

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων:
Forms and Changes of the Ideal of Vegetarianism in
Classical Antiquity

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My thesis contains approaches to the ideal of vegetarianism in classical antiquity from a couple of angles that were chosen individually. As opposed to the narrower practice of the Orphic-Pythagorean abstention from meat and killing animals (ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἐμψύχων), I have discussed vegetarianism with more stress on the phenomenon in a wider sense, starting from the assumption that the underlying principles and motivations for vegetarianism were more deeply rooted in classical cultural thought than the cultic or religious forms of abstention from meat would suggest.

With this principle in view, I have divided the chapters of my thesis in three main thematic parts. Chapters 1–3 keep closely to a discussion of the ancient classical sources (I. Classical Antiquity); Chapter 4 offers an outlook on the cultural contacts between East and West (II. At the crossing of East and West); Chapter 5 places the issue of sparing animal life within the context of classical studies in Hungary (III. Hungarian classical studies). Throughout my work, I have deemed it important to reach my conclusions by means of a comprehensive analysis of the ancient sources.

1. Vegetarian Golden Age and ancient cultural history

In chapter one, I have made a survey of the ideas in ancient thought about food in the beginning of times through an analysis of Greek and Latin sources. During my discussion, I have made a distinction according to the nature of the sources between the so-called ‘primitivist’ approach characteristic of the literary elaborations of the Golden Age myth and the ‘progressivist’ approach of the rationalistic cultural history. I have laid peculiar emphasis on the point where these two approaches intercrossed and gave birth to a confused theory of development.

For the most part, it has escaped scholars’ attention that in the literary elaborations of the Golden Age myth from Hesiod to Ovid one can recognize a common trait, namely the fact that the ‘automatic’ (αὐτόματος) food of the Golden Age is defined as cultivated crops of the earth or some other cultural products such as wine, milk, honey or olive-oil. This ‘cultural’ feature makes the Golden Age food belong to the category of the ‘cooked’ in opposition to the ‘raw’ food of the first times characteristic of the rationalistic cultural history. This supposition finds its justification in the different elaborations of the Golden Age myth. There exists a variant of the myth in which instead of crops the earth bears barley meal and wheat flour, that is semi-finished products of culture. In several pieces of Attic old comedy, dishes of ready-to-eat food are making their ways into people’s mouth in the ideal

state of the Golden Age. Automatic production of food in the Golden Age originally meant that the products of agriculture were growing by themselves without the necessity of tilling the earth by hard labour. The chief evidence for the Golden Age food being conceived of as cultural lies in the fact that from Aratus to Varro to Vergil a literary tradition of the agricultural Golden Age has sprouted. These variants of the myth did nothing but bid farewell to the paradox that went with the idea of the production of the crops of the earth without the hard labour necessary for it.

In what follows, I went on to discuss the attempts at rationalization of the Golden Age myth in the philosophical tradition. Here the influence of the 'progressivist' cultural history can clearly be traced. The cultivated crops of the Golden Age are replaced by the raw plant food of the primitive times, which, however, retains its ideal characteristic typical of the Golden Age. A confused form comes into being in which 'need' or 'want' (χρεία), a crucial element in cultural history is placed in a favourable light by reason of its keeping excessive and luxurious eating within the limits of necessity. In the cultural histories of Plato, Theophrastus and Dicaearchus, as well as their Roman successors, a chief characteristic of the ideal primitive times is that sacrificing and killing of animals for the sake of food were unknown. I have traced each consecutive phases of the cultural history of food in early times on the evidence of textual sources from slime, supplied by the earth as milk, to wild herbs to acorns and berries. The cultural revolution comes along with the invention of cultivated crops. This decisive turn is but rarely seen in an unfavourable light even in those accounts where the raw food of the first times was highly idealized. On the highest grade of development of the 'progressivist' cultural history as well as in the ideal food of the 'primitivist' Golden Age it is culture that proves to be a measure of value.

