too far, we can see how this might easily slip into moralistic critique, a play upon all manner of human insecurities and guilt, condensed down into a concern about eating practice. From an ethical point of view, the limits of such inversion stories are also clear. They have a tendency to represent harms which differ significantly as if they were equal. In particular, the harms of death which may be dreadful for animals, but which (in the case of humans) are often to do with the frustration of complex desires which only humans have, rather than levels of pain that any given creature might experience. It may still be wrong to kill animals for food. Generally, I think it is. But the wrongness in question is bound up with harms which are not obviously the same as the varying harms involved in killing people.

An appreciation of the difference is built into our practices. Even vegans, like myself, routinely break bread with the killers and consumers of animals but would be reluctant to break bread knowingly with either cannibals or murderers. Whatever kind of species egalitarianism we might then commit to, it is not one where an absolute equivalence of responses and equality in all things might be embraced. Cannibalism and meat eating are not down on all fours with each other from an ethical point of view, and there is no agenda in Ishida to draw more than a rough parallel between forms of preying upon the other. Tokyo's ghouls are not, then, thin devices for moralizing critique. Instead, they are

something more ambiguous, caught in between being one thing and another. Touka critiques her own predicament. She and her companions are something monstrous and threatening, yet also attractive. Not an unusual combination. Seductive vampires spring to mind.

Tokyo's ghouls are, then, like us enough for cannibalism to be a possibility, but also strikingly unlike us. They are unsettling, a hybrid at the margins of conceivable dietary practice, caught between cannibal and herbivore or even vegan. Although, apparently rotting cheese is still initially palatable. More tolerable than fresh food, but far from ideal (Ishida 2014, p.71). Their diet is like all diets. It has exclusions as well as inclusions. They cannot eat animal flesh or animal products more generally. Or, at least, they do not do so, out of a sense of disgust at the appalling taste. When Ken Kanecki becomes a ghoul, his familiar diet and beloved burgers make him ill. This drives him to consume human flesh, just as it drives vampires to drink human blood for their sustenance. Yet Touka, in the final instalments of the story in *Tokyo Ghoul: re*, does manage to eat human food in order to prevent her body from consuming the child that she is carrying. In extremity, her body finds a way for her and Kanecki to reproduce. He, by contrast, does not have the option. Animals are simply off the menu. Even the coffee that ghouls routinely drink (and often in excessive quantities, is black, no milk. The identification with the animal is reinforced in other ways. Masks worn by ghouls, for attack or defense against the ghoul hunters of the Commission of Counter Ghoul (the CCG), are frequently animal and used by the latter to name their unknown enemy. Touka is the Rabbit. Kanecki is distinctively caught between two things and wears a face with a monstrously exaggerated human mouth.

The cannibal theme is present throughout, and clearly more pronounced than the brief hand waving at animal-free diet. Yet the association with the latter is nonetheless

difficult to miss, the sense of threat in the face of something new. And this marks a further dimension to their sympathetically portrayed monstrosity. Although the key characters are simultaneously attractive and repellant, these ghouls are in other respects very different from the familiar vampires who disrupt a modern world as a demonic force from the past. Rather, they are coffee drinkers at home in the most modern of cities. Yet gathered in a café whose name suggests the search for a compromise with the past and, by implication, with the human both inside and outside.

II. Manga and Depth

My focus upon manga to write about these matters, and especially cannibalism, may benefit from some preliminary comment. Especially so, given that the monstrous nature of the cannibal makes sense only if we regard the prohibition or taboo on eating human flesh as a deep one rather than a superficial dietary preference. Some people like frogs, some like snails, some prefer animal-free and others consume human bodies. But the latter cannot fit, with any ease, within the range of available choice. For monstrosity, the taboo must place it beyond such availability. Yet, how can such depth be explored effectively through a shallow medium? And there is certainly something shallow about a good deal of manga and about graphic novels generally. Commentary on series such as *Bleach* and *Naruto* should not displace analysis of Tolstoy any time soon.

