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The negative impact of scientific ideology on education about the moral status of animals

Summary

The article presents an analysis of the ethical views of Bernard Rollin, an American zoologist and philosopher who examined how the education about the moral status of animals has been affected by the so-called scientific ideology. This way of thinking denies animal suffering and consciousness in stark contrast with our commonsense knowledge and collective human experience. Rollin points to positivism and behaviourism as twin philosophical and psychological sources of this scientific ideology. Positivism rejected the concept of consciousness as a subjective, metaphysical, unscientific, non-measurable state and separated science from values and ethics. Behaviourism further obstructed moral reflection on the acceptable methods of treatment of animals not only by eliminating the category of animal consciousness, but also by replacing the vocabulary to describe its experimental manifestations with one of observable actions (reinforcement and aversion). Behaviourism denies animal suffering and other states of consciousness on the epistemological principle that they are difficult to verify. This paradigm continues to be successfully applied in modern biomedical laboratories and blinds scientists to both the pain inflicted on animals and the moral repercussions of animal consciousness. Positivism and behaviourism alike cast animals as models and biological mechanisms to distort our understanding of their nature and justify their harm.

The article presents an analysis of the ethical views of Bernard Rollin, an American zoologist and philosopher who examined how the education about the moral status of animals has been affected by the so-called scientific ideology. This way of thinking denies animal suffering and consciousness in stark contrast with our commonsense knowledge and collective human experience. Rollin points to positivism and behaviourism as twin philosophical and psychological sources of this scientific ideology. Positivism rejected the concept of consciousness as a subjective, metaphysical, unscientific, non-measurable state and separated science from values and ethics. Behaviourism further obstructed moral reflection on the acceptable methods of treatment of animals not only by eliminating the category of animal consciousness, but also by

replacing the vocabulary to describe its experimental manifestations with one of observable actions (reinforcement and aversion). Behaviourism denies animal suffering and other states of consciousness on the epistemological principle that they are difficult to verify. This paradigm continues to be successfully applied in modern biomedical laboratories and blinds scientists to both the pain inflicted on animals and the moral repercussions of animal consciousness. Positivism and behaviourism alike cast animals as models and biological mechanisms to distort our understanding of their nature and justify their harm.

Key words: ethics, animals, scientific ideology, positivism, behaviourism

I will begin my considerations with the question indirectly related to the main theme of my article. What should be the main goal of an education dealing with moral obligations of people towards animals? Should it direct, prohibit, or indoctrinate? Should it tell us what we need to do, what we mustn't with respect to animals? This is a common way of thinking, which in practice brings negligible, mediocre results. The main task of moral education should be to change the existing, mental perspective, to release the man from the traditional patterns of thought. In this regard, I agree with Bernard Rollin, an American educator, zoologist, founder of the first veterinary ethics course in the USA, according to whom the main objective of moral education should be a radical change of perception and naming certain states of affairs. Thanks to it, man can get a new perception and new thinking, thereby changing one's existing moral point of view (Rollin 1981: 82). The new procedure will follow as a consequence of the change in perception of the world. Therefore, moral education should not directly intervene in human actions. They will be modified as a result of mental transformation. The philosopher provides examples of people who, at some point in their lives, have given up what was obvious to them, namely hunting, and realised that the hunt is nothing but killing for pleasure. Please note that the impetus did not come from the outside world, but from the mental one, and was based on a change in naming. Rollin believes that these people looked at a situation from a different perspective, saw in a new way what was once interpreted according to a single, traditional mental model, and changed the words to describe this situation (Probucka 2013: 208). Instead of the word "hunting" – these people began to use the expression "killing for pleasure". Incidentally, Rollin's proposal reminds us of the old stoic practice of the third century B.C., of altering the names and obtaining new cognitive perspective. Thus, for example, instead of saying "she wears fur", we should say "she wears skin ripped from the bodies of dead animals". Renaming begins to reveal what was hidden and brings us closer to the truth understood the way the ancient

Greeks did, as *aletheia* or unconcealedness, disclosure. The truth is, in this case, memory understood as an act of moral justice. It is a symbolic reminder of the existence of living beings, whose death and suffering was precipitated into mental oblivion. Let us recall that the word *aletheia*, meaning truth, is not the opposite of logical falsehood, only oblivion, described by the ancient Greeks with the word *lethe*. After all, the dead who crossed a river called *Lethe* lost their memory.

