Mad Dogs and Animal Protectionists: Rabies in Interwar Poland

ABSTRACT: This article examines the strategies adopted by the Polish Second Republic (1918 to 1939) to control the spread of rabies and focuses particularly on the response of the animal welfare movement to these strategies. Animal protectionists were critical of what they saw as an irrational and inflexible approach to rabies control, one which, they said, treated all dogs—who were the main vectors of rabies transmission—as potentially rabid, and which failed to make distinctions based on dog breed or supposed quality of the dog owner. Examining the content of protectionists’ criticisms tells us about the Polish animal welfare movement as a whole, about its prejudices, priorities, and ambitions. It tells us, too, about class tensions in independent Poland. Protectionists’ analysis of the rabies problem reflected their own urban middle-class milieu and was in keeping with their general desire as animal welfare advocates to reform, enlighten, and civilize certain kinds of people. Looking at rabies in interwar Poland encourages us, moreover, to reconsider the lines that separate human from non-human animals and to interrogate the role that humans play in zoonotic disease transmission.

A dog in the early stages of rabies, according to interwar understandings of the disease, is sluggish, carries its tail low, and shuns human companions. It emits...
an eerie howl and hides in dark corners. After a week or two, the dog grows progressively more restless and unpredictable and begins to sneak up on people. A great deal of saliva pours out of its mouth. It roams. It is able to run great distances in short periods of time and in its wanderings can bite hundreds of other animals—and, most terrifyingly, people too—thereby infecting them with the same demon that is its tormentor. The incubation period for the rabies virus ranges from days to months and depends, in part, on the location and the severity of the bite. Once the virus is finally unleashed, it moves through the central nervous system and produces inflammation of the brain. The result is an inevitable and excruciating death.²

Rabies is one of the oldest known viral infectious diseases that can make the jump from other species, mostly canine, to humans. The ancient Greeks’ word for rabies, lyssa or lytta, means “madness,” and our own Latin word “rabies” is derived from the Sanskrit rabhas, which means “to do violence”; the terms evoke the fury and volatility often exhibited by rabies victims.³ Though theories about what causes rabies have abounded throughout recorded history, in the mid-nineteenth century scientists established that the virus was spread by saliva that enters the body through a bite (or even a particularly severe scratch) from an infected animal. This understanding helped lead to the development of a post-exposure rabies vaccine in 1885 by the French chemist Louis Pasteur; if administered before the onset of symptoms, the vaccine would stop rabies from developing.⁴ Then as now, no medical intervention can prevent death once symptoms have already started.⁵

² “Jak rozpoznać wściekliznę psów,” Przyjaciel Zwierząt 4 (July 1919): 4. The animal welfare newspapers used for this research provide inconsistent and at times incomplete bibliographic information. Specific issues often include the issue number along with the month and year (as in this instance), but at other times they omit the month or the issue number, and sometimes both.


At around the same time that the scientific community made progress against rabies, states began implementing ever stricter policies to curb the spread of the disease. These policies included the leashing, muzzling, and registration of dogs, along with organized mass round-ups and killing of stray dogs, who were the most likely carriers of rabies. Great Britain was especially successful in these efforts to control the spread of rabies, and in 1902 declared the disease eradicated. Progress on the continent was slower, and there rabies remained a public health threat well into the twentieth century. In Paris there were over 400 rabid dog incidents reported in 1918, and in the same year 350 French people who had been bitten by a rabid animal were treated at Paris’s Pasteur Institute, which administered the potentially life-saving rabies vaccine. From 1915 to 1921, twenty-one deaths were attributed to rabies in France, with another, a final one for the interwar period, in 1924. From 1915 to 1926, Germany reported 180 cases of human rabies, even though its Imperial Animal Disease Law, which outlined requirements for the registration and quarantine of dogs, plus the elimination of all stray dogs, dated from 1880. In the comparatively underdeveloped east of Europe, rates of rabies infection were higher. Before 1944, a stunning average of 255 people died from rabies every year in Romania. Bolshevik Russia saw almost 24,000 people treated for rabies in 1925 alone. In the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939), an average of thirty-one people died every year as a result of rabies infection, for a total of 500 rabies deaths in the sixteen-year period from 1920 to 1936. Furthermore, 762 people were treated at Warsaw’s Pasteur Institute after being bitten by a rabid animal during the two-year period from 1927 to 1929.

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6 There was an unexpected rabies outbreak in Britain just after World War I, but it was quickly brought under control. By the 1930s rabies came to be known as a disease of the Empire exclusively, as reflected in Noel Coward’s song, “Mad Dogs and Englishmen.” See Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Rabies in Britain, 1830–2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 164–165.


8 Pemberton and Worboys 165.

9 W. Muller, J. Cox and T. Muller, “Rabies in Germany, Denmark and Austria,” in King et al. 81.

10 I. Lontai, “Rabies in Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Bulgaria,” in King et al. 124.

11 Pemberton and Worboys 171.


13 O. Matouch, “Rabies in Poland, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic,” in King et al. 65.
This article is about rabies in interwar Poland and specifically about the ways in which Poland’s organized animal welfare movement, which had blossomed in the years since the establishment of Polish independence in 1918, framed the rabies threat and why. For animal protectionists rabies was an animal welfare issue. It was also a social and cultural problem, the management of which reflected contemporary fears, stereotypes, prejudices, and hopes. As will be revealed below, animal protectionists’ analysis of rabies during the 1920s and 1930s sheds light on contemporary attitudes about citizen activism and the authority of the state during the fragile stability of the immediate post-partition period, and exposes the divisions between classes and regions in Poland. Exploring the Polish debates about rabies further allows us to think about interwar anxiety surrounding disease and contagion more generally, and about contemporary attempts to sanitize, both physically and metaphorically, certain kinds of beings in an effort to protect public health. When contemporaries talked about animals and animal disease, they were at the same time talking about their own human societies as well.

In their approach to rabies, Polish animal protectionists were in large part reacting to the state’s own position on rabies management. The interwar Polish state adopted the same so-called sanitary-veterinary strategies of rabies control that had been so successful in Britain and that were in use to a greater or lesser extent in all of Europe by the 1920s. The strategy focused on dogs, the main vectors of rabies transmission, and called for mandatory muzzling, leashing, and licensing along with the regular mass culling of strays, in addition to the capture of any dog in violation of the rules or of any dog suspected to have been in the presence of a rabid or a potentially rabid dog. On the one hand, animal protectionists agreed that the rabies epizootic was a serious public health threat and that the state needed to act aggressively to bring the disease under control; they applauded the state’s determination to eliminate rabies. On the other hand, animal protectionists believed that the state too often targeted the wrong dogs in its rabies management strategies. Existing policies failed to differentiate between types of dogs—purebreds, lapdogs, strays, abused dogs, well-cared-for dogs—and types of dog owners, and worked on the assumption that every dog could be a rabid dog. This meant that too many “good dogs” who posed no real threat to public health were defined as potentially rabid and eliminated. Animal welfare advocates considered this inhumane, irrational, and unfair, and a poor reflection on Poland’s status as a civilized nation; for protectionists, there was no civilization without compassion towards animals. Unlike the state, which set as its goal the elimination of rabies by whatever means necessary in order to save the maximum number of lives, animal protectionists argued that the methods employed in controlling the epidemic were equally important.