Here, I offer two considerations in defense of the approach. First, a negative consideration: there is simply no reason in principle why graphic novels and manga cannot tackle deep themes. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980-91), for example, explores the Holocaust effectively, from a personally engaged standpoint and is not a simple moralizing tale for children. But if the medium is capable of depth, then it is worthy of commentary. In the case

of *Maus* it would also be difficult for commentary to match the depth of the text. However, as a qualification in the case of *Tokyo Ghoul*, this might be more of an issue with the novellas, written by another author and crafted for more of a teen audience. My suggestion here is not, however, that they are bad instances of what they try to be, but simply that they are trying to be something else, without the same level of reflection upon the human condition.

Second, a more positive consideration: there may be something about manga as a cultural product that happens to be particularly apt for the present discussion. Manga is demotic. It is geared to mass production and to the ephemeral. It is not just there to be read but to be *consumed*. In its pages, the idea of consumption is multiply present. Images of humans who are physically swallowed by monsters and oneida are common. An obvious and comparable example is *Attack on Titan* (2009 onwards), where humans are besieged by creatures who would physically swallow them, take over and eat their bodies (which are, of course, *our* bodies). And then there is lolicon, where sexually immature girls are reimagined with exaggerated adult characteristics. The image of the adult lolicon reader as someone who wants to physically consume such bodies is a familiar one. Masahiro Morioka is a rare example of a philosopher who writes about this, and rarer still for doing so biographically, and as a warning about lolicon culture, breaking down his own sexual urges to devour, consume and become. 'lolicon men consume the images of cheerfully cavorting young girls they see on television as public displays of underage pornography' (Morioka 2017, p.106). What is in play, for Morioka is not ultimate a desire for intercourse (which would be dangerous enough). Instead, such men may be turned off or even 'herbivore,' with regard to actual sexual contact with members of the opposite sex (Morioka, 2014). Rather, the desire is to take over, to swallow whole. It is 'the desire to abandon my own body, transplant

myself into her body, and manipulate this pretty body in accordance with my own will. But since this cannot actually be achieved, I have no choice but to settle for the fixation on the “uniform” that so strongly evokes the image of “brainwashing” (Morioka 2017, p.81).

Even so, my thought here is not to endorse the broader framework that Morioka brings into play, one which links lolicon specifically to a narcissism theory in which adult men see a path not taken by themselves, one which might have been taken if their telos (like Kanecki’s) had not somehow gone horribly wrong during adolescence. Rather, my thought is the simpler one that consumption is continuously in play, at multiple levels within manga of various different kinds. Not always, one hopes, in precisely the way that it is present in lolicon. But nonetheless, the substitution of violence and devouring for sex across a broader range of manga, including both *Tokyo Ghoul* and *Attack upon Titan*, is difficult to miss. On screen controversy over the belated on-screen consummation of Kanecki and Touka’s relationship, may indicate that some fans preferred consumption to consummation. Self-consumption by Tokyo’s ghouls also has its obvious counterpart.

By way of drawing these preliminaries to a close, my claim that the ghouls of the story are threatening, attractive and monstrous may also benefit from a little clarification. *Threatening*, because it is *of the new*, a coming thing. They have what ordinary humans lack. But, at a deeper level they are especially threatening because theirs is a representation of community and not of isolated individuality. They are more Sawney Bean (with his cannibal tribe of wild Scotsmen) than Hannibal Lector. And this dimension of the social raises the spectre of the political. Foucault (2016) notoriously associated the monstrous carnivorous masses in anti-Jacobin literature, the threatening devourers of the social body (Foucault, p.98). (The image is familiar. Buchner’s *Death of Danton* (1835) gave us the line that the revolution is like Saturn, it devours its own children.) The image of the ravenous community

cannibalizing society and devouring an old order of things is, in obvious ways, more threatening than the isolated carnivore, whether a charismatic psychopath, a desperate loner or a seemingly ordinary man trusted by his neighbors. Carnivores too come in several flavors. As the story progresses through *Tokyo Ghoul: re*, we see that there is an emerging alignment with political critique in which the powers that be do not come out well.

