

Dignity of Human Beings – Dignity of Animal Beings

A Case Study: Bulls as Gladiators¹

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A frequented instance of the recent discourse on the animal rights is the topic of bull fights. The aim of my contribution is to offer an analysis of a similar debate on bull fights one hundred years ago, in Budapest. In the beginning of the 20th century several “road shows of Spanish toreros” had been organized in Central Europe, offering an opportunity to meet the new needs of mass entertainment and the idea of animal rights. By my analysis, the argumentation for animal rights in these debates was based on an analogy between the “dignity of the animal beings” and the “dignity of the human beings”, rooted in a naturalised anthropology of the late Continental positivism. At the end of my paper, I will mention a parallelism between this old philosophical background and the new concept of embodied mind.

Introduction: Bullfight as a Model

An emblematic example of the contemporary discourse on animal rights and animal welfare is the debate on the permission or prohibition of *bullfights*. It manifests a simple situation of the immoral abuse of animals' lives, without any modifying element, such as a strong economic interests in human welfare or the politics of world-nutrition. The question of bullfights seems to be a clear model of a pure ethical problem, in which the practical consequences are insignificant. Seemingly, the single sensitive question is the cultural embeddedness of bullfights in several societies and the resulting possibility of misunderstanding in intercultural discourses on several phenomena. In what follows I rarely touch on the cultural embeddedness of the analysed phenomenon. It is to be noted that before the economic crisis, especially in the '90s, the plan was to organise European road-shows of bullfights as parts of the global mass-entertainment. My analysis is focussed on this globalised form of bullfights, in the mirror of the large discourse on a similar situation, namely the real bullfights in Budapest more than a century ago, in the year of 1904. In the following part of my article I outline the events

¹ For this paper I have used the ideas presented at my lectures in The Lošinj Days of Bioethics, 2011, Croatia; and at the conference “Living with Consequences 2011”, Koper, Slovenia, 2011. The present article is a part of a research program entitled “Narratives of the History of Hungarian Philosophy (1792–1947)”, supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Found (OTKA K 104643).

of the early bullfights and their afterlife in cultural memory. Following that, I offer an analysis of the argumentation of the pro-animal movement of the time, and its background in the philosophy as well as other fields of culture of the same epoch. Finally, in the last part of my paper, I draw parallels between the philosophical background of the discourse that surrounded these phenomena one hundred years ago, and a relevant trend of our contemporary philosophical discourse, with regards to their consequences for animal rights.

Budapest Corridas in 1904 and Their Cultural Memory

There is a well-known comic scene of the classical genre of ‘Budapest Cabaret,’ with an elderly husband who can see only one escape from the trap of his awful marriage: to apply for the job of a ‘volunteer torero’ of the next ‘Budapest Corrida.’ However, today’s Hungarian audience regards this classic scene as a standard of the ‘comedy of a married couple,’ with grotesque, irrational elements; an elderly downtown citizen in the role of a real torero, the ‘arena of bulls’ as a real place in Budapest. However, originally these elements made the gist of the story. The wife of our ‘volunteer torero’ was a chairperson of a local pro-animal society in the fiction of cabaret, and the first problem of the non-fictional public sphere of the time was the evaluation of the *corridas* as the newest form of mass-entertainment in Budapest. In this period, all the great European cities had guest-toreros and “guest-bulls” for several pilot-corridas. Bullfight, having been a local tradition before, had tried to find its place and role in the new structure of globalized mass-entertainment. The case of Budapest was special in an international context, because in Budapest a permanent ‘arena of bulls’ had been built in a symbolic societal space; in the middle of the City Park, in the centre of the triangle of the Amusement Park, the Hippodrome, and the Budapest Zoo. After establishing this institution at this symbolic place, and successfully acculturating the bullfights into the new mass-entertainment of the city, Budapest was able to become the centre of the (never established) Central European bullfight-industry.