Protectionists further argued that cruelty, neglect, and ignorance played a role—albeit an indirect one—in spreading the disease, and they regretted that Poland’s national rabies strategy did not understand the connection between cruelty and rabies. They believed that until society as a whole took animal welfare seriously, rabies would remain a serious public health threat—and a stain on Poland’s still fragile international reputation. Linking humanitarianism to successful rabies eradication, as protectionists did, had the added effect of promoting the animal welfare movement as a whole. Rabies, ironically, presented animal welfare advocates with a chance to showcase their expertise and professionalism, and to publicize their potential usefulness in interpreting and solving a pressing public health problem. If one accepted arguments that cruelty and neglect contributed, even indirectly, to rabies infection, then the humanitarianism of Poland’s animal welfare movement could no longer be denigrated as mere sentimentalism and frivolity; humanitarianism became instead a matter of life and death, and animal welfare became a highly rational concern—a hallmark of a civilized society. This is precisely what makes the Polish case such a revealing and interesting one. The Polish rabies debate reflects general European-wide approaches to defining and managing the disease, but at the same time is distinctive because it unfolded in a new and insecure state that had not yet settled into a post-partition identity. Poland’s animal welfare advocates saw opportunity on the blank slate that was before them, opportunity to promote a modern humanity and opportunity to confirm the new independent Poland’s place in Europe and among the so-called civilized nations.

There is virtually no literature on rabies in Poland, on the Polish animal welfare movement, or, indeed, on the place of animals in Polish society during any historical period. The one exception is my own survey of the Polish animal welfare movement’s activities during the Second Republic. In contrast, much more has been written on animal protection (and on animal protectionists’ interventions into the rabies problem) in Anglo-American contexts. This scholarship is especially developed for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when animal welfare movements were first established, and typically considers animal welfare activism as part of broader liberalizing and modernizing projects aimed at “civilizing” the population. This is also one of


the themes featured in recent work on animal welfare in imperial Russia. Most notably, it is the German case that provides us with perhaps the most extreme counterpoint to the dominant view of animal protectionism as a potentially modernizing force. The work of Arnold Arluke and Boria Sax on animal protection under the Nazis, for instance, emphasizes how a deep commitment to animal welfare could co-exist with—and indeed profit from and reinforce—a profound contempt for certain kinds of human life. Recognizing the various and sometimes contradictory motivations for and meanings of animal welfare activism makes these movements particularly useful lenses onto the societies that form them. Studying animal welfare movements and the causes which animate them exposes the hierarchies that human societies create, the boundaries that they draw, and the interactions that they either countenance or denounce.

**MAD DOG CONTROL STRATEGIES**

For the new Poland, a state re-created in 1918 after over a century of partition, there were many political, social, and economic problems that required immediate attention, and especially pressing were matters of public health. The rampant spread of typhus in the immediate postwar period, for example, was regarded by the various state and voluntary agencies working in the region—the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Nations Epidemic Commission, and the Inter-Allied Sanitary Commission, among others—as not just a danger to Poland, but, given the permeability of borders and the extent of population movements during this time, as a threat to all of Europe. International bodies monitored closely the ways in which Poland coped with contagious diseases, and its capacity to respond to and manage public health crises reflected on Poland’s very right to be a state.

It is in this wider context that we must appreciate the war on rabies that the new Polish state launched. Eliminating rabies was more than a practical public health goal aimed at saving lives, though it was certainly that. As it did for animal protectionists and for the broader international community, rabies treatments of the disease across historical periods. See Baer; King et al.


eradication, from the Polish state’s perspective, carried an important symbolic dimension; it was a matter of national pride, a marker of the reborn nation’s civility, and a measure of itself as a modern and rational European body. What we can read in this commitment to rabies eradication, moreover, is an attempt to realize a new and greater purpose for the state vis-à-vis society. In the modern conception, the state’s job was to safeguard its citizens’ health and welfare and to intervene in people’s lives in productive ways.20

In 1919, while it was still embroiled in war and border disputes, the Polish state issued a broadly designed regulation which recognized the public health threat posed by rabies and other contagious diseases carried by animals, and which made the reporting of all sick animals mandatory.21 Regulations passed in 1922 and 1925 outlined specific features of rabies control, including mandatory muzzling and leashing, plus the regular and organized elimination of stray dogs.22 And then in August 1927 Józef Piłsudski’s recently installed Sanacja government produced a comprehensive strategy for attempting to minimize the impact of rabies infection in Poland. The Presidential Regulation Concerning Contagious Diseases Carried by Animals incorporated the basic approaches to rabies management established in earlier legislation but offered a far more precise description of what the authorities’ rights and obligations were in the event of a rabies threat.23 The 1927 law formed the foundation of rabies policy in Poland.

23 “Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 22 sierpnia 1927 r. o zwalczaniu zaraźliwych chorób zwierzęcych,” Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 77.673 (1927): Poz. 673, 1029. The 1927 law was supported further by a supplementary regulation passed in 1928 by the Ministry of Agriculture, which had been named in the 1927 legislation as occupying the leading role in the state’s efforts to control contagious diseases carried by animals. See “Rozporządzenie Ministra Rolnictwa z dnia 9 stycznia 1928 r. wydane w porozumieniu z Ministrami: Spraw Wewnętrznych, Skarbu i Komunikacji w sprawie wykonania rozporządzenia Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 22 sierpnia 1927 r. o zwalczaniu zaraźliwych chorób zwierzęcych,” Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 19.167 (1928): Poz. 167, 263–326. Articles 314 to 338 refer to
The law consisted of 113 articles that, in addition to rabies, covered several other contagious diseases carried by animals, like anthrax, foot and mouth disease, and scabies. The first of the seven articles that pertained to rabies specifically, Article 65, stated that the owner of a sick animal or of an animal suspected of having rabies needed to quarantine that animal immediately and inform the county authorities. According to Article 66 the authorities were obliged to immediately kill all animals that were confirmed to be rabid. If the animal that was rabid or suspected of being rabid had bitten a person, however, then it needed to be first placed under observation instead. This was done to determine whether the animal was in fact sick and in case any information obtained during the quarantine might prove medically useful in helping the human victim.24