To prove my assertion, I have grouped together all those occurrences which resort to the devices of cultural history in order to use them as arguments in the debate about eating meat and vegetarianism. 'Eating meat' (σαρκοφαγία), 'eating raw meat' (ὠμοφαγία), 'anthropophagy' (ἀνθρωποφαγία) or 'eating one another' (ἀλληλοφαγία) are such permanent trump-cards as can be used by any party of meat eaters or vegetarians in defence of their cases. In the final part, I wished to give a wide palette of the arguments attesting to this debate, used by the Orphic-Pythagorean, the Cynic, the Epicurean and the Stoic parties respectively.

2. Stoics and animals: eating meat or vegetarianism?

In chapter two, I have offered an analysis of the views of the Stoic system on animals, ignored so far in research. The representatives of this system were the most passionate opponents of vegetarianism. My aim was to disclose some inner contradictions behind the most consequent methods of the Stoic philosophers by trying to disjoint the elements of their system which are overlapping like tiles on a roof. I have started my discussion with epistemology, then moved on to ontology.

My analysis of the psychological capacities of animals has led to the result that animals are deemed gravely defective in all their capacities compared with men. This is even true of the two most fundamental capacities they are thought to possess, i.e. representation (φαντασία) and impulse (ὄρμη). Of those faculties which are reserved by the Stoics for men animals possess only rudimentary forms. I have established on the strength of evidence that the defectiveness of the psychological capacities of animals is due to their lack of reason (λόγος), the presence of which in human soul elevates all capacities to a higher dimension in men. In contrast with the ‘as if’ capacities in animals, man is the only one to possess the sound faculties of ‘apprehensive representation’ (φαντασία καταληπτική), ‘acting impulses’ (πρακτική ὄρμη), memory, emotion, and articulate speech. I have come to the conclusion that the Stoics did not allow the possession of reason to animals in a defective form in the same way as they did with the other psychological capacities because it was reason that they chose as a criterion by which to judge animals defective in all their psychological capacities.

It is also the appearance of reason in human soul which is the key element in the process of ‘self-appropriation’ (οἰκείωσις). To the scholars’ helplessness on the question of what constitutes the connecting link by nature between individual and social self-appropriation in Stoic thought, I have proposed that this link is the development of reason in human soul. This is what elevates man’s aim higher than that of animals, what makes his orientation shift from the first requirements of nature to virtue, from self-preservation and preservation of the race to communal feeling and justice. The Stoics, however, find themselves in a serious difficulty when they happen to come across traces of even reason and virtue in animals. The strategies they use to solve this contradiction I have demonstrated with their method, on the one hand, to push animals down to the level of plants and pull men up to the level of gods with the intention of making the intellectual capacities of the former dependent on nature (φύσις) while that of the latter on divine reason (λόγος), and

with their theoretical explanation, on the other hand, that the traces of virtues were planted in animals by divine providence for the sake of men's moral advancement.

The theoretical necessity for the Stoics to deprive animals of reason is strongly attested on the epistemological level. The case is not different with the ontological level. The question of vegetarianism comes to the fore directly in the famous anthropocentric teleology of the Stoics and the problem of the 'juridical communion' (κοινωνία) linking men with gods. According to the Stoics' alleged or real dilemma, which I have quoted on the testimony of original sources, if providential nature had created animals with reason, it would be inevitable for man either to commit injustice by killing and eating animals or to renounce life completely since abstaining from animals would mean remaining without means and sources. It is impossible to think that nature would not provide her children with the means to survive. But one could not think either that she would force them to commit injustice. Nature and virtue simply cannot get into such an irreconcilable state with one another. There is only one solution to the problem – to deprive animals of reason and to sacrifice them on the altar of justice linking men with gods. Therefore, in Stoic philosophy the teleological status of animals is determined by the claim that they have been created by providence for the sake of men's use. A great number of ingenious examples assigns the role for human use of each and every animal from the ox to the bedbug. The Stoics are faced, however, with another difficulty when it comes to determining to which point technical arts based on the use of animals are justified by nature, in other words, at which point the *use* of animals becomes an *abuse*. It seems that this crucial limit was reached in the image of nature as a nurse who is spoiling her children in an Epicurean way with thousands of sauces, relishes, and delicacies when supplying them with the countless species of animals. It is on this point that nature and virtue come into conflict with one another again. A solution to the problem was sought by illustrious Stoic philosophers such as Seneca and Musonius Rufus in promoting a moderate way of eating.