Attractive, because of the demonic aspect of the characters rather than in spite of it. Those who have fully embraced their ghoul-being enjoy an apparent freedom from familiar moral constraints as well as physical ones. My assumption here is that monstrosity need not exclude the demonic, with its strange, devilish, attraction. In a one-to-one beauty comparison between the ghoul hunters of the CCG and the young ghouls at Anteiku, the former would not be winning many prizes. At least, not until we begin to encounter half-ghouls, bred specifically to seek out and destroy their more fully-fledged ghoul counterparts. Here, we do see a simple inversion of what Morioka (among others) have written about. The cute bodies are those of the consumers, and not the consumed. Cute but also lethal. An exemplar being Rize, whose attack upon Ken Kaneki at the end of a date which otherwise was quite successful, opens the story. Ken does not date often or, it seems, well. Another cute female ghoul is the novelist within the novel, Sen Takatsuki, the prophet of a one-eyed king, part one thing, part another. More *kawai*, and with the openly politicized goal of a transformed world. And then there is Touka, who is a perfect match, lacking the grand vision of Sen and the petty appetites of Rize.

Finally, these people are all *monstrous*, with clear similarities to (and differences from) vampires. More formally, a case can be made for a good match-up with familiar typologies of monstrosity, i.e. the accidentally monstrous being whose telos has been altered, the morally terrible creature, and the hybrid. Some ghouls match up better with

some of these characteristics than others. Kanecki, with the accidentally monstrous and hybrid, the ghouls of the Aogiri Tree with the morally terrible. Touka is merely hybrid, a less complicated ghoul next door. Any plausible account of the concept of monstrosity that did not fit ghouls, even the sympathetically portrayed ghouls, would be problematic.

3. The monstrosity of cannibalism

Above, I have associated cannibalism with the monstrous. Kanecki is appalled by his own monstrosity, Touka is ashamed of hers. But is it really so monstrous, or merely so by virtue of circumstances under which humans must be killed or subjected to mutilation? Let us imagine that the surrounding events allow the ghouls at Anteiku to live out their lives with no ghoul hunters, no Aogiri Tree, and only the consumption of meat from suicides. (Of which there is a ready and uninterrupted supply.) We might even allow that the suicidal humans who provide their sustenance are aware of the likelihood of being consumed, and perhaps even opt for forests and cliffs where this is most likely to happen. Perhaps they might even wish for continuity in some form, or long to be desired, or crave a terrible and final humiliation as punishment for unspecified failures, and this might lead to something like tacit consent. Would we still be inclined to regard the cannibalism of Kanecki and the other ghouls in the same way, under such extremely favorable conditions? (Conditions more favorable even than those at Anteiku.)

My suspicion here is that we would, that any attempt to normalize the practice of cannibalism or even to take the rough edges off of it, would be misplaced. And my point here is conceptual. It is about that which is integral to the concept of cannibalism, to the way that the concept is used, and what it means *as we use it*. What is integral to the normative content of the concept is that matters of consent and the manner of death are

not the problem. Faced with an instance of cannibalism, our first thought would not be 'Was there prior agreement?' or 'Is this opportunistic, or did the consumer also do something wrong?' Instead, the practice of cannibalism is judged wrong by being judged cannibalism.

We might, then, wonder why someone would even be tempted to pursue a softening option. There do, however, seem to be at least three plausible reasons which cannot simply be dismissed: a desire to narrow the moral gulf between meat-eating and cannibalism, as a way to strike at the former; a broader 'each to their own' commitment to cultural relativism; and a special suspicion about the colonialist narratives in which the monstrosity of cannibalism has, historically, been embedded. For the moment, I will set the first of these aside, and return to it in the final section. At least some of the time, when the fearless thought that cannibalism is *nothing special* is set out, the other two reasons coalesce. That is how I will respond to them here, as different aspects of the same normalizing line of thought. This is how they first appear in the literary canon, in Montaigne's essay 'On Cannibals' (1580), where he remarks that eating a man alive is worse than eating him dead, and the latter is not any worse than many of the practices of torture and punishment practiced between neighbors and fellow-citizens under adverse conditions and 'under the cloak of piety and religion'. This, for Montaigne, was worse 'than to roast and eat a man after he is dead' (Montaigne 1993, pp.113).