The legislation also specified which animals should be suspected of rabies and how the authorities needed to respond to such concerns. A “suspect animal” was one who had been in contact with a rabid animal or with an animal that was thought to have rabies; these animals were to be quarantined and observed. But dogs were to be considered suspect even if there was only a possibility that they had had contact with a rabid animal or with an animal merely suspected of rabies; potentially rabid dogs were to be killed. In other words, dogs were to be considered suspicious at a much earlier point than other animals, and the response to these suspicions was far more severe.25 This was because dogs were so numerous and were the main carriers of rabies, but it also likely reflected the fact that dogs were less economically valuable than other domesticated or working animals (like horses, for instance). At any rate, it was this definition of a suspect animal, as applied to dogs specifically, that animal protectionists argued was both unreasonable and inhumane.

The injustice, protectionists believed, was reflected in other features of the legislation. For example, in the event of a confirmed case of canine rabies the legislation stated that the authorities needed to determine whether the rabid dog had been running loose. If so, then Article 70 permitted the authorities to declare an area of contagion where more severe restrictions could be placed on dogs’ mobility for a specified period of time.26 According to Article 71, the authorities
could also order the mass culling of all animals in the area of contagion that had been defined in Article 70 in order to prevent a major rabies outbreak. The culling would apply to any dog that the authorities had reason to believe was or might have been in the presence of the rabid dog; such a dog was “suspect,” according to the definition presented earlier in the legislation. Troubling, too, from animal protectionists’ perspective, was that the legislation granted local municipal officials and state-appointed veterinarians a great deal of latitude and power in terms of making determinations about just how narrowly or broadly to interpret these articles. 27

In general terms, this legislative approach to rabies control reflected the position of the Polish State Institute of Hygiene and was in line both with contemporary practices in other countries and with international standards. There was in fact a great deal of international co-operation on the subject of rabies during the interwar period. 28 The first International Rabies Conference was held at the Pasteur Institute in Paris in 1927; fifty-seven rabies experts from twenty-six countries attended, and four of these were from Poland. The purpose of the meeting was for experts to discuss the rabies virus as a medical and social problem, to consider the implications of rabies in the widest possible sense, and to develop a picture of what rabies management looked like around the world. Delegates reached a consensus that successful rabies eradication depended on careful monitoring of dog populations, especially stray dog populations, as well as on the aggressive application of limits to dogs’ freedom, and they urged all countries to reflect these principles in their rabies legislation. 29 Poland did exactly that, and arguably more, with its rabies control strategy.

ANIMAL WELFARE MEETS ANIMAL DISEASE

The Second Republic had two major (plus several smaller) animal welfare groups—the Society for the Protection of Animals (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zwierząt), which had its roots in the Russian partition, and the League for the Friends of Animals (Polska Liga Przyjaciół Zwierząt), which was formed in 1927 by break-away members of the Society. (The disagreements which led to this split were primarily personal and did not reflect particularly different goals in terms of animal welfare.) Each group was based in Warsaw and had branches throughout the country. In 1936, the Society and the League settled their differences and merged to become the Union of Animal Welfare Societies in the


27 “Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 22 sierpnia 1927 r.,” Art. 70–71.

28 Weindling 17.

Republic of Poland (Zjednoczenie Towarzystw Opieki nad Zwierzętami R.P.); membership numbers were in the thousands on the eve of World War II.\(^{30}\)

Details about the men and women who were part of this movement remain vague. What we do know is that members were drawn from the urban middle classes and the intelligentsia, broadly defined, and that both groups included several notable members or supporters.\(^{31}\) Their goal was simple: the protection of animals from cruelty and neglect. But protectionists’ motivation was about more than just the animals; cruelty, as one member of the League explained, “lowered the moral level of society as a whole.”\(^{32}\) Poland’s animal protectionists adhered to the familiar axiom that a commitment to animal welfare formed a critical measure of the level of civilization that a nation had achieved. As such they attempted to show that the new Poland, with its robust animal welfare movement, could indeed be counted as one of the civilized countries in Europe.\(^{33}\) That the Second Republic passed progressive animal protection legislation in 1928—thanks in part to the lobbying efforts of animal welfare campaigners—was taken as one clear indicator of this much-desired civilized status. Under the terms of the 1928 legislation, various ways of “tormenting” animals were defined explicitly and forbidden, and were punishable with both fines and jail time. The law was widely celebrated by animal welfarists throughout Europe and was a tremendous source of pride for the Polish animal protectionist movement.\(^{34}\)

Given that the archives of the Union of Animal Welfare Societies were destroyed in the course of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 (as were records of the Veterinary Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, which administered rabies policy), what we can determine about animal protectionists’ position on any specific issue comes mainly from the groups’ newspapers. The Society and the League, and then the Union, all published newspapers at different points during the interwar period. They appeared either monthly or quarterly, depending on finances, and were directed at both formal and informal members of the animal welfare community. The Society for the Protection of Animals published Przyjaciel Zwierząt [Friend of Animals] from 1918–1920 and then again from 1926–1931. The League for the Friends of Animals published Świat Zwierzący [World of Animals] from 1929–1937. Shortly after the Society and

\(^{30}\) Plach 6–7.

\(^{31}\) For a list of elite members and sponsors, see Plach 18.


\(^{34}\) Plach 8–10.
the League merged, the new Union of Animal Welfare Societies started publishing Świat i Przyjaciel Zwierząt [World and Friend of Animals] until the outbreak of World War II. But even before the Society and the League merged, and given that, as a result of financial exigencies, the Society had ceased to have its own newspaper in 1931, the League deliberately reached out to Society members and reflected the activities of both groups in World of Animals. There were no other animal welfare newspapers with national readership during the interwar period. As such, and given the basic similarities in terms of approaches to animal-related issues, I have elected to treat the two groups and their papers as reflections of a single animal welfare position.

