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Review article

SELECTED ISSUES OF EUTHANASIA OF ANIMALS PART II. THE ETHICS IN FACING DEATH

WYBRANE ZAGADNIENIA DOTYCZĄCE EUTANAZJI ZWIERZĄT CZĘŚĆ II. ETYKA W OBLICZU ŚMIERCI

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Streszczenie. Eutanazja zwierząt przysparza trudności natury religijnej i etycznej także wśród lekarzy weterynarii. Sposób podejścia do samego zagadnienia utraty życia przez zwierzę często wpływa na relacje pomiędzy jego właścicielem a lekarzem. Problem ten stanowi wyzwanie zawodowe i prywatne. Nieadekwatna postawa do zaistniałej sytuacji skutkować może długotrwałą utratą zaufania. Eutanazja bydła, trzody chlewnej czy drobiu w wypadku wystąpienia chorób zakaźnych jest dodatkowym wyzwaniem.

Key words: animals, euthanasia.

Słowa kluczowe: eutanazja, zwierzęta.

In the case of animals the terms killing and euthanasia shall not be understood equally. It is hard to talk about the willingness to die in relation to animals, yet, as mentioned before, the word 'euthanasia' means 'good death' by definition, namely shortening of life in which an illness causes suffering and pain, and there is no evidence of eventual recovery. Killing is only shortening of life, not always dictated directly by compassion towards the one being killed.

Euthanasia does not involve only providing pharmacological agent. It is frequently technically hard activity, conducted according to strict rules, that requires the doctor to be professional (Close et al. 1996, 1997) as well as empathetic. It often depends on how the owner will remember this emotionally difficult moment in their life, whether they will come back to the doctor with their new pet. Nowadays hardly anyone doubts the meaning of the relationship between humans and pets. Pets play a major role in the sphere of preserving human psychological, health and social well-being (Friedman et al. 1983; Bergler 1986; Blackshaw 1996). They are not only humans' companions, but also therapists, becoming more widely used in animal-therapy around the world (Barker and Dawson 1998). The presence of animals in the surroundings of children has an enormous and unique influence on their physical and psychological development (Jalongo 2004; Endenburg and van Lith 2011; Kulisiewicz 2014). Interrupting the relationship between human and pet usually results in emotional loss touching the owner, which has a different dimension in each case. Revealed reactions do not have to be the proper measurement of trauma of the pet's owner. Therefore, it is essential that the veterinary doctor has the capacity for empathy (Stern 1996; Bonnett 2008; Hamood et al. 2014), and also could show spiritual support in the moment of loss of animal that was close for the owner, and who would have the knowledge on the process of mourning of lost pet (Stern 1996). Generally the owners themselves can overcome grief after the loss of often long-term companion. However, some of them need special support from the veterinary doctor. Usually, the more emotional relationship between the human and the pet, the more reactions connected with its loss are difficult to foresee (Friedman et al. 1983; Bergler 1988). Sometimes overcoming grief is complicated by the sense of guilt. Professional conversation is then essential in order to eliminate this negative feeling. In extreme cases help of a therapist may be necessary. The veterinary doctor ought to properly recognize the situation and inform the owner about such possibility (Hart et al. 1990).

Animal euthanasia is a very complicated issue, which undoubtedly will become increasingly important as the public interest in pets is rising. The decision on euthanasia issues a difficult, professional and private challenge to the veterinary doctor. Even at the highest level of competence the doctor must deal with such decision, and sometimes failure at unexpected death.

A serious problem is epidemics of infectious diseases such as: pigs FDM and avian influenza, that leave millions of infected animals. In case of detecting an infectious disease many animals, healthy as well as infected, are subjected to euthanasia. Such actions are necessary despite the financial loses of the farmers. Mass animal euthanasia is essential in order to prevent further spread of the infection. In such cases human attitude towards killed animals is important. Human must remember about basic rules of euthanasia in order not to cause any more suffering of the animals, minimalizing stress and killing them in the shortest time. Moreover euthanasia ought to be performed in the proper place and professional manner in order not to cause trauma in humans. Killing a big amount of animals is highly controversial (Gerritzen et al. 2006; Cohen 2009). Extreme emotions are evoked also when wild animals are subjected to euthanasia. Some species living in large groups on the specified area have a negative influence on the natural environment, e.g. cormorants, magpies, ravens, starlings, pigeons and many other bird species. Despite the fact that these

animals are healthy, the threat they are enforces the decision to eliminate some of them in order to reduce their population. It is a difficult undertaking, which requires previous legal arrangements. Dilemmas are intensified by the fact that some animals are protected and represent a beautiful accent of nature. These situations take place in various parts of the world (Tidemann and King 2009).

Laboratory animal euthanasia is a separate issue. There is no relationship between the animal and its owner, adduced many times in this article, however, here arises a much more difficult to assess problem of using animals. Their life expectancy is specified by the time frame of the experiment they are part of. It is difficult to define if euthanasia is a part of this experiment or it ought to be separated from the whole process and treated as an issue to be assessed separately. On the one hand it ought to be emphasized that without animals and animal experiments the present medicine would be in an entirely different place, experienced progress would definitely not take place, on the other hand it should be noted that thousands of animals are deprived of the right to live. A large number of animals subjected to euthanasia after the end of the experiment, made that automatic systems were developed in order to implement the process in humane conditions (*SMARTBOX – Small Lab Animal Automated Euthanasia. n.d.. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from <http://euthanex.com/euthanex/smartbox/index.html>*). The number of euthanasia in this group will certainly be limited by newly established systems designed to stimulate biological processes. The used algorithms are able to convey reactions occurring in cells with increasing accuracy.

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Abstract. Animal euthanasia causes religious and ethical difficulties among veterinary doctors. The approach to the issue of animal losing life often influences the relationships between the owner and the doctor. This problem is a professional and private challenge. Inadequate attitude to the existing situation can cause a long-lasting loss of trust. Euthanasia of cattle, swines and poultry can also be a challenge in case of infectious diseases.