On the surface, the discourse about the bullfights followed the trend of contemporary Hungarian politics. The non-governmental organisations founded especially for touristic and cultural reasons were active in this regard, partially promoting and partially opposing the bullfights, using mainly nationalistic slogans. (Typical topics in the newspapers were the emphasis put on ‘Spanish barbarism’ and the contrast between the bull with a typical Hungarian bull-name and the torero with a typical Spanish name.) In the beginning, the government’s attitude was ambiguous. At first, bullfights were permitted, albeit only in the ‘French style’ (without killing the bull) – with toreros educated in Spanish corridas. Almost every new event in the arena, or even a street scandal, offered an opportunity to change the official rules. Finally, the government

prohibited the bullfights, and the globalized mass-entertainment in Budapest focused on other topics². The local press was mostly on the side of prohibition, and took the opportunity to present an analogy between the barbarism of the old animal battles in the eighteenth century and the new project³. Twenty years later, the next and last appearance of a Spanish bullfight road show was not in the focus of the public sphere. Corridas were only permitted in suburbs, outside the territory of the local authorities of Budapest, without sensational circumstances. In the press a periodical associated with the pro-animal movements published a significant reflection on the topic⁴, using the old *clichés* of the barbarism of bullfights and evaluated the new event as insignificant in comparison with the first Budapest bullfights. In the cultural memory of the Hungarian pro-animal movement the debate in 1904 was significant and triumphant, while the present one in the twenties was evaluated only as a boring shadow of the past. The prohibition of animal battles was considered to be an evident thesis, not worthy of a single new or special argument concerning the animal–human relationship.

The stereotype of the “protection of animals in the civilized Budapest,” versus the “barbarism of the bullfighting nations” was rooted in the role of the pro-animal movements in the Hungarian *fin de siècle* society. Written sources on the early history of Central European, and especially Hungarian, animal protection movements have convinced us that it had a double embeddedness, both in the bureaucratic elite of the new institutions of the late nineteenth-century modernization, and in the institutions of the new disciplines of biological studies. The commander of the Budapest Police⁵, a representative of the staff of the Budapest Zoo⁶, and the founder of Hungarian ornithology, Ottó Hermann were all active and distinguished members of the societies for animal protection. As a consequence, these societies were closely connected with governmental practice such as the rules of the local authorities concerning urban animals and animal fairs, circular letters for the schoolteachers of natural history, and so on. Their relationship with the sciences is important in understanding the pro-scientific position of the movement; its criticism of the wrong, non-enlightened traditions of everyday life was based on scientific data. An institutionalized, technologically and scientifically grounded, twofold *utilitarianism* has emerged as the dominant discourse, consisting of the utility of the animals for humanity on its first level, and a calculus of utility concerning the welfare, pleasure and pain of the animals on its second. To be a

² For the events and political circumstances of the early Budapest corridas see Vari 2010.

³ For the most typical reflections in the local press, see Takáts 1905; Vay 1904.

⁴ See Gelsei Bíró 1925.

⁵ Boldizsár Bornemissza, chief commander of the Budapest Police was the Honorary President of the Hungarian animal protection movement. His death on the 25th of August, 1905 was in the headlines of the press of the pro-animal movement in Hungary.

⁶ József Kukuljevič, as a representative of the management of the Budapest Zoo, was the chief editor of the central periodical of the Hungarian pro-animal movement.

moral subject in the above mentioned bureaucratic discourse is interpreted as being the subject of law. A paradigmatic consequence of this idea is the aspiration to broaden the Geneva Convention to include the “animal warriors,” especially the horses and dogs employed in the armies. The vocabulary of the movement was rich in metaphors taken from human professions: animals often appeared as workers, employees, or producers of goods in this discourse.