The newspapers linked campaigners across Poland and informed them about important happenings in the world of animal welfare, both at home and abroad. On the pages of the newspapers, animal protectionists explored a variety of topics, from zoos, dog breeding, and the basic care of domestic animals, to far more controversial subjects like vivisection and ritual slaughter. Rabies was a regular topic of discussion in all of the papers mentioned above—the Society’s Friend of Animals, the League’s World of Animals, and the Union’s World and Friend—with most issues containing at least one article on the subject.35

Even before the passage of the 1927 legislation there were occasional articles about rabies in Friend of Animals, but not surprisingly attention to rabies from animal welfarists increased after the state passed the new law. The first formal response from the Society to Poland’s 1927 rabies legislation was published in Friend in late 1927. At this time Friend was the only animal welfare newspaper in Poland, and at this time, too, the split between the Society and the League was very fresh, having just occurred earlier that year. In its first published response to the state’s rabies management strategy, the Society asserted boldly that the 1927 law was simply “not consistent with the concept of property law.”36 The group objected specifically to the wide powers that the legislation gave state officials to kill dogs—but not other animals—that were merely suspected of being rabid or of having been in the presence of a suspect dog; dogs’ lives, the Society said, should not be determined by the “whim” of an official who might interpret the possibility of contagion more broadly than was warranted. The Society believed instead that people should always be allowed to place their suspect dogs under quarantine to determine whether there was any actual cause for concern. They further stated that dogs should only be seized in those cases where the owner did not want to (or one could add: if they could not afford to) place a dog under quarantine; in this way, public safety would be protected while owners would not be deprived of their pets, who were, in animal

35 The Union also maintained a rabies sub-committee. See “Sekcja walki ze wścieklizną,” Świat i Przyjaciel Zwierząt 2 (1937): 17.

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protectionists’ conception, their property. These themes—that the legislation could be applied in ways that were unfair to dogs and to responsible dog owners, and indeed that it too easily exaggerated the extent of the threat—would be repeated throughout the remainder of the interwar period by the Society, and later, the League.

The first reaction to the legislation from the other major animal welfare group operating out of Warsaw, the League for the Friends of Animals, appeared in *The World of Animals* in the fall of 1929; *World* had only just been established as the League’s paper at the start of that year. Romuald Mandelski, who led the split from the Society and who went on to serve as the League’s first president from 1927 to 1931, believed it was important to inform *World’s* readers about the specific terms of the 1927 legislation and at the same time to offer a criticism of the law’s definition of the rabies problem. In his article Mandelski contextualized the legislation, and the entire rabies threat, in terms of animal welfare generally. The “rational” fight against rabies, Mandelski affirmed, could only take place alongside a wider campaign to promote the “rational protection of animals”; in his conception, public health and animal welfare were inextricably linked.38

Mandelski outlined the typical logic that animal protectionists would use throughout the interwar period to argue that Poland’s rabies strategy was problematic. He began by pointing out that even though the law weighed most heavily on the city of Warsaw, with its sizeable stray dog population, rabies was more accurately a problem that “had been dragged into the city by dogs from the countryside.”39 Mandelski explained, “As long as dogs in villages are kept stationary—which is contrary to their biological makeup—as long as they are kept on short leashes in dirty and plain and badly built doghouses, without water and adequate food, as long as they are beaten and kept downtrodden by owners who lack a sense of conscience,” Poland’s battle against rabies will be “pointless, and no regulation will give us the desired results.”40 These unfortunate country dogs, tortured by the conditions of their existence, Mandelski implied, “go mad” (in the sense of being unable to tolerate the brutality any longer), and long for freedom; when they see an opportunity, they take it and run, eventually making their way to the city. To “a layman’s eyes,” according to Mandelski, and to untrained state authorities as well, this mistreated-dog-turned-apparent-stray might well appear rabid, when in reality it was just exhausted and hungry. Or perhaps, Mandelski’s logic implied further, the poor creature would actually meet a rabid animal in its wanderings. Carrying the disease in its body, the dog

37 “Wyjątek z nowej ustawy,” 3.
39 Mandelski 9.
40 Mandelski 9.
would eventually cross the border that separated the countryside from the city and would go on to “infect healthy city dogs who wear muzzles and are on leashes.”

In the perceived interests of public safety, someone would sound the alarm bell, whether because the dog merely looked rabid, or because it actually was rabid and perhaps had even bitten a person. State authorities would enact the 1927 legislation and declare an area of contagion, and they would then send dog catchers out to respectable Warsaw neighbourhoods to conduct a mass culling of all supposedly suspect dogs that *may* have come into contact with the rabid dog. As we know from the 1927 legislation, the definition of suspect animal was extremely broad when applied to dogs, and so invariably healthy dogs—including ones that may well have belonged to readers of animal welfare newspapers—would be included in the state’s mass round-up. This was simply irrational, Mandelski argued, and would do little to reduce rates of infection.

What is striking about Mandelski’s analysis is that he defines human cruelty and ignorance as setting off the chain of events that *indirectly* caused the slaughter of (innocent) dogs. But the 1927 legislation, regrettabley from animal welfarists’ perspective, made no connections between cruelty and rabies. For his part, Mandelski implied that it was in fact certain types of *people* and what they did or did not do to their animals, rather than the animals themselves, that were one of the root causes of the terrible contagion that threatened public health. Rabies was a disease that incubated in a host outside of the modern city, according to Mandelski; it travelled on four legs from “them,” primitive people in primitive villages around Warsaw, to “us,” the civilized people in the very heart of Poland’s capital. In formulating the problem in this way Mandelski reinforced contemporary views about certain population types as carriers of contagion and as threats to the nation. (This general rhetoric, which had already appeared in the antisemitic press of the day, would of course take on even more extreme forms during the war when Jews were condemned as carriers of all kinds of disease, as the scourge of the racially pure and as a mortal threat to civilization itself.) From the perspective of middle-class urban animal protectionists, the scourge in this case was the vast masses of people who practised cruelty and neglect—the poor, the brutal, the rural, the ignorant, and the irresponsible. Civilization resided only in the middle-class homes of the city. In focusing on the Polish provinces as the source of contagion, Mandelski inverted the hitherto typical geography of disease transmission, which identified the city as the source

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41 Mandelski 9.
42 Mandelski 9.
43 Mandelski 9.
44 On the association the Nazis made between Jews and contagion, see Weindling 277–279 and 295.
of pollutants. By the 1920s and 1930s, it was the city, with its comparatively abundant and ever-expanding municipal and social services, that came to be associated with modernity, civilization, and progress, and it was the backward countryside that became instead the repository of potential disease. Indeed, in many other articles published in the animal welfare press, protectionists repeated that the basis of the rabies problem was to be found in Poland’s most underdeveloped regions, particularly in its central, southern, and eastern provinces.

The solution, Mandelski suggested, was to raise the standard of care for dogs in the areas where cruelty was thought to reside, the Polish countryside being chief among these; doing so would keep dogs at home and safe from rabies, and would therefore serve the interests of protecting public health as well. As animal welfare campaigners would continue to do throughout the remainder of the interwar period, in this introductory analysis of rabies Mandelski proposed expanding animal welfare groups’ educational initiatives so that both the state and the public at large would appreciate that humanitarianism, decency, and simple common sense needed to be at the heart of any rabies prevention strategy.