3. Plutarch's vegetarianism: common heritage and individual sensitivity

In chapter three, I have discussed the motivations used by Plutarch in defence of vegetarianism, with the view of separating the arguments inherited from a common stock from the motivations to be ascribed to Plutarch himself. My discussion proceeded from the two rhetorical speeches of *De esu carniū*. I have opposed the generally accepted view that these speeches were written by Plutarch in his youth under the influence of Pythagoreanism.

I have discovered close parallels of part of the arguments for vegetarianism in Seneca's letter and in the speech of Pythagoras in Ovid. The common stock of arguments, which had recourse to the philosophical motive of temperance as well as the religious motive of metempsychosis, was given effective rhetorical form by Plutarch in his two speeches. The same arguments were, however, utilized by Plutarch in works of other genre, either in dialogues or moral treatises. Thus the defence of vegetarianism is not limited to the works of a rhetorical tone. In my analysis, I have shown that Plutarch does not either accept or reject the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, but after the manner of his master Plato, he treats the doctrine as an indemonstrable myth which can, however, support rational arguments by the force of mystical truth.

Scholars who deny the Pythagorean influence in Plutarch's vegetarian belief are of the opinion that the philosopher defended vegetarianism by adopting 'animal reason' (λόγος) or the existence of 'justice' (δίκαιον) between men and animals. Through examination of the relevant passages, however, I have pointed out that Plutarch's view on these questions is not firm and unchanging. Depending on the aim of his individual works, he either ranks animal reason higher than human reason, or places it on a lower level, or makes animals explicitly devoid of reason. As far as justice between men and animals is concerned, one can undoubtedly see a sincere wish on the part of Plutarch to ensure justice to animals, but he is forced again and again to acknowledge the failure of his attempt, first only in the case of wild beasts, later even in the case of some tame animals. For this reason, he leaves justice behind and introduces a new criterion in the treatment of animals, i.e. gentleness and kindness.

Research on Plutarch has so far tended to emphasize either Pythagorean influence or certain aspects of animal psychology, thereby failing to realize that the clue to Plutarch's attitude to animals and vegetarian belief is to be sought in the philosopher's general psychology and moral philosophy. In Plutarch's concept of the soul, the 'emotions' (πάθος) in the 'irrational' (ἄλογον) part of the soul in their relation to reason show close conceptual and functional similarities to the domestic animals which are willing to enter into a mutual cooperation with man in order to maintain the household economy. Whereas in Stoic radicalism, uprooting of *all and every* emotion (ἀπάθεια) is taught regardless of whether wild or tame, in Plutarch the principle of moderation of emotions (μετριοπάθεια) is urged. Tame emotions through their cooperation with reason make the development of moral virtue possible. Uprooting of all emotions would therefore be nonsense and without ground in the

same way as killing tame and useful animals together with the wild ones.

The Stoic ideal of freedom from emotion does not even leave space for compassion towards animals. It is the gentle and compassionate attitude to animals which I could mark as one of Plutarch's most personal trait behind his vegetarian belief. It is due to this trait that he is so fiercely against senseless animal torture. A close connection with the theory about the soul can, however, be established on this point as well. The philosopher's individual sensitivity to beings endowed with soul might be explained by his admiration of animal nature possessed of 'emotion' (πάθος) and 'character' (ἦθος). The inherent value of the soul lies in its ability to perceive, to give voice, to move. This capacity cannot be reached by any lifeless object. I have adduced as a decisive argument against the view that the two speeches of *De esu carniū* were written by Plutarch in his youth that the same ideas about the soul are formulated by the philosopher in his most late and mature work about the Egyptian animal cults.

4. King Śibi and the dove: in chase of a suppliant bird

In the fourth chapter, I wished to offer an individual case study. Both in the field of classical and ancient Indian studies, a remarkable correspondence between the contents of an ancient Greek anecdote and the Indian legend of king Śibi has remained unrecognized through centuries. In the biographical tradition about Xenocrates an anecdote has been preserved telling how the philosopher once welcomed a suppliant sparrow chased by a hawk in his lap, and was not willing to deliver the suppliant bird to its pursuer. The same happens in the Indian legend where king Śibi welcomes a dove chased by a hawk in his lap, and is not willing to give it over even at the cost of his flesh. In my study, I have argued that the basic situation in the Indian legend, comprising the motif of welcoming a suppliant bird in a human lap and not giving it over to its pursuer, is likely to have wandered from West to East during the cultural contacts between ancient Greece and India.