I will also admit that appeals to the monstrosity of cannibalism *were* used as part of long-running attempts to justify various forms of colonialism in order to bring civilization to supposed savages who would otherwise have continued to engage in such practices. The obvious example here is the narrative of Carib (*karibna*) cannibalism, during the Spanish conquest of the Americas (Whitehead 1984, p.69). These cannibals were the bad Indians, by contrast with other groups, although the classification of cannibal and non-cannibal lined up

suspiciously well with the division between those who resisted Spanish power and those whose resistance was overcome. Similarly, the pattern of convenient appeal was repeated in accusations of cannibalism by the British during the colonial period, and may be detected even as late as H.G.Wells' depiction of the Morlocks in *The Time Machine* (1895). 'Even now man is far less discriminating and exclusive in his good than he was – far less than any monkey. His prejudices against human flesh is no deep-seated instinct. And so these inhuman sons of men - ! I tried to look at the thing in a scientific spirit. After all, they were less human and more remote than our cannibal ancestors of three or four thousand years ago' (Wells 2017, p.79). The cannibalistic, but apparently industrious, subterranean Morlocks need to be conquered (killed) for the sake of civilization's future. The latter rested with the listless Eloi who themselves rested for most of the time and grazed meat-free. Entitlement to dominate had to be earned through a superiority of practice, eating practice as well as industry, but there was no question about where it was to be found. The image of the cannibalistic masses recurs. These are, respectively, the descendants of the working class (hence the industry) and of the wealthy (hence the idleness), with power relations inverted and the Morlocks on top. Yet the contrast of civilization and cannibal plays upon imperial power, vegetarian refinement and, tacitly, upon notions of manifest destiny.

Face with this problem of entanglement in colonial narrative, some post-colonial narratives have tended to preserve a sense of cannibalism's monstrosity by introducing a note of skepticism about its occurrence, drawing upon the inaccuracy of reports and cases where the charge was little more than propaganda (Arens, 184-5). However, an awareness of its historical standing has always tended to return. In some places, at some times, cannibalism was real. This still leaves open the rejection of colonialism's apologetics in more pragmatic terms, by appeal to the simple point that even if cannibalism was practiced in

some places, the colonial system still did vastly more harm than good. But this may not appeal to those who wish to say that, even in its special abhorrence of cannibalism, the colonial system was wrong. A ready pathway here is the association of our abiding sense of its monstrosity with Western prejudice, and with an affective pattern geared for conquest.

There is something to this thought. After all, Montaigne had a point. If we are not deeply repelled by the killing of others in wars (even if we do not wish to engage in it ourselves) then why react so badly to the eating of enemies afterwards? What is the greater harm? Surely the killing itself and not the aftermath. Perhaps, in cultures where shame plays a particularly strong role, matters might be different. Perhaps the misuse of the corpse of Hector by Achilles, and the latter's decision to tie it to a chariot and circle around the burial mound of his friend Patroclus, is understandably seen as the greater abomination in the *Iliad*. But that is not where we live. Yet we too seem to have a strong sense of bodily integrity which extend beyond life and into times when the body has become a corpse. The embeddedness of this bodily integrity is a familiar. Utilitarian medics are not allowed to randomly harvest passers by on the pretext that while one individual has been harvested, several have been saved. We do not even permit them to harvest from the dead without something like prior consent and/or family consent. Nor, it seems, can we agree to just anything being done with our remains. Plastination, in the manner of Gunther von Hagens, is permissible for scientific, educational and display purposes, consumption is not. Vegans cannot offer their bodies to meat eaters as a compromise future menu option. A strong sense of integrity, which rejects an absolute voluntarism about entitlements to dispose, pervades the liberal societies of the West. Abortion rights are endorsed on this basis, even in countries where the legacy of 19th century Christianity, is heaviest. Its weight is not enough to outweigh our liberal sensibilities when it comes to such integrity.

But is this combined sense of bodily integrity, and the abhorrence of cannibalism which predates it, but with which it has coalesced, anything more than an accident of time and place? Within a certain kind of philosophical framework where intuitions are generally *mere* intuitions, the wrongness in question will be hard to place. J Jeremy runs an argument along these lines, 'not in defense of cannibalism so much as it is a defense of the rights of people to engage in practices crucial to their culture' (Wisnewski 2004, p.265). In a slightly different vein, Mikel Burley has draws upon the experience of the Wari of Wesern Brazil to argue that being seen as human (in a rich sense of the latter) does not exclude the possibility of being seen as food. His concern is with 'explicating a range of ways of understanding human beings in which the possibility of a person's being something to eat is not excluded' (Burley, p.486). Here, I will register a certain kind of sympathy with Burley's position. We clearly *can* have a concept of human, and of a shared humanity, while still eating humans. This is both a conceptual point and an empirical one, i.e. we have evidence that they are not mutually exclusive. And so, a certain attempt to make the idea of the human and the idea of food source mutually exclusive, a familiar argument from Cora Diamond (1978) that Burley is directly challenging, seems to have multiple exceptions.