At this point, the need has emerged of a new ground for argumentation. For avoiding the superfluous pain of every living being is enough to regard them as sensitive entities, but a description of animals as beings functioning in quasi-societal roles requires another concept of the animal phenomenon. This concept had been offered by a system of ideas about animal rationality and emotions, and a language devoid of the distinction between the human and animal physiological functions. All the important features of these discourses emerged together in a concise form in 1904 in the debates on Spanish bullfight, the new kind of mass-entertainment in Budapest. While the articles against the bullfights were published in the special periodicals of the pro-animal movement and did not interact with the mainstream discourse which rather used the stereotype of “Spanish barbarism;” still, the actions and opinions of the movement had a significant social effect⁷. At this time, within the pro-animal press, a new idea emerged, based mostly on the known opinions on avoiding the pain of both humans and animals, which took into consideration the *personality or dignity of the bulls*. In a system of ideas that regards the tasks of urban animals as quasi-societal roles, a professional fighting bull is a societal disfunction and a culturally alien phenomena, like that of a *gladiator*. This discourse evaporated with the crisis of World War I, and it has never been reconstructed in its former, complex form. The above mentioned pro-animal article about the bullfights from the '20s remembers the triumph “over the barbarism of bullfights,” but has forgotten the argumentation of the debate.

A New Concept of Animals

In the following I describe the main elements of this new frame of ideas about animals based on a typical text from the theoretical literature of the Hungarian pro-animal movement of the turn of the century. The first step is to distinguish it from the mainstream utilitarian argumentation of the animal protection movement of the time, mirrored in the other articles of the same periodical: “educated people know that the

⁷ Actually, we cannot speak about a unified organisation. The Hungarian pro-animal movement at this time was highly diversified. Almost every significant town had an independent pro-animal group, typically with the participation of the local intelligentsia, and with the active collaboration of the local teacher of natural history. The national-level organisation was only established in a relatively late period of the movement, and it has functioned as a federation of independent societies.

animals are worthy of good treatment not only because of their utility, but because they are sensitive and *understanding* beings as well⁸. The thesis of animal reason has an important effect on the concept of human reason as well, and destroys the dichotomy between human and animal mental capacities. There is no strict difference between (animal) *instinct* and (human) *reason*, both being based on the same processes of *taming* and *training*. The structure of the reason of a tamed and trained animal, living in a cultural environment, is similar to that of a human, because the *humans* under cultural conditions *are tamed and trained animals*, formed by their own culture. Both animal and human reasoning are based on the common capacity of *imitation*. The emphasis in both human and animal cases is placed on the role of imitation in establishing societies, concluding in an utterance about the “(animal) capacity of civilisation.” The consequent style of the author, using ‘he,’ or ‘she’ instead of ‘it’ to refer to animals, is a natural consequence of the principles. We can see in the vocabulary and scientific context that this new concept of animals is not a naïve romantic analogue but an element of a new worldview. The article mentioned above had offered a systematized epitome of the most widespread ideas amongst the pro-animal movement⁹. This highly *socialized*, maybe *humanized* concept of animals is the root of the idea of animal rights based on a concept of “animal dignity,” similar to that of humans. This *socialized* animal, e.g. a bull, not only has the rights to avoid pain and suffering, but to avoid participating in humiliating actions (e.g. in bullfights) as well.

A Possible Philosophical Root of the New Image of Animals

The above described, typical example of the theoretical thinking of the pro-animal movement of the era was not separated from the intellectual life of the epoch. It was not only embedded in sciences but in philosophy as well. My historical example for the connection between pro-animal theory and contemporary mainstream philosophy outlines a characteristic anthropology. It was, however, rooted in *fin de siècle* positivism; its development is not typical. Mainstream Hungarian philosophical thinking, in accordance with the trends of Continental thinking, had departed from positivism, and was more in line with neo-Kantian tendencies, and later, with the different schools

⁸ Reisz 1905. The article is an edited version of a lecture of the author, Irén Reisz, a teacher of natural history, read in the presence of the general assembly of the Animal Protection Society of Baja, a little town on the right bank of the Danube.

