

Animals in the Society of Humans: Privileged and Enslaved

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Our current society has a very ambivalent relationship with other species. On the one hand, more and more people are known to be animal lovers, and in opinion polls they state their opinion that it is very important that animals are treated well (Special Eurobarometer 442 2015), and they also usually can't abide the idea or image of another creature suffering or being killed (Lamm et al. 2010). On the other hand, the vast majority of these people consume a large quantity of animal products daily from large-scale, industrial livestock farms, where animals are treated as utility units rather than as individuals with their own needs (Twine 2010). Through the excessive consumption of these products, consumers participate not only in the unnecessary suffering and killing of sentient creatures (Pluhar 2010; Discanto et al. 2014), but also in an environmental threat to our entire planet (FAO 2006; Thaler et al. 2013; Scarborough et al. 2014 Springmann et al., 2016).

How do people come to terms with this blatant contradiction? What mechanisms allow the existence of a contradictory relationship in which we love one animal and kill another? Is there any way to allay this paradox and promote a more sustainable way of life and a more empathetic relationship with the other inhabitants of our planet? Contemporary social science research is trying to answer these and other questions.

Conformity

As Tobias Leenaert writes in his blog, *Vegan Strategist* (Tobias Leenaert 2016), the question, "Why do most people consume meat?" can be very simply answered, "Because most people eat meat." This is due to man's tendency to conform to the culture to which he/she belongs by birth. (Asch 1956). Human behaviour is strongly influenced by existing social norms which determine what is appropriate in a given society, and also, contrastingly, what is completely undesirable (Myers and Twenge 2016). These norms can be tied to various ideologies that sociology defines as "cultural beliefs that legitimize a particular social arrangement including patterns of inequality" (Macdonis 2010, p. 257).

Just as some norms, such as spatial segregation, can help maintain racist ideology, other norms, such as the consumption of so-called consumable animals, are tied to the ideology of carnism, the mechanisms of which have been analyzed and described by American psychologist Melanie Joy (2011).

Carnism as an Ideology

The ideology of carnism is defined by Joy (2011) as an invisible system of persuasion that it is ethically correct and desirable to eat the flesh of those species that are considered consumable in the given context. In essence, it can be seen as the opposite of vegan ideology with its conviction that killing and consuming animals is overwhelmingly unethical (CVS 2018). In the case of veganism, it is usually obvious at first glance what convictions its

supporters advocate and where they stand ideologically. On the other hand, the beliefs associated with the consumption of meat are so normalized that few think about their ideological nature, let alone their scientific accuracy or ethical justification, just as in the past with the ideology of racism or patriarchy (Joy 2011).

Invisibility

The ideology of **Invisibility** is due to the system being maintained and supported by a number of shared ideas that are accepted as general truths without deeper reflection, so few people realize that they are under their influence. "We tend to perceive most of life as a reflection of universal values. But what we consider to be normal is nothing but the beliefs and behaviour of the majority." (Joy 2011, p. 31) In addition to invisibility ideology itself, Joy also mentions psychological and physical invisibility.

Physical invisibility means the fact that the vast majority of what is happening to animals in the livestock production process remains hidden to the public. The only time people can normally see the animals, whose products they consume on a daily basis, is when they pass a lorry on the motorway, that is carrying these creatures to their deaths at the slaughterhouse (Joy 2011, p. 39). The question is whether or not Sir Paul McCartney is right when he says: "If a slaughterhouse had glass walls, everyone would be a vegetarian." (Jones 2009) The answer is not entirely unambiguous, because in reality the situation is also influenced by the invisibility of psychological mechanisms and a number of others besides.

The term psychological invisibility refers to a variety of mental processes in relation to the consumption of consumable animals, which prevent people from perceiving livestock with a similar level of empathy to that usually enjoyed by other animal categories in our society. These processes include, for example, learned cognitive schemas that sort animals into consumable and non-consumable animals, or the so-called meat paradox, which is the result of ambivalence between positive attitudes towards animals and the popularity of their consumption.

Mental and Social Processes

When children are born into a certain culture, they adopt learned patterns of thought during their socialization, which help them to organize and understand the world around them (DiMaggio 1997). In the field of cognitive psychology, these formulas are called **schemas** and tend to remain unchanged even if information that is inconsistent with the current schema appears and can therefore be an obstacle to critical thinking (Nadkarni and Narayanan 2007).