Indeed, while it is true that we do not ordinarily think of humans as a food source, all that it takes to make this happen is for something (or several somethings) to go badly wrong before our patterns of response are liable to change in significant ways. What it is to have a particular concept should cover both circumstances, not just one, and it does seem to me that Diamond's approach suffers from this restriction. When the smooth running of the world breaks down, we see matters in a different way. In the present case: both as human and as meat. Shame about cannibalism is premised upon a grasp of this combination, a grasp that it really is a human who is eaten. Diamond accepts the empirical evidence but

disputes the conceptual point. 'We do not eat our dead, even when they have died in automobile accidents or been struck by lightning, and their flesh might be first class. We do not eat them; or if we do, it is a matter of extreme need, there is very great reluctance' (Diamond, 467). My difference from Diamond here is simply an acceptance that the exceptional circumstances are also integral to the concept, that the concept has not ceased to function, or that we have lapsed into a deeper form of cognitive dissonance than usual. My difference from Burley, on the other hand, is greater. From the conceptual point that Diamond's position is overly-restrictive in its understanding of the very idea of a human, he slips towards normalization and a position closer to Wisniewski's appeal to a reasonable cultural diversity, as a possible way of coping with death and bereavement. 'There are many ways in which respect and piety can manifest, and cannibalism is one of them' (Burley, p.500). The fact of occasional instances of honorific human consumption is not in dispute. But accepting this is a long distance away from also accepting that there is nothing generally repellant about cannibalism, or that our revulsion at the prospect is a culturally skewed 'yuck factor,' rather than an affective response which viscerally embodies some manner of deep but unspoken knowledge, a 'Yuck factor' of a more defensible sort (Midgley). It seems to me that Burley slides towards the latter when speaking of the possible ways of being human in apparently neutral terms. The terms in which one person might like frogs and another snails and a third may be fond of cannibalism (just so long as the form of live permits). This looks closer to a defense or quasi-defense of the practice.

We might, of course, dismiss this on methodological grounds, drawing upon a familiar point about responding to anomaly: while there are *some* radically counter-intuitive 'fearless thoughts' that turn out to be true (e.g. the Earth orbits the Sun and not vice-versa), the fact that a thought falls into this class also gives us reasons to consider that any proof of

its legitimacy might equally well be read as a *reductio*, an indication that one or more premise is wrong, or that the reasoning process has gone astray. This approach to anomaly is sufficiently widespread that Quine (an archetypal analytic) and Rai Gaita (who is anything but typical and whose interests here are of an entirely different sort) both subscribe to versions of it (Quine, pp.14-19; Gaita, p.310). In the present case, I do find it persuasive. When someone proves that necrophilia, or bestiality or cannibalism are licit, I am inclined to assume that their moral framework is flawed, or the arguments that they deploy within it are skewed. What is striking about defenses of cannibalism's normality is that it reverses the regular assumptions about how to proceed by pointing to the lack of any clear-cut justification for the prohibition in Kantian terms, utilitarian terms or virtue ethical terms. (The description is drawn directly from Wisnewski's approach.) The presupposition of such an approach is that the burden of demonstration rests with those who accept the regular norms by which human societies, and modern broadly-liberal societies in particular, generally work, and not with the advocate of the fearless thought. In terms of methodology, this seems like an odd presupposition to make.