Among the arguments, I have laid particular stress on the fact that the social and cultural phenomenon of supplication is much more attested in the classical world than in ancient Indian society. A counterpart of the anecdote about Xenocrates is to be found in a similar anecdote in which a depraved judge of the Areopagus kills the suppliant sparrow without mercy, thereby incurring his own exclusion from the council of judges. The literary image of a suppliant bird seeking refuge in a human lap is used by Ovid sending letters from his exile, and in one story told by Herodotus the killing of sparrows seeking refuge in a

shrine is depicted as a most impious deed. The anecdote about the sparrow which is welcomed in a human lap is intended, not unlike other stories, to impart a moral lesson based on the principle *a minore ad maius* ('from the smaller to the larger') to the effect that who treats even the smallest animals in a gentle manner shall necessarily accomplish the virtue of philanthropy and justice towards his own fellowmen.

On the side of the Indian legend, I have mentioned as an evidence for the borrowing that the ancient anecdote, more close to reality in its original form, has assumed in the Hindu and Buddhist versions characteristics typical of ancient Indian religion. The king is subjected to a divine test of justice by the hawk and the dove, both appearing as gods in disguise. The most telling sign of accretion in comparison with the ancient anecdote consists in the bodily self-sacrifice of the king who is willing to cut off his own flesh in order to redeem the suppliant dove. I have given a broad list of the Indian stories in which cutting one's own flesh off one's body is a central theme. These stories make it probable that to the typically Indian motif of bodily self-sacrifice the story of welcoming the suppliant bird chased by a hawk in a human lap was added secondarily.

5. "Who is cruel to animals cannot be a humane man:" Emil Ponori Thewrewk about protection of animals in ancient Greece

In the fifth and final chapter, I have made a little excursion to European cultural history, departing from a short propaganda article written by Emil Ponori Thewrewk, the pioneer of Hungarian classical studies, with the aim of promoting the animal protection movements of his time. I wished to reveal the layers of ancient sources behind the article, perhaps of slight importance in itself but pointing to several interesting directions, as well as its background in European cultural history and its connections to the contemporary animal protection movements in Hungary.

In my investigation of the circumstances of the emergence of animal protection movements in 19th century Hungary, I have discovered important personal relations linking Emil Ponori Thewrewk to protection of animals. Árpád Ponori Thewrewk, the scholar's younger brother, himself a classical scholar and teacher, has written several books for the education of the youth in which he did not cease to urge humane treatment of animals. István Thewrewk, the scholar's son, a writer and publicist, seems to have had a similar sympathetic attitude towards the case of animals, judged by one of the chapters of his biographical work on archduke Joseph, devoted to the theme of the archduke as friend of animals. Archduke

Joseph, patron of the National Animal Protection League, was on his part in close acquaintance with Emil Ponori Thewrewk who followed the former's work on gypsy language and culture. All these persons, in conformity with the spirit of the time, have often used in defence of the case of animals the argument that is formulated in the title of Emil Ponori Thewrewk's article, that is cruelty to animals lays the foundations for cruel treatment of human fellows, and vice versa, gentleness towards animals fosters in man a gentle moral disposition.

Emil Ponori Thewrewk has given a few ancient instances for this educational principle, after briefly alluding to religious considerations known to him for sparing animal life, i.e. animal cults and transmigration of souls. This allusion to animal cults and transmigration of souls provided me an occasion to make some of the theories of history of religion of the scholar's time the subject of my discussion, namely the theory of totemism advanced by Robertson Smith, and the theory of animism advanced by Edward Burnett Tylor. In these historical approaches of religion, based on developmental theory, a good reflection of the spirit of the time can be discerned which distinguished superstitious beliefs of the childhood of humanity from later scientific knowledge, seeing in religion and science the stages of one and the same developmental process. Gyula Hornyánszky, one of Emil Ponori Thewrewk's most illustrious students, subscribing to the theory of totemism has presented a valuable survey of the causes and explanation of the anxiety felt about killing the ox in the ritual of the Buphonia.