⁹ However, at the same time there were other initiatives for the popularization of the idea of animal protection, especially in the field of education; that used the known theories instrumentally. For instance, there are known appeals of the pro-animal movement for teaching the elements of animal rights in the frame of the organized religious education in schools. These appeals have never been rooted in the theological thinking of a Christian pro-animal group of any denomination; they were always the opinions of a laic movement, communicated towards the clergy.

of neo-idealism. The author discussed below demonstrated a reciprocal intellectual development. In the beginning, he focused on topics of neo-Kantianism, like the problem of the category of time, and later, he took up the positivistic point of view during his investigations. He was a consequent critic both of the old-fashioned materialism of Karl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner, and of the contemporary idealism, and his close connection with the new data of experimental psychology made his ideas acceptable in the public opinion of his period, which was mainly based on the sciences. In this chapter of my paper I show that this system of ideas with its anthropological consequences is useful in a pro-animal argumentation, including an explicit argumentation for the parallelism of animal and human reasons and personalities of the era mentioned above. Finally, I show that his anthropology and the above mentioned argumentation of the animal protection movement went hand in hand.

In the following I refer to the texts of a Hungarian author of late positivism, Jenő Posch (1859–1923), a recognised ancestor of international behaviourism¹⁰. I use these texts as instances offering a good opportunity for the comparison of several elements of his philosophical vocabulary and the vocabulary of his contemporaries in the Hungarian animal protection movement. The first remarkable idea is a systematic anti-metaphysical cleansing of the vocabulary of the theory of mind¹¹. For him, the use of the words ‘soul’ and ‘mind’ is similar to the use of the word ‘cholera’. The illness called *cholera* is not *caused* by the *black bile* (in Greek: *cholē*), like in the theory of Hippocrates, but the word is still used as a neutral sign of this illness, without problems of interpretation. Likewise, there is no substantial soul or mind as a separate and pre-existent cause of the mental phenomena, we use these old words only as a neutral sign of a group of special phenomena, called *mental*. The cleansing of the language was expanded to include the vocabulary of the recent materialism of Karl Vogt, whose famous example had been unmasked as an unconscious requisite of the old metaphysical vocabulary. For Vogt, to suppose the existence of the soul is similar to suppose the existence of a ‘spirit of kidneys.’ (Urine is the product of kidneys without a ‘special spirit of kidneys,’ and the thought is the product of the brain without a phenomenon called the ‘mind.’) By the critique of Posch, this Vogtian localisation of the thought in the body is just a requisite of dualism, which upholds the existence of the thought as a separate entity, and not a bodily function¹². The insufficient character of Vogtian materi-

¹⁰ Researches of the first American behaviourists and Posch ran in parallel, although the achievements of Posch were available in the international scene after World War I, with a concise explanation of his ideas in German. See Posch 1923. Posch later became part of the historiographical canon of behaviourism; McGuigan 1978.

¹¹ The author’s opinions about the critique of language are connected to those of Mauthner. An interpretation of their relationship is the future task of the history of philosophy, especially considering their correspondence.

¹² For the topics mentioned see in his masterpiece, *passim*: Posch 1915.

alism inspired him to call his own system ‘realism,’ as a theoretically more consequent form of old materialisms. The central position of the critique of language, and the aim of his researches, was to offer a new, complex anthropology and keep it in the realm of philosophy, in spite of his close connection to the experimental sciences (his writings were published in periodicals of philosophy.) In the system of Posch, mental phenomena evaporated amongst the events of the (potentially or actually) acting bodies. His system was not based on “thinking bodies” alone, but in a more radical manner, on the identification of thinking with physical acting. In the style of the author, his theses did not include any humiliation of the human being; on the contrary, he expresses them with a kind of pathos characteristic of the Enlightenment. It seems that in these theses he found the answer for the question of his early Kantianism (“what is the human”).

