**Crossed destinies: gender supremacy and species supremacy**

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) claimed women’s inclusion in public life and published the famous “A Vindication of the Rights of Women”, considered one of the earliest works of the English feminist movement ([[1]](#endnote-1)). She argued that every man has an equal right to education because of his equal intrinsic capability to reason. In response to this book, in the same year in London, the philosopher and translator Thomas Taylor (1758–1835) wrote, anonymously, a satire provocatively entitled “A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes” ([[2]](#endnote-2)).

In his writing, the Neoplatonic philosopher of Cambridge explicitly criticized the thesis of the British writer: “If one accepts that all men have equal rights, one also has to accept that all women have rights, which unfortunately leads to the conclusion that all brutes have rights, which proves that the initial argument about the rights of men must be wrong”.

Taylor’s words, however, should not amaze us because for thousands of years of history and Jewish-Christian tradition, philosophical thought has brought together women, children, slaves and animals “in the same condition of subjection with respect to man, white, western and hunter”.

However, fate is mocking us since the knowledge of the satirical libel is today linked to the moral reasonableness of the thesis of recognizing rights to non-human animals, at that time absurd, as that of the recognition of rights for women ([[3]](#endnote-3)). Moreover, the woman-animal binomial proposed by Taylor has, albeit unconsciously, favored the link between the animal question and feminism expressed today in the ecofeminism movement.

Women at the time were not considered to be totally rational beings and female instability was empirically founded by the presence of the uterus that forced women to the mere rules of corporeity. Rationality, as a masculine attribute, justified the state of superiority of man over woman and, likewise, over the animal world.

Probably, the fear that the emotional-animalistic approach could undermine the female emancipationist cause has delayed the interest of the female movement towards the rights of non-humans, unlike what happened to other battles, such as anti-racism, anti-fascism anti homophobia and transphobia or class struggle. Women claimed their equality with men, on the basis of the equality of their rational faculties. Approaching the struggle of women’s rights to that of animals could be considered a sore point capable of undermining the validity of the claimants theses.

This devaluation of emotions has been disavowed by recent studies on neuroscience that indicate the fundamental role of emotions in decision making ([[4]](#endnote-4)).

However, for centuries the influence of Cartesian thought has imposed, at least in western culture, an objectifying vision of the animal. The supposed inability of the animal to experience emotions and, in particular, feelings of pain, has generated the devaluation of the animal by machine and, as described by Italian National Ethics Committee, its reification ([[5]](#endnote-5)). Today again, animals are treated, used and exploited as things. Today again women are exposed to violence, objects of domination and exploitation.

Animals and women are united because they continue to suffer increasing violence and oppression yet, in both cases, they are underestimated. Animals and women united in the claim of the fundamental duty to respect, indispensable for making the behavior of man ethically worthy.

1. **References**

   1. Wollstonecraft M. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. London: J. Johnson; 1792.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 1. Taylor T. Quid Rides? [Pseudonym], A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes. London: Edward Jeffery; 1792.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 1. Singer P. Animal liberation. London: Pimlico; 1975.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 1. Tyng MC, Amin HU, Saad MNM, Malik MS. The Influences of Emotion on Learning and Memory. Front Psychol. 2017;8:1454.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. 1. Comitato Nazionale di Bioetica. Bioetica e Scienze Veterinarie. Benessere Animale e Salute Umana. 30 novembre 2001. Available from: http://bioetica.governo.it/media/1876/p52\_2001\_bioetica-scienze-veterinarie\_it.pdf

   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)