When children are young, they tend to be interested in all animals indiscriminately, but as they grow into their culture, they gradually learn that some animals are for cuddling and admiring, while others are better kept at an emotional distance and not perceived as individuals (Cole and Steward 2014). In the case of a family breeding animals intended for eating, it is recommended that children do not name them and thus avoid emphasising their individual personalities. One important schema therefore, is so-called dichotomization, in which animals are divided into two basic categories: "consumable" and "non-consumable" (Joy 2011), which are changeable in different cultures and for individuals (Fessler and Navarrete, 2003). This process usually involves legitimizing the inclusion of animals in these

categories, although this may not be consistent with the truth. This **dichotomization** allows people to "justify the consumption of a particular animal because it is not very clever, is not a pet or is not cute" (Joy 2011, p. 123). The discovery that domestic pigs, for example, achieve better intellectual abilities than domestic dogs and can solve problems faster than many primates, can therefore come as a big surprise (Broom et al. 2009).

One of the reasons why people find it acceptable to consume so-called "consumable" animals is closely related to the need to reduce what is known as **cognitive dissonance**. Cognitive dissonance is the designation for the inner tension experienced by an individual who holds two opposing beliefs or values at the same time or manifests contradictory behaviour (Festinger 1962).

In the case of animal consumption, there is, on the one hand, a positive attitude towards animals and a reluctance to observe them being killed (Elias 2006) and, on the other, a learned habit of eating products that require the killing of animals. According to psychological experiments, unpleasant tension from this ambivalence is relieved by an underestimation of the mental abilities, susceptibility and moral status of the animals they consume (Loughnan et al. 2010). This phenomenon, called the meat paradox, causes people to tend to perceive livestock as more stupid, less sensitive, and generally less important than social or wild animals.

The meat paradox eases the consumption of "consumable" animals because their life is perceived as less valuable. This does not mean, however, that most people would find it pleasant to watch them being slaughtered or mistreated. The sociologist Elias, who has written **a theory of civilization**, noticed that while in the past it used to be commonplace to carve up whole animals directly on the dining table before serving them up, this spectacle has gradually disappeared or moved asd into the background and causes previously unfamiliar feelings of embarrassment and disgust. (Elias 2006, p. 193). Therefore, another important mental process that reduces cognitive dissonance is **dissociation**, which in this case is the separation of consumed meat from the concept of the living animal it comes from (Kunst and Hohle, 2016). Neat packaging aids in hiding the true origin of the meat, which does not resemble the original animal at all.

The names given to these items typically refers to the resulting product rather than to the animal itself, such as "pork" or "beef" (Rothgerber 2014), which is a classic example of so-called **objectification**. An animal is objectified if it is viewed as an inanimate object. "The fact that we perceive animals as objects allows us to treat their bodies as things, without the moral concerns which we would feel otherwise." (Joy 2011, p. 118). Objectification is closely related to **deindividuation**, i.e. the process whereby we perceive individuals only through their group identity, and the larger the group, the more difficult it is to see its members as individuals. For example, pigs for the slaughter tend to be perceived as a rather abstract group. However, if consumers were first acquainted with the unique personality of a given animal before eating its meat, it would be much more difficult for them to eat it (Joy 2011, p. 119).

An important part of carnist ideology is the **rationalisation** of meat consumption.

Rationalisation in psychology refers to post-behavioural processes whose function is to justify or explain potentially problematic behaviour (Beauvois and Joule 1996). Melanie Joy (2011) described the three most common rationalisations of meat consumption and Jared Piazza (et al. 2015) added a fourth, unjustly neglected. Thus, in the context of psychological research, the four most frequent rationalisations of animal consumption which reduce moral

concern have been gradually identified (the 4Ns): meat consumption is (1) **normal**, (2) **natural**, (3) **necessary** and (4) **nice**.

(1) The first rationalisation concerns normality and reflects the fact that our society is dominated by carnist ideology, with people usually having a strong tendency to maintain the status quo and conform to the majority, even if this is obviously wrong (Asch 1956). (2) Further rationalisation is based on the belief that what is natural is also morally correct. In fact, however, this argumentation, called argumentum ad naturam, is considered to be a logical error (Curtis 2010). (3) The third frequent justification is that the consumption of meat is necessary because without it man's nutritional needs cannot be met. Leading nutritional institutions in Western countries, however, confirm that a well-designed plant diet is not only nutritionally adequate, but also reduces the risk of a number of diseases of civilization (Melina et al. 2016; Dietitians of Canada 2014). (4) The last common rationalisation is the claim that meat is simply tasty. This argument has long been ignored, as in other contexts (e.g. rape), justification due to pleasure given to the perpetrator would not survive. However, research shows that this is a relatively frequent argument (Piazza et al. 2015).