As far as Rollin's views are concerned, in his opinion the way of talking about animal existence, animal life, death, and suffering was most greatly impacted in the modern times by the so-called scientific ideology, which has dominated thinking about the animals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Rollin 1990: 122–126). Let us recall that one of the meanings of the word '*ideology*' – defines it as a collection of ideas that are hostile towards truth, impartiality and fair thinking. These ideas may cause not only human but also non-human suffering, enslavement and biopsychological destruction. Worth remembering are also the words of sociologist Peter Berger, who, in his *Invitation to Sociology*, wrote that we are talking about ideology when a theory does not serve the truth, but it rationalises an important interest. And it is in the name of this interest that ideology distorts reality, as it is functional for it (Berger 1966: 107). On the other hand, the phrase '*scientific ideology*' is defined as an intentionally distorted presentation of the world and the creatures living in it, present in the natural or social sciences. Almost every category of scientific language can be a carrier of ideology (Rollin 1989: 31). It should also be noted that the preachers of that scientific ideology, conscious or not, are not the representatives of the uneducated masses, but scientists.

According to Rollin, a manifestation of this scientific ideology is discernible in contemporary science (not the latest, but modern in general) is a dominant way of thinking, which negates what would seem obvious, namely the ability of animals to suffer and the fact that they have consciousness. The philosopher reminds that the first conference on animal pain was held in the US as late as in 1982. Until 1930, it was difficult to find scientists, psychologists, or doctors in Europe and the US, who felt comfortable to speak openly about pain, mental processes and emotions of animals (Rollin 1981: 60). In his opinion, erasing from the language phrases associated with the suffering of non-human beings, and words that would determine their mental states is one example of ideologisation of empirical science. It is based on speaking against commonsense knowledge and collective human experience, according to which animals feel pain and are conscious beings. This does not mean that the so-called common beliefs are free

from errors related to an exaggerated interpretation of animal behaviour and assigning to animals e.g. full understanding of human speech, stresses the philosopher. Despite the fact, this type of thinking, in his opinion, would be closer to the recognition of animal nature, in contrast to theses supported by advocates of scientific ideology. It should be emphasised that it is the proponents of the scientific ideology that made the vast majority of researchers, doctors, and experimenters indifferent to the question of the moral aspects of abuse and torture of animals, e.g. in medical laboratories.

Therefore, which theories would be representative of this scientific ideology? Rollin points to positivism and behaviourism, two trends – one philosophical, the other psychological – which determined the nature of modern scientific thinking (Rollin 1990: 69). Let us recall that positivism, created in the nineteenth century, was the philosophical theory which had a decisive influence on science and the rejection of the concept of consciousness as a subjective, non-measurable state. Its essence was the reductionist and physicalist thinking, which supplanted the study of consciousness in general. The essence of reductionism was to eliminate from science (but also from culture in general) any unnecessary frills. And one of them was the category of consciousness, which came to be seen as metaphysical, unscientific, unnecessary, ambiguous, and dark (Rollin 1990: 66). Consciousness was interpreted as fiction, a conceptual construct reducible to experimental components. The positivists sought to ensure that any scientific description could be expressed in the language of physics. This led to eliminating all concepts and phenomena that the language of physics cannot describe. Let us remind that it was the scientists who supported the demand for the release of empirical science from metaphysical components. For example, Hermann Helmholtz argued that metaphysical conclusions are either fake or hide empirical conclusions. But for Ernst Mach all the concepts should be reducible to physics (Kołakowski 1968: 133). In addition, positivism cemented the belief that science, being anti-axiological as a rule, should not be linked with values. After all, it deals only with what is experimentally and intersubjectively verifiable, and its main objective is to analyse empirical data. Please note, positivism separated science from values. Thus, a scientific thinking pattern should also reject ethics, interpreting it as a field of subjective reflection, in which the leading power are the emotions (Rollin 1981: 59). And in science, there is no place for emotions. According to Rollin, positivist and neo-positivist thinking not only expressed widely held beliefs of scientists, but it was a program manifesto, a declaration that postulated cutting off scientific research from axiological-normative positions, including elimination of evaluative words such

