

III. He who is cruel to animals cannot be a good person.- Arthur Schopenhauer

A hot summer evening: Two children are sitting on the ground and play. As I come closer I see how they kill small insects, so small one barely can see them on the grey asphalt. Those who go past them without saying anything could argue that this game is just the result of boredom; and anyway who cares if there is a spider less on earth. But I cannot just keep silent and think what makes me so angry about it and so thoughtful. Playing is learning how to live and if children learn that killing animals is just, but killing or hurting human beings is not they soon will come to the conclusion that animals aren't as worthy as humans are. This idea will not change even if they are adults. The action of those children only is the herald of many other cruel actions to come. It reveals a lot about how they think about animals, tolerance and even morality. But how to explain this to a child whose parents probably eat meat and never told their children what respect means. Somebody how could do this easily would be a good philosopher. This example once again proves that the world needs good philosophers, people who question actions and ideas which are thought to be normal and just because of tradition, in this case our way of treating animals. In the society we live in the idea of how to treat animals and our environment as a whole has become popular and many philosophers devote their lives to answer the questions that pop up. Is it moral to kill an animal? In which way are we responsible for our environment? The media is full of articles about intensive livestock farming and a new generation, the vegan generation, develops. But still... the majority of the society does not seem to care a lot about what they eat and which status they have in nature. These evolving questions are not only questions of biologists and geologists and sociologists but mainly these are philosophical questions because the changing of one's view on animals is a moral one. It is a question that develops because of questioning the living together on earth. This thesis can be proved by having a closer look at Arthur Schopenhauer's foundations of morality.

Maybe he would have a good advice what I should say to those children and adults. At least his clear statement „He who is cruel to animals cannot be a good person.” indicates that he knew want to think about the children's behaviour and our relationship to animals as such. To understand the quotation one has to analyse Schopenhauer's choice of notions. They give us a clear idea of the author's understanding of morality. He deduces his idea of morality from how we treat animals. Someone who is not cruel to animals is a good person. The opposite of cruelty can be defined as being respectful and tolerating because a cruel behaviour offends against a subject's right to be treated respectful. The right to be treated with respect derives from the dignity we award to all individual human beings.

As Immanuel Kant describes it in his third formulation of the categorical imperative, one should never treat a human being as means only but also as ends. Schopenhauer extends this imperative. His statement bases on the assumption that dignity not only is what human beings have a right to be characterised with, but that all living creatures, meaning human beings and animals have dignity and thus should be treated with respect. He therefore extends morality on the level on animals. To conclude one could say being cruel to animals equals being cruel to human beings. It's easy to say that humans who humiliate a human being are not good, in the sense of immoral. But in a society in which people eat meat, do intensive livestock farming and kill insects without even thinking about it, the opinion of Schopenhauer which I and many other people do support nowadays is the battleground for many discussions and even hatred.

Quoting Schopenhauer while the others around you eat meat whereas you eat the vegetarian option will provoke a discussion which normally ends in a fight.

Who would be not offended to be called a bad person just because he or she is doing what all generations of human beings have done, eating animals. The argument that one did not kill the animal oneself can be easily refuted by reasoning that they still had to die a cruel death and one did accept it or even caused that the animal had to die when deciding to buy the meat in the supermarket or to order the meatballs in the restaurant just because...

„Would you also say that you are not guilty if you pay someone to call your enemy or even a person you don't know?“, I would ask and would be confronted with an angry look. „But different from what you say animals don't have the same dignity we have.“ Many people said this to me during my hard life as a vegan and most people justify their view by saying that animals do not think, that they don't feel the same emotions as we do because they are not intelligent as we are. This hypothesis implies that dignity depends on the IQ a creature has. This opinion is extremely wide spread in a society like the western one in which knowledge and a good education are of extreme importance for the social living together.

The natural dignity that every individual has because of being alive and having a right to live fortunately (still) are the basis of our right system. Continuing the train of thought of those who claim that animals are less worthy because of not being intelligent or not living up to the human idea and extend of intelligence, ends in a disaster. Before defending oneself in court one would have to test one's intelligence. The one with lower intelligence would automatically have less dignity and therefore his statements would be less valuable. The constitution would be based on inequality and the argument of the restaurant discussion that animals can be killed because of their low intelligence would be totally legal.

In the restaurant my imaginary discussion takes place some people form the tables around us would join the discussion and at least the vegetarians of them would support me, those who critically think about the notions of animals and human about this categorisation that exists since human beings experience themselves as human. It is only natural that they gave the other creatures around them the name animals to distinguish what is human. This behaviour in categorization equals the one when talking about the blacks and the whites, the Muslims and the Christians, women and men. Creatures who are different are treated differently and are fought against and also oppressed and enslaved. This becomes evident when we have a look at the history of human beings. It is the reason for the majority of all fights. The well-known example, the Holocaust, as the mobbing of the good students in school AND the ignorance towards the extermination of animals and the destroying of the areas they live in, as well as the slavery in America for so many centuries. We as Germans like to believe that we live in a modern democratic, non dictatorial society, but we forget the animals, as the blacks were/ are forgotten in America. A hierarchical society in which the powerful treat those who are inferior in a cruel way is immoral.

To come back to Schopenhauer's idea one can say that those who do accept the murder of animals or even murder animals just because they are different are as immoral as those who accept or murder human beings. Besides the condition to be a „good person“ is not achieved when one does not accept the animals' right not to be treated as they do not have the right to be free and happy and not can be owned by anybody. This statement again is based on the concept of equality of humans and animals. In other words: Those who are cruel to animals are those who differentiate and treat individuals the way they treat them because of not accepting their basic equality in dignity. Regarded from a different angle the angle of someone who is cruel to animals for example because he eats meat, but fights against racism will be extremely offended. I don't want to claim that those who eat meat would say the Holocaust was moral, but that they don't consequently do justice to their so called moral conceptions and standards.

I support the basic assumption of Schopenhauer. Those who make an exception in the most fundamental aspects of morality, namely that everyone must be treated equally even if we are not equal in intelligence, that we have to make individuals the means And ends of our actions, and last but not least that we accept and live their lives considering the fact that every creature has the same right to be treated with respect and be tolerated, are not good (in the moral sense). In a world that is well aware of the fact that technically we are of the same species as spiders, the barrier of saying that animals different to humans is vanished. That's why it is time to make the notion animal and human vanish too.

At the end of this train of thought I know that I would go across the street where the children do their cruel games and would say: „ Don't you see these animals run away from you because they fear to be killed and want to live? Wouldn't you do the same if someone superior to you would hunt you? Don't you think this makes them just the same as you. If you tolerate your behaviour you set a sign that you also would tolerate their behaviour. You wouldn't kill your dog just because he is an animal and less intelligent as you are, so you shouldn't kill these insects just because they are less intelligent then you either. He who is cruel person cannot be a good person.”