In connection with the fairly frequent justification of the consumption of meat due to its irresistible and irreplaceable taste, one of my students carried out an interesting experiment. She offered random passers-by four identical samples of vegan sausage to taste and compare, but one was presented as vegan and the other three as pork. While there were no significant differences in people's preferences between the three supposedly meat samples, the vast majority of respondents (91%) preferred a non-vegan option (Santamaria 2015) when comparing plant and supposedly meat sausages. Rationalisation relating to the good and irreplaceable taste of meat can be rooted in ignorance or prejudice against plant products which can strongly influence the perception of taste.

Carnism in Practice

As outlined above, our relationship with other animals is full of contradictions that we tend to overlook or directly suppress. It is only by a range of psychological and sociological mechanisms that it is possible that in a civilized society which is increasingly sensitive to violence against non-human animals, there are areas in which universally shared values are contradicted (Elias 2006).

With the advent of the industrial revolution, selected animal species became an integral part of industrial food production, causing them to be reduced to machines and utility units (Franklin 1999). These machines are, thanks to biotechnology (through breeding, genetic modification, energy-rich food, and in some countries also through growth hormones) increasingly efficient and powerful, so they provide a maximum of animal products at a minimum of feed and living space costs. For example, hens which would tolerate laying 10–15 eggs a year in nature, at the end of the 19th century, were laying 100 eggs a year, and now lay more than 300 (Romanov and Weigend 2001). Cows are producing more and more milk every year due to advanced breeding (with a two-month break preceding the annual birth and violent separation from the newborn), with an almost exponential increase in the United States (VandeHaar and St-Pierre 2006). The focus of industry on high performance continues, regardless of the effects this growth in efficiency has on the lives of the animals themselves, Twine 2010).

Another clear manifestation of carnist ideology in our society is the wording of the Act on the Protection of Animals Against Cruelty, which does not de facto protect some animals against abuse. According to this law, no one can kill an animal for no reason unless it is terminally ill. However, there are a number of exceptions, such as "the use of products from animals bred or kept for the production of food, wool, leather or other products" (Act No. 246/1992 Coll., § 5, 2). Another exception concerns the definition of what the law means by abuse. For example, maltreatment is considered to be "the carrying out of surgical interventions to alter the appearance or other characteristics of an animal, even if such procedures are carried out using means of general or local anesthesia, pain-relieving agents or other methods, in cases referred to in Section 7 (3) and (4)... " (Act No. 246/1992 Coll., § 4, g). Then, in Section 7, we find eight exceptions to this rule that apply to farm animals. Desensitization is not required for "castration of males less than 7 days old in pigs and younger than 8 weeks in cattle, sheep, goats or rabbits" nor in "cauterization of beaks in chickens under 10 days of age, which are intended for the production of eggs for consumption" (Law No 246 / 1992 Coll., § 7, 3).

Compliance with this Act is supervised by the State Veterinary Administration, which is a body under the Ministry of Agriculture. According to sociological research, bureaucratic institutions tend to defend and maintain the status quo, as changes represent complications and are both organizationally and financially demanding. As Merton points out, an important aspect of the functioning of bureaucratic organizations is the high degree of conformity with prescribed behavioural patterns, that can result in the "relocation of goals", where the instrumental value becomes the ultimate value (Merton 2000, p. 187).

In addition to the mechanisms described above, the protection of all animals is also hampered by the fact that compliance with this law is overseen by veterinarians who have undergone specific scientific socialization. This socialization can paradoxically have a negative effect on the ability to be compassionate towards animals. For example, one study revealed that fourth-year veterinary students are less likely to reduce pain in animals using tranquilizers than are students in their second and third years of study (Hellyer et al. 1999). A similar study carried out among students of two UK veterinary schools revealed that students showed less compassion towards the manifestations of hunger, pain, fear and boredom at the end of their studies than at the beginning (Paul and Podberscek 2000).

Conclusion

Now we have to answer the question of how to weaken the existing paradox whereby, on the one hand we feel moral concerns about watching animal suffering and killing, and on the other we consume cheap animal products every day that contain this suffering as a hidden ingredient. One way is to push for legislation to gradually eliminate any exceptions that allow animals to be treated in ways that would be considered as abusive in other contexts. However, without society's support, these changes cannot be realized, as political forces usually respond to the demands of the majority.

Therefore, it is important to educate people to overcome the psychological barriers that prevent them from sympathizing with certain animals and discourage them from changing their way of life towards more compassionate and environmentally sustainable plant based diets. Given the above, it makes sense to point out, by various means (e.g. through social networks and other media), the individuality, emotionality and intelligence of farm animals, to refute the illusions associated with the four most common rationalisations of animal

consumption, to convey to people in a sensitive way the suffering that animals go through, to talk to people about their own values, to inform on nutrition, and to offer tastings of good plant based foods.

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