

Justyna STECKO<sup>1</sup>

## **A CONTEMPORARY ATTEMPT TO LOOK AT ANIMALS ETHICALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF WITOLD KOEHLER'S DELIBERATIONS**

A man as a conscious and rational being tries to define his place in the universe, himself in relation to the cosmos, absolute, logos and nature. Witold Koehler in the book "Animals are waiting" undertakes an analysis of key issues that arise from the man-animal relationship. He deals with the issue of animal consumption, including the question of keeping live fish in the shop, as well as hunting or training. This paper is an attempt to bring closer both the historical development of human-animal relations and their contemporary state – the attention has been paid to issues related to this state, with particular emphasis on meat consumption, and they have been shown through the prism of the concepts of Witold Koehler.

**Keywords:** animals, "zoo rable", vegetarianism, Witold Koehler.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The issue of immoral treatment of animals and even directly the concept of "zoo rable" was created and used by Witold Koehler in the book entitled *Animals are waiting*. As the author writes: "in the human-animal system, rudeness can only refer to one side, it is exclusively human. Since its form is specific in such a relation, it manifests itself mainly or sometimes only in relation to an animal – therefore it seems appropriate to create a special term. The contractual term could be: "zoo rable" (Koehler, 1981). Witold Koehler tackles many of the problems that result from human-animal relationships. He deals with both the issue of animal consumption, including the keeping of live fish in the store today, as well as hunting and training. This article is an attempt to approximate both the historical shaping of the human-animal relationship, as well as their modern state - focused on the problems associated with this issue, with particular emphasis on meat consumption, and is shown through the prism of the concepts of Witold Koehler.

### **2. MAN TOWARDS ANIMALS – A HISTORICAL ASPECT (Stecko, 2018)**

What connects Pythagoras, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Voltaire, Vincent van Gogh, Abraham Lincoln, Franz Kafka, Nicola Tesla and Albert Einstein? In addition to being outstanding individuals and influencing our civilization and culture, they were all vegetarians. However, when you look at human and animal relationships over the past several thousand

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<sup>1</sup> Justyna Stecko, PhD, Assistant Professor, Rzeszów University of Technology, Faculty of Management, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, e-mail: jstecko@prz.edu.pl. ORCID: 0000-0001-9968-7946.

years, they were not only characterized by love, respect and protection. Cruel and ethically controversial behaviors were much more frequent.

Ancient thinkers were no longer unanimous in assessing animals. Attitudes towards animals varied: from the respect of Pythagoreans who believed in reincarnation, through the concept of Plutarch, who argued that they exhibit intelligence and some features of moral virtues (Ślipko, 2009), to the views of cynics who considered them even beings superior to humans. The most popular for this period and later times, however, is the concept of Aristotle, who in animals saw only a lower being serving a man.

In the Middle Ages, the concepts of subsequent saints also varied. According to St. Augustine, animals are “mindless creatures flying, swimming, walking and crawling, since they are not connected with us by having reason” (Saint Augustine, 2003). Saint opinion was similar. Tomasz, in his opinion, all non-human creatures are only instruments needed to meet the needs of man, and because of lack of reason – as St. Tomasz – they are not subject to moral judgments or punishments. The doctrine of St. Albert and St. Bonaventure (Ślipko, 2009). One of the few thinkers in this period who dared to close the distance between the animal and human world was Saint. Francis of Assisi: “Our primary duty towards our younger brothers is not to harm them, but stopping there is not enough. We have a more important mission – to help them whenever they need it”<sup>2</sup>.

Renaissance humanism did not destroy the medieval barriers that divide the world of people and animals, despite the views of figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, who said simply: “There will come a time when people like me will look at the animal killer as they do now look at the killer of people” (Gelb 2017). It seems that the greatest discrepancy between the animal world can be found in Spinoza's views, and the far-reaching harmful effects had the Cartesian theory of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Although the first of them granted animals the right to feel, but at the same time argued that they are different from human feelings, so they can be used freely to meet human needs. According to Spinoza, “the law prohibiting the killing of animals is based more on vain superstition and divine mercy than on common sense” (Spinoza, 1954). However, it is the Cartesian way of looking at human-animal relationships that has been reminiscent to this day. According to Descartes, the key element that “makes us human and different from animals” (Descartes, 2005) is reason. Animals are merely machines without communication skills and suffering. “My views are not so cruel to animals, but convenient to people – at least for those who do not believe the Pythagorean prejudices – they free them from the charge of crime when they eat or kill animals” (Singer, 2004). The Cartesian concept influenced the justification of numerous live animal experiments conducted in the name of science.