Even so, like other methodological points, the presupposition that the burden of demonstration rests with the normalizer of cannibalism is open to question. So, let us assume that when confronted with attempts to normalize cannibalism, there really is a case to answer. In its defense, this idea of cannibalism's normality also need not be set out in terms allied to a demythologizing, scientific frame of mind which points out that protein is protein, irrespective of its origins. The possibility of normalizing in various different ways may be clearer when we break down the apparent focus of the disgust associated with cannibalism. For example, if we read the tale of the Sakyamuni Buddha's previous lives in the *Jataka*, we will encounter a story where, as Prince Sattva, he gave up his body to be

eaten by a starving tiger. We are not disgusted at the prospect of his human body being consumed but impressed by the mythical level of sacrifice. Nor are we disgusted by sky burial in Tibet, when the human dead are cut up to be consumed by birds rather than accumulated in graveyards. Indeed, the latter has become something of a controversial (ghoulish) tourist attraction. It is not, then, the sheer prospect of the human body being consumed which provokes the reaction of disgust, but rather the *mixing* of living human and dead human. Realms which belong apart. And this looks suspiciously close to a kind of insecurity about *being*, an insecurity about our mortality transposed into fears about purity and projected onto the inoffensive corpse of another. The taboo, then, might seem to arise out of our evasion, out of our weakness and fragility, however the latter is understood. Like other forms of puritanism, and politically-suspect forms of disgust, it may stand in need of a good critique.

Such an appeal to the relativity of cultural norms is, however, less telling than it may seem. Admittedly, all diets have prohibitions, and these prohibitions do not always fall in the same place. Where they fall is often a matter of accident and circumstance. However, any move towards normalization would find it difficult to attend sufficiently to the peculiar rarity of cannibalism. It would involve underestimating the prohibition. Most, perhaps all, human societies have shown few qualms about killing people, regularly and in appallingly large numbers. Curiously few of the victims anywhere have ever actually been eaten, even when liberal notions of bodily integrity have not been in place. Heads have been captured for presentation, teeth have been harvested for dentistry, fingers and breasts removed as souvenirs or out of morbid curiosity, scalps have been taken as proof of a kill or for the sake of bounty. Battlefield bones have been disinterred for fertilizer. Cannibalism has also (I think undeniably) occurred along with these things, but more in the shadows. Opportunistically,

and like the cannibalism of Touka, often in shame, mostly for survival in dire circumstances, when wagon trains fail and planes crash. Even in the narrative of cannibalism by the Wari that Burley relies upon, those who eat the deceased group member must go through at least a show of reluctance. Not out of a sense of the finality of accepting their loss, but out of the realization that what they are being asked to consume is actually a corpse. In the exceptions, such as, honorific consumption, as in cases of dire need, the action is not merely seen as one of respect, but simultaneously as something dreadful. All out cannibalism, of a sort where people were *reduced* to meat, really would be circumstances in which the concept of a human was absent. The range of behaviors consistent with a grasp of the latter concept remains restricted, even if the lines cannot quite be drawn where Diamond once suggested.

It is also noteworthy that attempts to suggest that some people like frogs and others like snails, and that cannibalism may fit somewhere into this mix of dietary diversity, have themselves been implicated in Western colonialist narratives. Appropriately, in relation to Japan, with the suggestion that as Buddhism became marginalized and Shinto more evident during the militarism of the 1930s and 1940s, the way was paved for ritualized cannibalism. A linear connection has regularly, and without much more than a favorable timeline, been drawn with the incidents of cannibalism upon Allied airmen resulting as the bombing of Japan accelerated in 1944. Most recently (at the time of writing) the debate resurfaced several years ago around the film *Unbroken* (2014), starring Angelina Jolie, and based upon a text where 'acts of ritual cannibalism' were claimed (Hillenbrand, p.322). There were calls for boycott of the film from Japan's political far right, with Shinto priest Mitsuhiro Takeuchi playing a prominent role. Note, the link requires the appeal to 'ritual,' rather than to the medicinal cannibalism (small amounts of livers of airmen) and nutritional cannibalism (meat

from around the thighs) which figure in postwar confessions. The idea of ritual, and the appeal to a flaw in Shintoism, has tended to overshadow the testimony, and the appeal to the unchecked sadism of individuals which tends to be given a great deal of leeway under wider conditions of war and mutual atrocity.