Accordingly, articles about proper feeding and watering schedules for dogs, plus commentaries on the right way to build a dog house and the appropriate length for a tie-out (a minimum of twenty metres), filled the pages of the animal welfare newspapers throughout the interwar period, as did frequent reminders about the potentially lethal effects of mistreating dogs. These discussions were intended to show that unhealthy and poorly treated dogs were more susceptible to rabies precisely because these were the animals that were the most likely to escape their environments and wander the world as strays. According to this logic, improving the conditions of a dog’s life would have a more beneficial effect on public health than killing thousands of dogs that might have been in the presence of another dog that might have been rabid.

Not surprisingly, too, there were numerous articles in the animal welfare papers about the process of rabies transmission. In these pieces protectionists sought both to bring a more rational perspective to assessments of the rabies threat and to dispel misinformation about the deadly disease. Specifically, they distinguished carefully between types of dog bites and warned that teasing and scaring dogs for amusement (acts which starkly revealed what protectionists described as a general lack of humanitarian feeling in Poland) could well provoke the animal to bite; bites like this seldom suggested rabies, however.

45 For a general discussion of these themes, see Weindling Ch. 2, esp. 87.
47 Mandelski 9.
Similarly, if a person were to try to take a dog’s bone, it stood to reason that the dog would get mad and bite, but again, this was not the same kind of mad biting that should lead to a suspicion of rabies. And if one were bitten by a dog that had not been on the loose and had no occasion to be bitten by a rabid dog, then, similarly, there was no need to react with alarm. With such concrete examples and practical information, animal protectionists hoped they could play a small role in protecting dogs and alleviating anxiety about the potential for rabies infection; the state, after all, seemed unwilling to do so or to interrogate human choices and actions, preferring instead to regulate and punish only the animals.

What was also crucially important from an animal welfare perspective was convincing people that bites really were the one and only way for the rabies virus to be transmitted to humans. The papers regularly ran articles by veterinarians and public health experts which affirmed this position and discredited the possibility of a spontaneous generation of rabies. From the perspective of animal protectionists, it was not only that spontaneous generation theories were simply wrong; the problem was also that such theories made all dogs suspect and potentially rabid. Here it is important to remember that dogs, as the main carriers of this life-threatening infection, were also the most common and perhaps the best loved domesticated animals. They lived in close proximity to humans, and increasingly inside the middle-class home itself. There was thus an element of betrayal in rabies infection that gave rabies a sinister and even transgressive character, one that was absent from discourses about other contagious diseases carried, for example, by universally maligned rodents, like rats, or by lice. Moreover, a belief in spontaneous generation reinforced a view that all dogs were potential agents of destruction, and made it more likely that someone would misinterpret unusual behaviour in a dog as rabies (the dog just “went mad” one day); in doing so they would set off a panic that would end in a mass culling of dogs. The frequency with which animal protectionists discredited theories of spontaneous generation suggests that too many people (even their own readers, evidently) remained skeptical about the information they received from scientific professionals. The papers positioned themselves as the trustworthy intermediaries between these professionals and the public, and translated scientific information into layman’s terms.

51 On rabid dogs violating the notion of home as haven, see Kathleen Kete, The Beast in the Boudoir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) Ch. 6.
52 Mann 10.
THE DOG CATCHER

Before the formal state regulation of rabies, the work of rounding up stray dogs—the most obvious sources of rabies infection—was left to terrified mobs who brandished whatever weapons they had on hand to eliminate the perceived threat to their community’s safety. In the modern period chaotic mobs were increasingly displaced by professional dog catchers regulated by the state. In the Second Polish Republic dog catchers were overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture working in partnership with local municipal authorities; dog catchers conducted routine round-ups of stray dogs in both the city and the countryside, and also picked up dogs who had owners, but who had nevertheless violated some part of the law. One of the most common infractions was failing to wear a muzzle in public places, which included parks, sidewalks, “and those areas in front of a house which can be accessed by anyone.”

All captured dogs were transported in the dog catcher’s vehicle to an impound facility, where they were placed in a section for either obviously sick or seemingly healthy animals, and kept for three days. During periods free from rabies, the healthy animals would be returned to owners who came to the facility as long as they provided proof of the dog’s registered status plus a written statement from a veterinarian testifying to the good health of the animal. During confirmed rabies outbreaks, however, owners who wished to retrieve their pets also had to seek written permission from the municipal authorities. This requirement added an additional layer of complication to an already onerous, expensive, and time-consuming process. In all cases, owners paid for the food and shelter that their animals had received; rates were set by the municipality and were not trivial, thereby limiting further who could avail themselves of this option. Animals that were not retrieved at the three-day mark—the majority—and animals that were clearly sick, would be euthanized “in a humanitarian fashion” under the supervision of a state-appointed veterinary doctor. Alternately, healthy purebred dogs could be sold by the pound executioner.

53 For examples of mob action against dogs in early modern England, see Swabe, “Folklore,” 318.
54 For a brief mention of dog-catchers in Cracow before World War I, see Nathaniel D. Wood, Becoming Metropolitan: Urban Selfhood and the Making of Modern Cracow (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010) 82 and 171.
56 “Wyjątek z nowej ustawy weterynarnej,” 3; and “Zarządzenia i okólniki władz państwowych i samorządowych w sprawie ochrony zwierząt: Instrukcja (ramowa) dla rakarzy miejskich (gminnych),” 18–19.
provided that the sale did not violate any rules governing the prevention of contagious diseases and was approved by a veterinary doctor. According to one animal welfare activist, in 1926 (so even before the 1927 contagious diseases legislation was passed) 5,000 dogs were seized by the dog catcher in Warsaw alone.

Throughout the interwar period animal protectionists maintained that this entire dog catching system constituted a “barbaric custom,” a hold-over from a cruel and primitive era. One commentator called the rounding up of dogs “pointless” and warned that contemporary practices “induce indignation in the cultured general public, while with foreigners they create a not very flattering impression of the culture of the Polish state.” Animal protectionists objected specifically to the fact that the rules which governed dogs, dog catchers, and rabies did not allow for any rhetorical, practical, or, indeed, legal distinction to be made between owned and unowned dogs (in contrast to the situation in Germany, for example), and instead made all dogs potential targets of the dog catcher. To place dogs from “good homes” alongside strays in the dog catcher’s van, and to treat these animals as equal in the threat they posed to public health, simply defied reason, according to animal protectionists, and raised the spectre of an out-of-control state that intervened indiscriminately in citizens’ lives.