as: a morally good/bad/right/wrong act. Such thinking, liberated from moral evaluations, which were treated as unnecessary and unscientific, reached its apogee in medical laboratories of the concentration camps. It was there that extremely instrumental treatment of people, who were used as the subject of painful scientific experiments, took place. On the other hand, the second contemporary place in which this paradigm is successfully applied is biomedical laboratories. There, animals are ruthlessly subjected to cruel tests (Rollin 1989: 211). Cynicism, callousness, indifference to the suffering of non-human beings observed in scientists, and the lack of reflection on the moral aspects of this type of research is also the aftermath of the positivist program (Rollin 2011: 430). And if this kind of discussion takes place, it is quickly closed with the argument referring to human benefit. As a result, the positivist paradigm causes scientists to become blind to both the issue of causing pain to animals, and to the moral aspects of the existence of animal consciousness.

Let us move on to the analysis of behaviourism the second component of scientific ideology, which blocks moral reflection on the acceptable methods of treatment of animals. First of all, behaviourism was the consequence of applying the reductionist method in psychology. According to this theory, animal awareness includes both mental and emotional states. It is outside the scope of the research because these states may not be subject to observation and experiment. Thus, behaviourism excludes reflection on the awareness of the extent of its analysis. In its pure form, this theory contradicts cognisability of consciousness in general, both in humans and in animals. As a consequence, psychology becomes only the theory of behaviour.

Let us recall that behaviourist thinking is underpinned by the theory of John B. Watson, according to whom psychology in terms of research and methodology should conform to physics and chemistry. According to Watson, we can write psychology as the science of behaviour, and never go back to our definition, never use the terms: consciousness, mental states, mind, content, introspectively verifiable, imaginary, and the like (Watson 1913: 158). In a world which is the subject of observation, there are only stimuli and responses. Watson believed in the possibility of creating the new psychology as the science of behaviour, which will not contain such words as: consciousness, mental states, mind, satisfaction, imagination, affection, will, deference, etc. (Hebb 1960: 740). In his opinion, considering subjective mental states is the methodological waste of time, because they do not exist. And even if they do, then scientists should ignore them, as chemistry ignores alchemy, astrology or telepathy. Consciousness is but a term determining a certain set of behaviours, and nothing more.

Thus, the consequence of this position was to deny the existence of consciousness in both humans and animals, and in a milder version – denying its cognisability. No matter which of these versions will be taken into account, there can be only one conclusion – the category of consciousness should be ignored.

This thesis has become particularly useful in animal psychology, in which not only the category of animal consciousness was eliminated, but also all its experiential manifestations, such as pleasure and pain. After all, the subject of research may only be measurable, mechanical aspects of the body's functioning, or certain behaviours, because only they exist in reality. It should be emphasised that everything that is rational and empirically measurable should be included in the realm of what is real. Both pain and pleasure are not parametrically measurable and thus do not constitute a scientific problem. Pain does not exist, as well as other states of consciousness that are difficult to verify. The category of good or bad mood must therefore be disregarded as functionally and scientifically irrelevant. We can only talk about positive and negative reinforcement, considering it in terms of the result. Thus, the positive reinforcement is one that increases the likelihood of certain behaviour, and negative reinforcement reduces the likelihood. Rollin stresses that this frame of mind is still reproduced in the training of researchers and experimenters, whose professional goal is the invasive treatment of animals. They are taught such a way of thinking based on disregarding the issues of pain and consciousness. It is a methodological procedure, which simplifies many practical issues and makes experimental work easier.