Posch’s ideas had partly been developed in individual articles since the last years of the nineteenth century, and the outlines of the system were finished by 1910; the whole work was published as late as the second year of World War I. Its reception is not separable from the cultural shock of the war period. For the illustration of the cultural plausibility of this new anthropology, I refer to the short stories and novels of a well-known Hungarian writer, Frigyes Karinthy, written in the war- and post-war years¹³. Karinthy’s stories in this period are abundant in fantastic elements, connected to the phenomenon of *changeable personalities*; in the simplest form it is the idea of *changeable bodies* under conditions of the newly invented scientific method of *conscious reincarnation*. All the stories have similar, tragic ends, as the main character, who should not be connected to a pseudo-being of ‘soul,’ full of false ideas and theories, misinterprets the concept of identity,. In the final scenes it becomes clear that human personal identity can only exist in the human body; failing to respect this fact one of the characters discovers the inability to make love with a *borrowed body* as a simple tool, another can *really feel* his self-identity only on the occasion of his hanging. Paraphrasing Foucault’s thought, we see here scenes where the human bodies try to *escape from the prison of soul*, but it is too late for the human persons to survive.

After this culturally interiorised anthropological turn, Posch explicitly formulated the consequences of his philosophy regarding animals. From the point of view of his system, the integration of a new theory of animals into a radical conception of *acting bodies* can find its place in the interpretation of thinking and the critique of the metaphysical language. In this analysis he judges the differences between the animal and human physiological functions in ordinary languages to be a meaningless requisite of a failed metaphysics, just like the words ‘soul,’ ‘spirit’ and ‘mind’ were in the above mentioned texts. A normative distinction between the *perished animal* and a

¹³ These writings of Karinthy have a large interpretative literature in Hungarian humanities; I for now choose, however, disregard the reflections on them. The supposed parallelism between Posch’s philosophy and Karinthy’s fictions is my own hypothesis.

dead human being, an *eating person* and her *devouring pet*, or referring to a human as ‘he,’ or ‘she,’ and to an animal as ‘it,’ are mere linguistic phenomena, rooted in the language-use of the epoch. This pro-animal argumentation was published on the pages of the most influential Hungarian literary review, as a practical conclusion of the summarized philosophical opinions of the author, published in his books and his articles in serious periodicals for scholars¹⁴. From our present point of view, it appears only as an interesting particularity of the history of philosophy, without any of the above detailed parallelism with the vocabulary of the animal protection movement of the same era. A historiographer, after reconstructing these analogous structures, must observe that the arguments for animal rights on a philosophical basis had unfortunately disappeared in the ’20s of the last century. The cultural plausibility of the above quoted theories evaporated in the darkness of the intellectual history of the interwar Continental Europe.

Epilogue: Remarks on a Contemporary Theory

Every argument for animal rights or welfare – or at least, for the smallest amount of suffering for animals – has an inevitable, either explicit or hidden, anthropological aspect. We can express this question in the concept of the *difference* and *similarity* of the animal and the human personality, the animal and the human *nature*. The history of Western philosophy is abundant in relevant *pro* and *contra* arguments, especially in the field of moral philosophy; both the supposed uniqueness of humankind and the requirement of animal–human brotherhood are fundamentals of widespread systems of moral opinions. The initial topic of my present approach was based on a recent concept of the philosophy of mind called the ‘*embodied mind*’. According to my hypothesis, the opinions in philosophy of mind connected to this term are able to establish an argument for animal rights based on the similarity of the human and the animal body–mind structure, both historically, as detailed above, and synchronically, as follows.

At the end of the last century a new concept emerged simultaneously in the different discourses of epistemology: ‘embodied mind.’ According to the opinions of the most enthusiastic supporters of the theories based on this term, it has the potential to be a fundamental challenge and the turning point of Western thought concerning crucial questions of philosophical anthropology. One of the most influential books of these theories, written by Lakoff and Johnson, formulates the question rhetorically in its initial chapter: “Who Are We?” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). This text offers a list of the ideas of the European intellectual heritage that their novel theory exceeds. One of the most important utterances concerns the relationship between animals and humans:

¹⁴ See Posch 1924. For the animal–human relationship, see especially Chapter IV. This posthumous writing can be regarded as his “intellectual last will and testament.”