Animal welfare advocates used their newspapers to present touching and real examples of what Polish dog catching policies looked like in practice. One featured story told the tale of Pani Zofja Witszak, a café owner in Warsaw, and her five-month-old Doberman. One December day in 1931, Pani Witszak took her puppy out for a walk, and after a time she let him off leash so that he could get some additional exercise; she kept his muzzle on. At that particular moment a police officer walked by and demanded the payment of a 3-złoty fine from Pani Witszak for allowing her dog off leash. Pani Witszak did not have any

59 Żyżkowski 2.
61 Tryjarski 15.
money with her and asked the officer to come to her café to collect his payment. The officer refused, however, and interpreted her request as an unwillingness to pay, at which point he fined her again. The next day he appeared at her café with the municipal dog catcher and demanded to take her puppy. Somehow Pani Witszak was able to convince the duo that the dog was not at home, and she was successful in doing so again when they re-appeared a couple of days later. Frightened, however, she contacted the League for the Friends of Animals for help. The League took the view that the officer was over-interpreting the legislation and was acting unreasonably; that the legislation allowed for such over-zealousness was, in fact, part of the problem. The League intervened aggressively in the case, and eventually Pani Witszak managed to save her dog after paying the two fines and securing the agreement of a local veterinarian about the dog’s well-being.\footnote{Though it is not stated explicitly whether Warsaw was under a rabies threat at this time, the League does write in the article that there was “no mention of rabies” to Pani Witszak in the initial exchange between her and the officer. See Z., “Wścieklizna o trzy złote,” Świat Zwierzęcy 1 (January 1932): 8.}

The League used this story—which carried the humorous title “Madness [Wścieklizna] About Three Złoty”—to warn its members about how irrational the local authorities and the dog catcher could be. Both the dog and Pani Witszak were sympathetic heroes and ideal representatives of animal and human types respectively. The Doberman was a high-status pure-bred, and a puppy at that, and did not fit the profile of what protectionists assumed a rabid dog looked like. For her part, Pani Witszak was a bourgeois lady of some means, hardly the stereotype of the irresponsible dog owner that protectionists generally targeted in their activism. Both dog and owner had class, status, and respectability, and belied contemporary notions of which people (the poor; rural folk; men rather than women) and which animals (strays; mongrels; country dogs) were most likely to be associated with rabies.\footnote{Similar arguments are made by Harriet Ritvo for the Victorian British context in The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).} The state’s unwillingness to make distinctions between dog types and to reflect any such distinctions in rabies policy corresponded with their refusal to differentiate between the quality of the dogs’ owners or to trust owners when they vouched for their animals. Here animal protectionists’ criticisms of the state’s rabies control policies reflected their own privileged class status and social prejudices; first and foremost they acted to protect people like them and their own dogs. Readers could have easily placed themselves in Pani Witszak’s position and imagined their own sweet “Kubuś” threatened by an overly eager police officer and his willing dog-catcher accomplice.
The problems with the state’s policies were further revealed through an example drawn from the prestigious Żoliborz neighbourhood of Warsaw in the early 1930s, where two people were bitten by a rabid dog. As we know from the 1927 legislation, the authorities were permitted to define an area of contagion and to order a mass culling of all animals in that area as a response to a confirmed case of rabies. As we know, too, such a culling could include all dogs that might have been in the presence of the rabid dog. A mass culling is precisely what happened in Żoliborz. Some residents complained to the League for the Friends of Animals that the dog catchers sent to the area to round up all suspect dogs were using excessive zeal. Dog catchers even seized purebreds and pampered lapdogs, according to eyewitness reports, if there was so much as the slightest suggestion, corroborated or not, that the given dogs had been running loose in the neighbourhood during the last couple of weeks, and some dogs were apparently also removed from private homes. Moreover, many of the captured dogs were shot on the spot instead of being transported to an impound facility, thereby depriving owners of an opportunity to save their pets. In total over 80 dogs were killed in this round-up.

From protectionists’ perspective, it should have been possible for the authorities to make more careful determinations about a specific dog’s likelihood of being sick, while still protecting public health; the mass slaughter was excessive, cruel, and irrational. Animal protectionists speculated that round-ups like this were really ordered only to assuage public hysteria and to create an impression of purposefulness and control. In reality, as the Żoliborz example showed animal protectionists, the round-ups were often frenzied, chaotic, and merciless. What was also troubling, protectionists said, was that the various individuals in charge of the action—the mayor, police officers, the dog catcher himself—had little or no training in humanitarianism or in animal health and were therefore ill-equipped to make sound determinations about dogs’ lives.

Animal protectionists felt quite differently about round-ups when they targeted nameless and ownerless street curs; seizing and euthanizing these dogs, according to protectionists, was logical and, indeed, a matter of public safety. After all, according to one report from 1938, there were an estimated 30,000 homeless dogs in Warsaw alone (in addition to 20,000 registered ones). Strays

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65 “Sprawa masowo tępionych psów na Żoliborzu,” 24.
66 “Sprawa masowo tępionych psów na Żoliborzu,” 24.
were the ones that covered a great deal of ground in short periods of time, were unsupervised, and were most likely to come into contact with rabid animals, just as Mandelski had suggested in the first article about rabies published in *World of Animals*. Notwithstanding protectionists’ assumptions about what ignorant human actions contributed to the stray dog population in the first place, they were generally willing to write off strays once they already existed. The problem, animal protectionists repeated, was that contemporary state-led responses to rabies threats muddled the distinction between basic dog types and intertwined the fates of good family dogs and strays; state-led contemporary responses to rabies thereby symbolically breached the distinction between social classes in Poland as well.

