# Meeting 7: Áhimsā

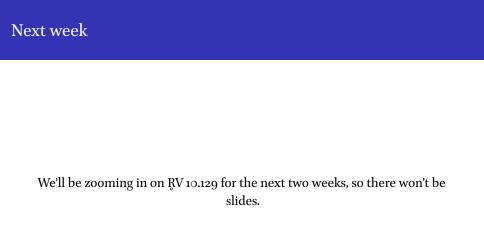
Nonviolence & vegetarianism in earlier & later Hinduism

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# WhatsApp group

https://chat.whatsapp.com/IXCQEkhfrcwHI7CNY8Fgat



## Some questions to consider

- What are the Vedic moral prescriptions on violence in general?
  - What is the special role of the cow in the Vedic religion?
- In what contexts are these prescriptions overridden by ritualistic goals?
  - Is it permissible or an obligation to sacrifice and eat animals?
- To what extent is this Vedic mindset present in Epic Hinduism?
  - in *modern* Hinduism?
- We'll return to these at the end!

#### What is áhimsā?

- Álpha-privative endocentric (tat-púruṣa) from  $\sqrt{hims}$
- First found in Brāhmaṇa literature
  - Non-privative appears later, probably back-formed
- Post-Vedic: wife of D<sup>h</sup>árma, development of the Śákta tradition
- $\sqrt{\text{hims}}$  is much older: e.g. himsr'a (of Agní) in RV
- Thus: non-harming (where harm can be good or bad)
  - Harming whom?
    - Men
    - Kine
    - Other animals

### Áhimsā towards men

- Obviously: killing Árya-s not condoned in general
  - Two acceptable contexts:
    - Battle (e.g. Ten Kings, between Árya-s)
    - Human sacrifice (present but rare)
- Killing Dásyu-s?
- Pacifism? Vedic, Epic, Vedanta

### Áhimsā towards kine

- Go-medhá and other rites
- Sacrifice of bulls: RV 10.86.14
- Yet: aghnyā (f., less commonly m.): synonymous with cow
- Synthesis: kine, unlike other animals, are morally akin to men.
  - Can only be sacrificed in special circumstances

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