It is in opposition to superstitious beliefs that Emil Ponori Thewrewk makes mention of some laws or judicial sentences, thought to derive from Athens, the citadel of justice, which either forbade or punished severely the maltreatment of animals. I have made it my task to trace the ancient sources of these quotations and analyse them in their original contexts. Triptolemus' law in Eleusis prescribing the avoidance of causing harm to animals is paralleled by one of the curses of Buzyges in Athens against a person who kills a draught ox. A certain qualm about killing tame and domesticated animals is manifested in both cases, closely associated with the defence of culture and agriculture. The sentences of the Areopagus punishing animal torture are quoted to illustrate the principle "who is cruel to animals cannot be a humane man". This consideration, rooted in ancient classical tradition and based on the principle *a minore ad maius* ('from the smaller to the larger'), was embraced at the dawn of Enlightenment by some European intellectuals who had an open mind to animal issues. I could follow the traces of the quotations of Emil Ponori Thewrewk

back to Alexander Pope on the side of English literature, and to Montesquieu on the side of French jurisprudence. As earlier precedents for the use of the principle one can refer to the works of John Locke and Michel de Montaigne. As far as the argument used by the contemporary supporters of animal protection is concerned, that treatment of animals shall have an effect on relations with human fellows, it was a natural means of defending one's case against such objections, not rarely raised even today, as one should rather have a concern for humans before one could think of animal welfare.

As the chapters of my thesis were written for the most part as separate studies, they have a wide range of themes and conclusions. As a recapitulation, however, the following remarks can be made.

The ideal, if not an everyday practice, of vegetarianism in antiquity was not restricted to the narrower Orphic-Pythagorean communities who would have expressed their opposition to the established social and cultural order by their abstention from meat. The vegetarian ideology and the endeavour to spare animal life make their presence felt at every step in the different layers of ancient cultural thought. The ideal of vegetarianism is represented in the Golden Age myth as well as in the ancient rationalistic cultural history. It is closely connected to the concept of culture and civilization through the conceptual correspondence between 'tame' and 'cultivated'. The products of agriculture, particularly cultivated crops, bring about a lawful life, leading to a sharp distinction between 'civilized' and 'barbarian'. Therefore killing domestic animals that work together with man in producing cultivated crops is one of the most crucial points. On the social level, humane treatment of animals lays the foundations for the social virtues between men, i.e. philanthropy and justice. Finally, in the process of developing moral virtue, the relation of the emotions to reason in the human soul follows a pattern of mutual cooperation between man and the tame and domesticated animals that willingly bow their neck under the yoke.

Publications related to the topic of the doctoral dissertation

- GAÁL Balázs: „»Aki az állattal kegyetlen, nem lehet emberséges ember«: Pónori Thewrewk Emil és az állatvédelem a régi görögöknél”, *Antik Tanulmányok* 56 (2012), 17–63.
- GAÁL Balázs: „»Állatvédő« törvények az ókori görögöknél”, *Társadalomkutatás* 30 (2012), 186–194.
- GAÁL Balázs: „A dietetikától az etikáig: ókori görög étkezési tabuk és magyarázataik”, in: *Convivium: Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karán 2012. november 6–7-én tartott vallástudományi konferencia előadásai*, ed. Déri Balázs, Budapest, 2013, 49–56.
- GAÁL Balázs: „Vegetarianizmus és nem-ártás az ókori Indiában: keleti és nyugati perspektívák”, in: *Convivium: Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karán 2012. november 6–7-én tartott vallástudományi konferencia előadásai*, ed. Déri Balázs, Budapest, 2013, 197–316.
- GAÁL Balázs: „A sztoikusok és az állatok: húsevés vagy vegetarianizmus?”, *Antik Tanulmányok* 58 (2014), 201–233.
- GAÁL Balázs: „Síbi király és a galamb: egy üldözött madár nyomában”, *Ókor* 13 (2014), 12–20.
- GAÁL Balázs: „Plutarchos vegetarianizmusa: közös hagyomány és egyéni érzékenység”, in: *Studia Classica*, ed. Ferenczi Attila, Budapest, 2015.