It is not true, however, that only such ideas emerged among modern philosophers. Michel de Montaigne represented one of the most open views. In his opinion, a man, despite his predispositions, should not feel distinguished from animals as he does not belong to the higher species. On the one hand, he criticizes religious beliefs about the creation of a man in the image of God, on the other, he indicates that in comparisons human beings are much closer to animals (Montaigne, 2004). Montaigne clearly condemned cruelty to animals – he did so not for fear of being transferred to humans, but for the animals themselves, which had the same right to life as humans. “As far as I'm concerned, I've never been able to watch,

<sup>2</sup> It is worth paying attention to the ecological decalogue of St. Francis of Assisi based on his writings and early Franciscan sources – compare: <https://swietostworzenia.pl/czytelnia/16-ekologia-franciszanska/122-ekologiczny-dekalog-sw-franciszka-z-asyzu> [Access: 24.12.2017].

without anger, the persecution and killing of an innocent and defenseless animal that does no harm to us" (Montaigne, 2004). Among modern thinkers, it is also worth paying attention to the concept of John Locke, who spoke about consciousness both in relation to man and animals. Views on the mental abilities of animals can also be seen in Leibniz. However, he made a significant difference – only people are able to understand morality, and according to the thinker, thanks to the ability to think abstractly (Leibniz, 1955). Another groundbreaking thinker who recognized that animals had the respect and the right to be treated well by humans was J.J. Rousseau. Among the philosophical concepts that could help in the discussion about animal welfare, one should also mention the concept of David Hume, who stated: "no truth seems to me more obvious than that animals have thought and reason as well as man" (Hume, 1963). In his opinion, indifferent attitude, and worse – cruelty, was humiliating to man (Zaorsa, 2016). The concept of Artur Schopenhauer, who simply calls "people devils on this earth, and animals tormented by souls" (Stecko, 2011) has become an extremely important voice in the defense of animals. He paid particular attention to the issue of awareness (Schopenhauer, 2009).

However, it seems that Jeremy Bentham had the greatest impact on animal rights discussions. According to this thinker: "one should not ask whether animals can reason or speak but can suffer" (Bentham, 1958). Man, wanting to show his superiority, has emphasized for centuries that he outweighs animals with his reason and communication skills, instead of paying attention to what unites us. No matter how we differ, we are all capable of suffering. Bentham directly writes: "May the day come when everyone recognizes that the number of legs, the hairiness of the skin, or the ending of the *os sacrum*, are also not convincing arguments that letting an affection be allowed to be tormented. Because of what you can draw an impassable border? Would it be because of it has the ability to reason or maybe the gift of speech? However, an adult horse or dog is incomparably rational and more able to communicate with an animal than a child having a day or week or even a month of life" (Bentham, 1958).

As you can see, for centuries views about human-animal relations have not been homogeneous, and so it is today. In discussions about respect for animals, there are arguments that were cited centuries ago, and as it turns out – consumer pleasure, satisfaction and a full stomach are invariably "values" that affect our relationship with the natural world.

### **3. "GASTROCENTRIC" STIMULI AS A REGULATOR OF ETHICAL HUMAN ACTIVITIES**

According to Koehler: "passions change, gentle views, but the taste remains the same: venison roast, hare pate, roe deer – they are still welcome and do not bring unpleasant associations. These are not matters of subtle nerves, but paramount issues: the field of stomach needs!" (Koehler, 1981). Your master, says Koehler, is your stomach. Is it true that our egoism and taste preferences are responsible for the deaths of billions of animals? Approximately 70 billion farm animals are killed each year (Czarnaowca, 2014). Advertisements of meat, cheese and milk chocolate give us idyllic images of happy pigs and cows grazing in the meadows. And consumers – as Koehler writes – even if they think that a tasty piece of meat they just eaten pulsated with the joy of life a moment ago, they want to believe that "professionals doing this to some extent and on their moral account their bloody duty, seem skillfully and humanely based on the methods of action developed by expert technicians of

modern, painless slaughter” (Koehler, 1981). Koehler's words, even though they were written almost 40 years ago, are still valid today, and the imaginations of consumers are equally naive and far from the truth. Not only many of these animals will never experience freedom in nature – they spend their lives in a small cage, without even seeing a scrap of the sky. On the other hand, those who have ever had the opportunity to “enjoy the joy of life” felt the nightmare of transport, whose description of conditions due to the volume of the text I will skip, although this is a very controversial topic.

What does “typical slaughter” look like? Andrzej Elżanowski talks about this in detail (Kowalski, 2013). Chickens on the conveyor belt hang their heads down so that their heads are immersed in a live gutter that should be stunned. Often, however, the birds bow their heads, and as a consequence, not only the conscious go under the knife, but even die only in boiling water. “Research from the American government shows that in the US it can be up to four million birds a year” (Kowalski, 2013). Slaughtering of calves, cows or bulls looks a bit different. Animals should be stunned effectively before slaughter. The butcher puts a special pistol on their heads. There is a bolt inside it, which under pressure is pushed out with enormous force from the “barrel” of the pistol and strikes the animal in the skull (Kowalski, 2013). According to research and observations regarding stunning devices, “slaughterers do not adjust the appropriate current to the size of the animal”, hence some animals go to the conscious and conscious tape. “The tape goes on – you need to cut the arteries and drain 20 liters of blood, then peel off the skin. It happens that a cow is still alive at this stage” (Kowalski, 2013). According to the report of the Supreme Audit Office, 60% of Polish slaughterhouses inspected did not comply with the provisions on the conditions of slaughtering animals (*Książka o prawach zwierząt...*, 2014). Consumers, when putting ribs on the grill, do not want to think about the slaughterhouse. But perhaps – as Paul McCartney wrote – “if the slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be a vegetarian” (McCartney, 2012).