This does look suspiciously like another orientaling narrative, moreover one which is overlaid with Western preferences for Buddhism over Shinto. A preference which, in this version does little justice to either. We know very well, from other parts of the world, that Buddhism does not offer guarantees against the human flaws which become so evident in wartime. No religious practice does. And organized Buddhism's role, as a national religion, in both Rinzai and Soto variants, was far from unblemished. (I say this as someone with an abiding interest in the latter.) The targeting of Shinto then does an injustice of misrepresentation to Buddhism as well and obscures their complex entanglement. Japanese culture is obviously influenced by both, in deep ways, and in equally deep ways it treats cannibalism as abhorrent, as an impure and monstrous thing. One might even make a better case for a special abhorrence of cannibalism, and specifically of ritual cannibalism, based upon Shinto attitudes towards the impurity of the dead body and harmony between the dead and the living, evidenced in the notorious reluctance across Japan to consent to organ donation, or to be a party to transplants (Namahira, 940-41). The Yasukuni Shrine which has provided a resting place for Japan's fallen since the 19th century, enshrines only spirits and not corpses, not even those of an unknown soldier. The dire effects of Ken Kanecki's transplant, the life-saving operation, which transforms his telos and changes him into a ghoul, may itself be an attempt to play upon such an idea of exceptionalism and of a special culturally-driven suspicion about the dead body and its contaminating threat.

But even this exceptionalist story about a special aversion and its possible roots in Shinto, might be a little too convenient. In its own way, it too seems entangled with Orientalising narratives. We have, after all, seen this kind of thing before, with a supposed link between the special animistic archaism of Shintoism and Japan's openness to technology. A mythology which has come to play a role, but a mythology nonetheless. However, nothing so strong as a special abhorrence, beyond the ordinary familiar abhorrence, is required in order to discount the idea that a softer attitude toward cannibalism might somehow be found in Japan and might somehow show that the familiar abhorrence, which has coalesced with bodily autonomy in the West, is a cultural quirk. Japanese reactions to cannibalism look pretty much the same as almost everyone else's. And they would have to be in order for the storyline of *Tokyo Ghoul* to work. Indeed, it is tempting to think of the text as partly inspired by public fascination about the case of Issei Sagawa who, in 1981, after repeated failures attempts to get help for an obsession, murdered and consumed parts of a female student while studying in Paris. The French authorities deemed Sagawa insane, and promptly got him off their hands after only a limited incarceration. A string of Japanese doctors disagreed and insisted that he ought to have been imprisoned. Instead, Sagawa became a minor celebrity, in a sort of fascinating horror way, with an autobiographical account, *Kiri no Naka/In the Fog* (2002), becoming a best-seller and the obvious antecedent to a number of manga, including both *Tokyo Ghoul* and *Attack on Titan*. There are, perhaps, echoes also of this case in Morioka's account of consumption and the young female body as well. Public fascination with Sagawa, like a curious viewer sympathy for the character of Hannibal Lector (who emerged in the immediate post-Sagawa aftermath), draw upon their unsettling danger, oddity and unhomeliness. And a sense of the latter is bound up with the familiar taboo.

It is difficult to avoid the idea that Wells' Time Traveller was mistaken, even a little in denial of his own feelings, and that the taboo does go deep within our multiple understandings of what it is to be part of our moral community, *one of us*, or, in familiar terms, human. Deeper than cultural quirks and culinary localism. And, as a sort of heresy when social constructs can be found on all sides, the best explanation here may turn out to involve some naturalistic component. An attitude towards cannibalism as abhorrent may well be a very good candidate for an evolutionary account of the role of group selection, with the emergence of a stable practice of cannibalism carrying serious implications for population dynamics and survival. In which case, the kind of culturally shaped 'yuck factor' which seems to place it as merely one local quirk among others, would instead involve a form of unarticulated knowledge, a matter of knowing how to get the social group through the times of extremes scarcity which have been all too commonly in human history, even if they bear little relation to how we (myself and likely readers) live now. From an evolutionary point of view, eating one another in times of pressure has never been a particularly good recipe for pulling through. Eating bodies which bear no threatening trace of illness poses a problem of supply most easily met with the Burke and Hare solution of making corpses out of the living.