“The discovery that reason is evolutionary utterly changes our relation to *other animals* and changes our conception of human beings as uniquely rational. Reason is thus not an essence that separates us from other animals; rather, it places us on a continuum with them.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999. 4.) The emphasis is, of course, on the rejection of the Cartesian dualism. The list of the theses of “the changes of our understanding of reason” is followed by another list of the *failed theories* from Descartes through Kant to Chomsky. However, these are theories of the mind only *prima facie*, on a closer reading it turns out to be a list of the main anthropological opinions of Western philosophy. Based on the first thesis of this list – “there is no Cartesian dualistic person” –, and after the declaration of the human–animal continuum, we presume that the next statement must be the enlargement of the concept of ‘person’ to include animals, or at least, some argument against this enlargement. Later, the authors offer large systematic chapters on “the cognitive science of basic philosophical ideas,” i. e. about morality. Based on the initial promises of the book the reader expects an enlargement of the sphere of the moral beings or subjects to include animals, or at least a reasoning for the exclusion of animals from the moral sphere. Surprisingly, we cannot find any such statement, and after the first pages the reader must say “goodbye to animals” forever.

This *forgetting of animals* is rooted in several structural elements of the early theories of ‘embodied mind.’ In what follows I briefly outline a highly simplified model of a large, vivid and interesting field of recent research. I think it holds true only for the early theories; and only from the point of view of animal protection. In the new theory the words ‘body’ or ‘flesh’ refer to the neural networks and sensitive apparatus, sometimes in almost the same way that ‘brain’ does, instead of the whole of the flesh. A vocabulary built on this special point of view of the ‘body’ can function in a theoretical discourse as a material reduplication of the dualistic theories that are considered old-fashioned. However, the judgements about the things and processes are radically new; the *structure* of this New World is almost the same as that of the old one was. It is true that the body–mind dualism and the separated person as an agent of sensation and action are theoretically denied, but the texts always speak about the new epistemological and moral roles of ‘persons,’ and new concepts and roles of ‘minds.’ It seems to be like old actors in an old play of an old theatre, only with a new director – the tradition will reorganize the old dramaturgic machinery against the will and the new point of view of the new director. The semantic structure of the key words – ‘embodied mind,’ ‘disembodied mind,’ ‘embodiment,’ and ‘disembodiment,’ in French: *‘incarnation’* – supports the tendency of this hidden dualistic discourse with the clear theological connotation of the vocabulary. Body–mind dualism is encoded in this vocabulary, despite of the monistic intention of the speaker. Ironically, an argumentation *against* the pre-existent mind and the separation of body and mind should express it by using the terms of the separate, pure mind and body. (Recently, as a member of the editorial board of the *Hungarian Review of Philosophy*, I encountered the question as a problem of

translation and the appropriate standardized use of terms like ‘embodiment,’ ‘embodied mind,’ in Hungarian, by different authors¹⁵. Finally, instead of the word by word translation it became ‘bodily mind,’ but the most radical, and clear formulation was the ‘thinking body,’ without a separate mind.) Conclusively, we have seen a great promise for rethinking the relationship between animals and humans within the framework of a recent theory in the philosophy of mind, that proved unfulfilled because of its old vocabulary, and the unconscious use of the terms of this vocabulary. It seems like the philosophers have forgotten the results of the old linguistic turn by the new ‘mentalist’ turn. The case may be that philosophical theories, like a human eye, must always have a blind spot.

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¹⁵ For the problems of terminology see especially Sutyák 2010. note pp. 17–18. It was a special issue of this periodical, entitled “The Body.”