What is the veal so tasty and recommended on culinary blogs? Like more than a 2–4-week-old “child” of a cow, and as specialists point out, the best quality meat comes from the youngest animals fed during this short period of their life mainly with mother's milk. And if we want it to reach the highest market price, then we starve them, leading to anemia and at the same time the most expensive, pale pink meat. Nine months of pregnancy equals our dinner, and in the specialist press they are referred to only as “live”. According to Koehler, the “once domesticated, and today specifically animal mechanized in its life processes, the pathetic remnants of its personality were taken away. Since his birth, it is – just meat. Living Meat!” (Koehler, 1981).

Koehler is convinced that the promotion of vegetarianism would inevitably be a completely fruitless and lifeless undertaking in Poland! (Koehler, 1981). Let's try, though for a moment, to imagine what would happen if we stopped eating meat as humans? It seems that the first benefit – extremely important from the point of view of ethics – is that no one would probably starve to death anymore. Food would be enough for everyone. According to specialists, if the legumes and cereals used to feed farm animals were to be used for people – the problem of hunger would be solved (Tylikowska, 2017). Analyses show that to produce 1 kilogram of meat, you need about 12 kilograms of feed and from several to several thousand liters of water. As a result of the desertification caused by the Earth's desert, water becomes a scarce resource. The production of one hamburger “meat insert” consumes it as much as a two-month uninterrupted shower.

If we gave up meat, the world would also be much less polluted and we would slow down climate change. Marco Springmann (Gazeta.pl, 2018) from the University of Oxford estimates that reducing meat consumption in the world could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as two-thirds. This would slow down global warming. By 2050, average temperatures would not rise by more than 2 degrees. This is twice less than current forecasts. The scientist estimates savings for the world even at USD 30 trillion a year.

It also seems that the introduction of a plant-based diet would reduce the problem of obesity, thus - improve health, and savings due to this (only on the purchase of medicines alone) would constitute as much as 2–3% of the gross world product. Interestingly, we would probably also deal with one of the biggest challenges of modern medicine – antibiotic resistance. It turns out that the drugs used to treat animals on industrial farms remain in meat, and people as consumers of this product are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics. These actions – according to Dr. Marco Springmann – would extend the lives of people and at the same time introduce huge savings estimated at 700–1000 billion dollars a year (Ceglarz, 2017)

So if we can't convince people to eat meat with ethical considerations, it may be worth paying attention to economy, ecology and especially – the egoism of people. Since today we care about ourselves the most, maybe we will modify the diet out of care for our health and life. According to Marcin Piotrowski - the chef of one of the exclusive restaurants – “If people were aware of the ingredients in their meat, probably half of them would exclude them from their diet at all”. Currently, various chemicals are added to meat to extend its date of consumption or improve appearance.

From the Polish slaughterhouses, pork carcasses leave with a 30-percent carrageenan injection from protein hydrolyzate, and the sausages are already virtually meat free. If we are what we eat, is it better to have a garden in our belly than a cemetery?

#### 4. ANIMALS ARE STILL WAITING

In a man – according to Koehler – there is what he calls “the hunger for the pleasure of killing”: “in poverty of eternal hunger for prey, in the symbolism sanctifying sacred torture performed in the name of satisfying the alleged hunger of an imaginary deity, there was a genuine hunger for the pleasure of killing, lifted to the religious peak ecstasy” (Koehler, 1981). According to Koehler, both the average consumer and experienced biologist are aware of the intensification of not only physical but also psychological suffering in animals sentenced to rape or the role of experimental material (Koehler, 1981). This thesis is confirmed by contemporary zoologist Professor Andrzej Elżanowski, in subsequent texts he indicates how monstrous and aware of this bestiality. If the variety of life forms on Earth, Koehler writes, “were limited to self-living organisms, which are plants capable of photosynthesis, there would be no problem of suffering. To be more precise – there would be no pain that would be within the sensitivity range of the receptors in which perhaps the most primitive animal organisms are equipped” (Koehler, 1981).

Koehler asks: “Will there ever come a time when a rational man – *Homo sapiens* – for centuries of his existence on Earth – the cruelest predator and inexhaustible sower of pain, will turn his genius against suffering” (Koehler, 1981)? In my opinion no.

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