

The Psychological Aspect

Applying violence to so-called domestic animals under intensive production conditions and in slaughterhouses affects the psyche of people, especially of children. As this is known since a long time, in Swiss slaughterhouses the killing is done at 5 a.m. and the animal industries are taboo. If there were not

*„Now I can contemplate you in peace:
I do not eat you any more“.*

Franz Kafka, looking at fish in an aquarium.

some persistent animal protectors, time and again pointing out the problems, the majority of the Swiss population would barely know of their existence. As thoroughly as can be managed, the antecedents of the steak on the plate are suppressed.

As a vegetarian, you don't need to feel guilty when you see a rabbit or a cow. And you don't need to suppress your feelings for animals. In this way, the relationship between Man and animals takes quite a different dimension than it possibly can with meat eaters.

Most children have a natural aversion against eating something from a killed animal. Usually they get accustomed to it only grudgingly. Often they get into conflict with their feelings, since these are opposed to the sayings of their parents („eat the meat so you will be big and strong!“). More often than not they decide to follow their parents (in fact, being dependent on them, they don't have not much of any other choice) and thus have learned to mistrust their own feelings or to suppress them. In some case this can even lead them to secretly and finally unconsciously hate their parents, for instance when they are forced to eat their own rabbit. As such hate must itself be repressed, yet stays active, it is very likely to be projected upon other people. At adult age, in practically all cases all such incidents are completely repressed, liable to becoming conscious again only in exceptional situations. With sensitive persons, this (originally self-imposed, but later not

resolved) repressivity can lead to hefty psychic disorders¹, as e.g. the psychologist G.L. van Daltsen discovered in many of her investigations.

Children are taught early that different kinds of animals must be treated in very different ways (cats and dogs are to be hugged, pigs are to be killed and eaten). Since children have a much more close relationship with animals than most grown-ups, it is not surprising that they apply the same type of arbitrary distinction to human races (dark-skinned people do not rate as high as fair-skinned ones); of course this extends easily to locals versus aliens.

But there is a positive feedback to the psyche through meat consumption, which I would like to mention, too: meat eating can boost the self-esteem of the consumer (which usually happens unconsciously), since for the mere desire of his palate it was deemed sensible to kill a living being capable of suffering. This gives more sense to his own life. This is especially interesting, of course, for people suffering from some kind of inferiority complex (which unhappily is very common in industrial countries). Yet it would be

„Simply through it's physical action upon the human temperament, a vegetarian way of life would influence the destiny of humanity in very positive way“.

Albert Einstein

better to treat the psychological causes than to pamper the symptoms.

Obviously these correlations are never analyzed scientifically — why should they, with no one prepared to do anything about them anyway, the turnover of meat industry being much more important (it „creates jobs“!). Maybe this also stems from the fact that the decision-makers, usually themselves being meta-eaters, at the same time belong to the group concerned by the decisions to be taken, which makes them prefer to sup-

press these issues altogether, delicate already within their own self. On top of this, nobody likes to admit an error committed for decennia.

Another group of persons should not be forgotten here: those people working in the meat industry. It would be wrong to think that they do not have psychological problems out of having to kill the animals; by the way, this ugly work is usually shifted on to foreigners. In the slaughterhouses, there are tensions and quarrels nearly every day between the workers about who has to do the dirty job of killing. It is

The toll of meat consumption in Switzerland is 30 million animals killed per year.²

„It is a sign of hypocrisy when meat-eaters look down with contempt upon slaughterers, because Man is not only responsible for his own acts, but also for those he arranges to have done by others“.

Magnus Schwantje

practically impossible to practice in this profession without losing the compassion for the animals and viewing them as nothing but suppliers of meat. This happens necessarily out of the psychological self-protection of the worker and has nothing to do with weakness of character. Nevertheless the evasive idea is often heard, that all this is not so terrible after all, as such a profession will only be chosen by people with an innate disposition

towards raw and cruel action, on whom not much can be worsened anyway. First I think this is only a pretext to calm one's own conscience, and second that it would be our moral duty to keep off such people all the more from activities which make them suppress the

creative side of their character and develop it's ugly one.

In applying the Rorschach Test, the mentioned psychologist also discovered that the tested farmers always projected blood or skeletons into the ink splotches presented to them. This revealed to her the intimate relationship of the farmers and their animals, which invariably ends with the latter being killed. Of course I do not want to generalize this idea, but it can not be simply ignored, either, simply because large-scale analyses have not been done yet.

Many people know the phrase „He who sows violence will reap violence“. In spite of this, they see no reason to stop the violence against our fellow beings committed daily in stables and slaughterhouses, or at least to stop endorsing it with their own meat consumption. They believe to be able to wash their hands in it by hiding in the mass of meat-eaters; nevertheless, „an injustice remains an injustice, even if everybody commits it“ (M. Schwantje) and violence remains violence, even if delegated to others (e.g. slaughterers – or soldiers, for that matter).



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¹ Brockhaus, Wilhelm: Das Recht der Tiere in der Zivilisation, F.Hirthammer, Page 272f.

In this context, the statement of Federal Councillor Ruth Dreifuss is interesting: „Here in Switzerland, every seventh child is psychically afflicted“ (quoted in: Der Brückenbauer, Nov. 17, 1993).

In a project in psychiatric epidemiology of the Swiss National Foundation for Scientific Research, the psychiatric Policinic of Basel found out that more than half of the representative sample of Basels city-dwellers had been, for two or more weeks in a row, completely dishearted or even depressed every day. Further, 23% of the questioned people had suffered from severe dread at least once in their life, which (as opposed to the depressions) had come up during childhood already.

² Source: bilanz 10/88, page 68