The dog catcher himself was a visible symbol of this breach when he entered a middle-class neighbourhood and ripped a lady’s lapdog from its home or filled his van with wailing purebreds. Animal protectionists described dog catchers as cruel brutes, as men who actually enjoyed beating dogs to death with clubs and poles, and who were able to resist the pleading cries of dogs and owners.69 Even though the rules governing dog catchers forbid causing animals “unnecessary pain,” shocked observers of mass dog cullings approached animal welfare groups with accounts of inhumane (and illegal) conduct by dog catchers.70 One resident of Rembertów, just outside of Warsaw, relayed to the Society for the Protection of Animals how officials there had hired a random local man to shoot on the spot all unleashed, unmuzzled, and untagged dogs in the late summer of 1930; a trained dog catcher who would round up the animals and transport them to an impound facility was regarded as “too expensive.” Scenes like this might be expected “in Bolshevik Russia, in uncultured countries,” the article about this in *Friend of Animals* stated, but was astonishing in a nation that “in terms of civilization and culture occupies one of the leading places, or at least should occupy one of these places.”71

Rumours also circulated in the animal welfare papers that dog catchers delivered dogs to much-loathed vivisectors, to men who were no less cruel than dog catchers, but who nevertheless operated under a cloak of professional respectability.72 Indeed, there was truth to such rumours. Though dog catchers did not themselves send dogs to vivisectors, the pound did; in the budget year 1934–1935, the Warsaw pound sent 163 dogs to educational institutions for

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70 “Zarządzenia i okólniki władz państwowych i samorządowych w sprawie ochrony zwierząt: Instrukcja (ramowa) dla rakarzy miejskich (gminnych),” 18.
“research purposes.” As such, in the modern era animal welfare campaigners saw themselves as needing to defend animals not just from the typical targets of their activism—the poor; working-class men; people in the countryside—but also from an increasingly activist state, and even from learned men of science.

Animal protectionists thus called for better oversight of all parts of the system that governed rabies; in their view existing policies were applied haphazardly and inconsistently, left too much to the discretion of minor local bureaucrats, and at times even violated the letter of Polish law. Members of the Society and the League positioned themselves as animal welfare watchdogs that would expose any egregious misinterpretations of the legislation and at the same time would educate the public and state administrators in the fundamentals of humanitarianism. Sometimes the state responded positively to protectionists’ appeals for improvement. In 1935, for example, the governor of Warsaw province, after back-and-forth communication with the League, issued a formal reminder to all regional mayors that the mass cullings of dogs needed to respect the principles of humane treatment outlined in the 1928 animal protection legislation; the governor warned that dog-catchers who acted in “inhumane” ways would be punished.

Animal protectionists would have preferred much more than such occasional small victories. Their specific goal was to be recognized as active and formal partners of the state in defining and executing rabies control strategies. A precedent for a partnership between animal protectionists and the state had already been set in a 1930 addendum to the general animal protection legislation passed in 1928. With this addendum the Minister of Internal Affairs appointed specific animal welfare groups to work alongside formal state bodies, including the police, to uncover and punish violations of the animal cruelty law. The Society for the Protection of Animals and the League for the Friends of Animals were among the ten organizations named by the government. But in terms of rabies management, no such formal co-operation existed, and animal welfare societies were not consulted during rabies outbreaks for advice or assistance.

In the absence of any official role in rabies management, the animal welfare groups pursued their lobbying and monitoring efforts while also maintaining a

73 “Psy w zakładzie utylizacyjnym,” 16.
74 Kean 95.
76 “O racjonalną walkę ze wścieklizną,” 2.
78 “O racjonalną walkę ze wścieklizną,” 2.
lively discussion in their newspapers about alternative rabies control strategies. The earliest alternative proposals were the most enduring ones as well. Protectionists generally favoured expanded quarantine programs and a case-by-case determination of dogs’ fates during rabies outbreaks. In the event of a declared rabies outbreak, the idea was, dogs who had been or may have been in the presence of known infected dogs would be quarantined rather than killed, and only those that had been bitten or scratched by rabid dogs, or those who went on to exhibit symptoms during the isolation period, would be killed; these kind of quarantine procedures were standard practice in Germany. In 1932 the League also mused about establishing its own alternative quarantine facility that would work co-operatively with the authorities and that would offer some of its spots for free so as to accommodate people of limited means. The Polish animal welfare agencies always struggled with finances, however, and there is no evidence that such ambitious and expensive plans (or any other specific alternative strategies) were ever pursued in earnest; the state evidently was also unwilling or unable to pay for such an idea. All that was left, then, was for animal protectionists to encourage their readers to follow the existing laws exactly; this, they said, was a dog’s best protection. To this end they reprinted relevant parts of legislation in their papers and also published notices put out by communities from across Poland notifying the population of a rabies outbreak and of a planned culling in a given region; this was all the fair warning they could give.

**Muzzling Madness**

As we have seen, animal protectionists focused most of their energy on dissecting and criticizing the state’s mass culling policies and on its round-up procedures. But they also scrutinized other elements of the state’s rabies management strategy. The requirement that dogs be muzzled when out in public was one such element. Muzzling was one of the main strategies used in formal rabies prevention since the mid-nineteenth century, when it was first introduced in England. In independent Poland muzzling was in place from the start of the interwar period and remained a requirement throughout the era. The idea behind muzzling was simple: a muzzled dog could not bite and therefore could not transmit the rabies virus to another animal or to a human.

But as one writer in a 1926 issue of *Friend of Animals* concluded, muzzling was a cruel practice, and muzzles themselves were nothing other than

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79 “O racjonalną walkę ze wścieklizną,” 2.
80 Matecki 93.
81 “O racjonalną walkę ze wścieklizną,” 2.
82 For example, see “Obwieszczenie,” Świat Zwierzęcy (June-July 1934): 11.
83 Swabe, “Folklore,” 321.
“instruments of torture.” In addition to causing dogs discomfort and raising their anxiety, muzzles inhibited breathing, prevented dogs from drinking water when they needed to, and ultimately led dogs to overheat. Muzzles were also a visible symbol of the control that the state exerted over dogs—and by extension people’s—lives. That supposedly good dog owners were required to muzzle their animals represented an affront to both them and their dogs. As animal welfarists pointed out, moreover, it was usually the well-cared-for dogs of law-abiding men and women that were muzzled in the first place, and yet these dogs were a low risk for rabies infection. Stray dogs or rural dogs, the most likely carriers of rabies, remained unmuzzled, and therefore muzzling regulations were not actually protecting public health. Here protectionists seemed to concede the obvious point that muzzles could in theory prevent bites and therefore could work to stop the spread of rabies. But, again, this would be the case only if muzzles were worn by high-risk dogs, which of course they were not. Given, too, that dogs were supposed to be leashed and registered—which the dogs of responsible owners most often were, protectionists claimed—the muzzling regulation was simply excessive.

For its part, Poland stayed the course with its existing rabies control strategies—muzzling, mass cullings, and round-ups—despite the various criticisms that animal protectionists articulated. As the state said, these methods, after all, were the standard in international rabies control. This was ultimately clear to animal protectionists as well, and they understood that there really were no other feasible ways to control the spread of rabies and to ensure public safety at the same time. Yet by the 1920s a completely new possibility for rabies prevention had, in fact, appeared on the horizon: vaccinations.