Please note that, when describing animal health condition, behaviourist researchers do not use such words as pain, suffering, fright, fear, recognising them as unscientific, unverifiable, and in fact, meaningless rubbish (Rollin 1990: 103). They use substitute expressions, such as negative reinforcement, aversive behaviour, bodily reflexes, which do not evoke emotionally negative reaction in the audience. The description of these conditions is mechanistic and, in the case of pain, reduced to e.g. biochemical aspects of activation of the pituitary glands. In fact, cries of pain are not interpreted as evidence of suffering, but as vocalisation. Thus, at the level of language, pain is not interpreted in terms of sensation, but only as a chemical and physical reaction to an external stimulus. This type of language, which is a daily practice, unavoidably renders scientists indifferent to the object of their research, because that is its purpose. Animals are interpreted as models, physiological objects, biological mechanisms.

According to Rollin, behaviourism has infected contemporary thinking about the ontological and moral status of animals. And it is still extremely

convenient for researchers, who do to animals what the average person would consider bestiality. Since in the twentieth century the amount of animal studies has increased dramatically in many fields of science, behaviourism has provided convenient ways to numbing conscience and getting rid of moral scruples where maltreatment of non-human beings was taking place. Remorse has been erased by the ideology both built and promoted by scientists, which absolves them of responsibility for the moral aspect of their research activities (Rollin 1990: 107).

Let us remember that behaviourism, with its vocabulary, which was purged of such words as pain, suffering, fear, fright, and mental states, is a continuation and a modern, camouflaged version of Cartesianism. According to it, animals are only *machina anima*, living machines, with no soul, mind, nor physical sensations. They differ from other things purely by biochemical processes, i.e. the fact that they are alive, but nothing more. A significant threat to our way of thinking and speaking about animals is none other than neo-Cartesianism, represented among both psychologists and philosophers. These include, among others, Stephen Stich and Raymond Frey. In their opinion animals do not have any desires, beliefs, or mental states (Stich 1979: 20). They should only be attributed biological needs, because their nature is not complicated. Animals can be compared to living carriers of sensations experiencing two basic states: negative (pain) and positive (pleasure). According to Frey, the absence of convictions in animals would be related to the inability to use verbal language. After all, these creatures cannot speak sentences which could be attributed logical value: truth or falsity. The philosopher assumes that the presence of beliefs must be conditioned by a belief in the truth or falsity of sentences describing this belief (Frey 1980: 87). Frey suggests that we imagine a mental state, in which we are convinced that we do not have a Gutenberg Bible in our home library. Thus, beforehand we would have to accept as true the following sentence: "I don't have a Gutenberg Bible in my home library". In his opinion, any conviction must be preceded by the awareness that a phrase which describes this belief is true. Since animals do not have this ability, assigning beliefs to them is a cognitive error. To us, people, animals only have seemingly some beliefs about the world around them. In fact, they are only sensitive mechanisms and nothing more. Frey does not end here his bizarre argument, which denies the latest results of neurological research. For if the animals have no beliefs, they also cannot crave anything and have no interests. These creatures want nothing, and if someone thinks otherwise, he is a victim of a cognitive illusion. "Does a beaten dog suffer?" asks the philosopher. Yes, but this fact does not imply that the dog has a desire

not to be beaten and an interest in not experiencing this state. Frey believes that animals can be attributed interests only in a metaphorical sense, analogous to cars that "have an interest" in possessing a tank full of petrol (Frey 1980: 80).

From Frey's reasoning, conclusions similar to those at which Descartes arrived a few hundred years ago can easily be derived. If we refuse animals desires, beliefs and interests, they become machines, with the only difference being that in Descartes theory they are living machines, and in Frey's – sensitive machines (Francione 2000: 104).

Let us summarise our reflections. According to Bernard Rollin, in the modern times, scientific ideology had a decisive influence on the way of talking about animal existence, animal life, death and suffering. Its manifestation was the denial of the ability of animals to suffer and possession of consciousness. This was done by wiping with scientific language phrases associated with the suffering of non-human beings, and the words that defined their mental states. Scientific ideology undermined common-sense knowledge, according to which animals feel pain and are conscious beings. Theories that promoted scientific ideology were: positivism and behaviourism. They separated science from values and moral judgements, ignored the category of animal consciousness and its external manifestations. Animal suffering has become irrelevant from a scientific point of view.

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