4. Conclusion

I may, admittedly, be in danger at this point of showing a little too much. If the visceral disgust concerning cannibalism has such deep underpinnings, it could be difficult to explain early-modern medicinal practices based around the mythical properties of powdered mummy, and powdered ex-people more generally. Yet, in such cases, what confronts us when we set aside special exceptions (comparable to the wartime case mentioned above)

are practices which require transformation and sanitization. Something very different from honorific consumption of the recognizable body, or Ken Kanecki's longing to eat at the corpse around the corner.

Yet, there may still remain a path to normalization in the future. Josh Milburn has recently appealed to the prospect of *in vitro* human meat within a strategy of the sort for which a promissory note was issued in the previous section: if the justifications of *in vitro* meat work in the case of animals (because it is harm-free), then they may work equally well with human flesh. And so, a sense of the proximity between eating meat and eating people is triggered with the former coming out much worse than we might expect. (A theme that we have already actually encountered, in Wells, albeit jumbled together with some disreputable ideas of superiority and culture.) While not to everyone's taste, there might be something to this line of thought, where the seemingly harmless consumption of *in vitro* human flesh shows that the taboo on cannibalism has its problems. The approach might help us to carve apart cases where the 'yuck factor' which is in place expresses a genuine kind of knowledge and cases where it does not, but is merely a product of historical inertia, a failure to move on under circumstances where the risks associated with a culture of human-meat eating are no longer in place. Even so, I wonder about the sense in which this really would be cannibalism, especially if we regard the latter as I have done above, as a thick concept, with norms of prohibition and disapproval built-in. Again, it seems odd to say, 'John and Mary are a lovely couple. Cannibals, but they don't do anything wrong.' And the thought here is not necessarily that the individuals in question might bludgeon strangers for their supper.

Rather, the thought is that what is problematic about cannibalism is not actually the eating of a certain kind of protein, however it might taste, but *the practice of eating human*

flesh. And the latter is something much broader, broader even than the simple act of eating human flesh. Something which involves the vulnerabilities and relationships of an entire way of life. It poses a significantly different set of ethical problems from those associated with the consumption of flesh without history. Or, at least, without the kind of history that human flesh ordinarily has. In a sense, the eating of *in vitro* human meat would only be cannibalism in a very restricted way, if at all. The material would be biologically related to us, but it would never have been one of us.

This is not quite the same as saying that our familiar response to cannibalism is an attitude towards corpses, to the remains of actual humans. Curiously, it does seem broader than any such attitude towards a corpse and does seem to involve responses whose rationality might be hard to defend. Attempts by vegan activists, novelty chefs and artists, to sell or distribute human milk products, human-sourced ice-cream and cheese, have occurred in New York and London in recent years, and have generally been met with mixed reactions of interest, disgust, legal head-scratching and polite requests from the powers-that-be to cease and desist. And flesh is not an issue here. No flesh is processed in the making of these products. They are, in much the same way as other forms of *in vitro* meat, harm free. The humans are obviously free range and not subject to the traumas which are ordinarily associated with dairy production. Yet, this *is* produce with history, but still not a *history of the right sort* to constitute anything like cannibalism in the familiar sense. We do not get down on all fours with Kanecki and Touka simply by consuming human sourced ice-cream.

By why have I used, and repeatedly used, their picture to help draw out the concept of cannibalism as a concept of something monstrous? Why not go for an even more sympathetic example based around honorific consumption? Here I want to say that our

grasp of the concept is flexible enough to apply in multiple circumstances, but is built around monstrous exemplars rather than honorific cases. We could, of course, shift the concept along, and there is nothing wrong with doing so when we have a suitable reason. When, for example, a concept ceases to play its traditional role in an effective way, or when we hope to extend its normative force onto some new practice. But nothing of this sort holds here. Instead, and whatever else we want the very idea of cannibalism to do, we still need the concept to play its traditional role in relation to cases like Sagawa's. These are not likely to go away any time soon and it would be very misleading to narrow the gulf between them and routine meat eating, whatever the rights and wrongs of the latter. Overall, I am tempted to say that any practices of consumption that we might now consider as permissible ought not to be regarded as cannibalism in the regular sense, irrespective of whether or not the foods in question have a historic connection to a human body. Cannibalism is a concept that we need in order to pick out something far more monstrous, and to track a prohibition that far runs deeper than food regulations or notions of good taste.

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