Prophylactic vaccination programs for dogs started to be implemented in different parts of the world in the early 1920s. Japan was a forerunner in this regard and in the course of 15 years had vaccinated almost two million dogs; rates of rabies infection there fell dramatically. In interwar Europe, preventative vaccination programs for animals were used (in conjunction with strategies like the ones employed in Poland) in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia (from 1928), Hungary, and, from 1925, Portugal. According to supporters of canine prophylactic vaccination, such programs represented the most rational solution

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88 Dr. W. Głowacka, “Sposoby zwalczania wścieklizny w różnych państwach,” Świat i Przyjaciel Zwierzę 2 (1937): 2; and Matecki 91. See also Matouch 69; and Lontai 121.
to the problem of rabies: either a dog was vaccinated and had immunity to the
disease, or it was not and therefore was always susceptible to rabies. One such
supporter was a veterinarian and rabies specialist from the Agricultural Institute
in Bydgoszcz named Dr. J. Wyrzykowski. In an article published in *World of
Animals* in 1934, Wyrzykowski urged Poland to do away with its reliance on
mass elimination strategies. The regular slaughter of thousands of dogs was both
“uneconomical and unethical,” Wyrzykowski said, and, at any rate, had not led
to a reduction in rates of rabies infection.89

Yet the prophylactic vaccination of dogs ultimately had few powerful
supporters in Poland. Reservations about vaccines as the basis for rabies
prevention were articulated by the Warsaw branch of the Pasteur Institute, for
example, which was the main scientific institution that researched rabies and
that also administered post-exposure vaccines to humans.90 Prophylactic
vaccinations were not mentioned explicitly in the 1927 rabies legislation, or in
the supplementary legislation for rabies control put out by the Ministry of
Agriculture in 1928. (But the 1928 legislation did explicitly forbid giving the
post-exposure vaccine to dogs, and to all other animals that may have come into
contact with a rabid animal; in other words, post-exposure vaccines that could
prevent rabies from developing were for humans only.91) Not even the animal
welfare agencies, which ran the occasional optimistic article about prophylactic
vaccines as a promising component of rabies prevention strategy, were willing
to push aggressively for a complete abandonment of existing practices and to
venture into the unknown. Polish critics of vaccinations said that they were too
expensive and difficult to manage, especially considering the large number of
strays and the challenge of maintaining accurate registration logs.92 More than
that, and taking into account that normally a few shots were required within
several days and that this process needed to be repeated every year, skeptics said
that ensuring compliance with the regimen would be impossible.93

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89 Wyrzykowski 3–4.
90 The Pasteur Institute had been established in 1886 by the prominent bacteriologist Odo
Bujwid (1857–1942) and operated throughout the interwar period. See “Streszczenie
in League of Nations Health Organization 155.
291–292. See also Z. Wachnik, “Historia wścieklizny,” in *Wścieklizna*, edited by Z.
Wachnik and M. Mazurkiewicz (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Rolnicze i Leśne,
92 Wyrzykowski 4.
93 Głowacka 2; and “Zwalczanie wścieklizny,” *Świat Zwierzęcy* 5–6 (May-June 1933): 3.
CONCLUSION

And yet ultimately it is vaccination programs that are credited with bringing rabies under control throughout continental Europe, Poland included, in the decade after World War II.\(^94\) Today rabies no longer occupies the same place in the public imagination as it once did and is considered a low public health threat on the continent. Worldwide, however, approximately 55,000 people still die every year from the disease. These deaths occur mostly in the developing world where state infrastructures and resources, or political will, are inadequate to deal with the problem. Dog bites continue to account for the vast majority of rabies deaths in humans.\(^95\)

So why should historians be interested in rabies policies—and animal protectionists’ responses to rabies policies—as they existed almost a century ago in a country on the eastern borders of Europe? The story of how interwar Polish animal protectionists framed the rabies problem provides us with a vivid example of the various tensions, possibilities, and ambiguities that define the period. The Second Republic began life by facing military threats and hostile neighbours, and throughout its twenty years of independence weathered serious political and social instability as well as economic uncertainty and ethnic conflict, all while dealing with the potentially crippling spiritual legacy of partition. This was not the most likely setting for the emergence of an animal welfare movement and for a rich discourse about human-animal interaction. And yet an impressive animal welfare movement did emerge in the Second Republic, and its members insisted on the importance of asking questions about how animals were being defined, and why, and what the implications of these definitions were for both human and non-human animals.

As we have seen, rabies provided protectionists with a particularly rich canvas for exploring human-animal relations and, ultimately, for probing the nature of human relations with other humans. Protectionists understood that rabies was a serious threat to public health and that effective rabies management required a co-ordinated and aggressive national strategy. The Polish state provided the legislation, the financial resources, the professional expertise, and the logistical framework that such a strategy demanded. But protectionists disliked aspects of the state’s policy. The men and women of Poland’s interwar animal welfare movement boldly challenged the state’s strategies for dealing with rabies. They urged the state to put what they called rational analysis above hysterical fear and to chart a more moderate and humane rabies control strategy, one that protected the great mass of society while simultaneously recognizing the protection of animals as an imperative of civilized nationhood. From their

\(^{94}\) Matouch 65–66; Matecki 91; and Wachnik 36.

\(^{95}\) Global Alliance for Rabies Control: <www.rabiescontrol.net> (Accessed 13 January 2012); and Wasik and Murphy 206.
perspective, the Polish state’s mass culling policies in particular represented an ugly and morally dubious dimension of modernity and scientific progress, and ultimately sullied Poland’s reputation as a civilized nation. In the tension that emerged between animal protectionists and the state we can read competing definitions of rationality, progress, and civilization—and ultimately of modernity itself.

At the same time, animal protectionists were very much people of their class, time, and place. Their analysis of the rabies problem reflected an urban middle-class condescension toward the poor and the working classes, and was in keeping with their general desire as animal welfare advocates to reform and enlighten certain kinds of people. Just as relations between humans were mediated by class and notions of civility and respectability, so were relations between humans and animals.

Lastly, studying a century-old debate about rabies can help us think about the way we talk about “new” zoonotic diseases, like Mad Cow or Avian influenza. Zoonotic diseases force us to reconsider the lines that separate human from non-human animals, and in doing so unsettle the very meaning of what it means to be human. At the same time they encourage us to interrogate who or what causes disease and to question the role that humans play in disease transmission. Lastly, they bring into sharp focus the ongoing tension that exists between an imperative to do everything possible to secure human health, on the one hand, and, on the other, to moderate this obligation with a commitment to some historically contingent definition of acceptable risk and animal welfare. As such, the study of zoonotic diseases exposes our own conflicted attitude toward non-human animals.

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96 Pemberton and Worboys 4.
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