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ARTICLES

Ritual slaughter and animal welfare in interwar Poland

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This article examines the ritual slaughter debates in the Polish Second Republic (1918 to 1939) from the perspective of the organized animal welfare movement, and argues that animal welfarists both supplied and reinforced antisemitic arguments for banning ritual slaughter; Poland partially banned the Jewish rite in 1936. Animal protectionists in Poland subscribed to the view that the level of civilization reached by a people was best measured by their attitudes towards animals, the most defenseless of living creatures; compassion and humanitarianism, they believed, were defining features of modern civility. Animal protectionists understood ritual slaughter to be unusually cruel, and as such they saw it as violating the imperatives of the modern and rational era. Given that Jews were the ones who practiced ritual slaughter, they in turn were described as a cruel anachronism that jeopardized animal protectionists’ goal of establishing Poland’s place in a civilized Europe.

Keywords: ritual slaughter; Polish Jews; interwar Poland; Polish antisemitism; animal welfare

Introduction

Ritual slaughter or kosher butchering – the slaughter of a fully conscious animal – has long been an important component of Jewish dietary laws as well as a defining feature of Jewish religious practice and observant Jewish identity. An animal slaughtered in the ritual way has its throat sliced in a single motion by a specially trained butcher using a knife designed for that purpose. The goal is to cause a quick death and to facilitate the best drainage of blood from the animal’s flesh, as Jews are forbidden from consuming blood. Criticism of this practice developed across Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, and campaigns to either ban completely or to limit ritual slaughter were spearheaded by members of newly formed animal welfare societies, who simultaneously scrutinized a wide variety of other animal-related practices. Christian opponents of ritual slaughter argued that exsanguinating a conscious animal was unusually cruel, and they advocated instead the practice of what they termed “humane slaughter” – that is, depriving an animal of consciousness by stunning it before initiating exsanguination.

The campaign against the Jewish rite became especially heated in the Second Polish Republic (1918 to 1939). Interwar Poland was home to the largest population of Jews in Europe (and the second largest in the world, after that in the United States), totaling some three million people, or between 8% and 10% of the total population. Unlike their counterparts in other countries, especially those in Western Europe, Polish Jews

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were largely unassimilated and lived alongside rather than with their ethnically Polish neighbors.\textsuperscript{3} Polish Jews, moreover, were subject to the authority of the kehillot, the Jewish self-governing institutions that regulated religious (and other) community affairs, and they were also particularly religiously conservative and observant. For these reasons ritual slaughter was commonly practiced in interwar Poland.

A number of studies have examined the ritual slaughter debates in the Second Republic and have shown that opposition to the practice, which peaked in the mid-1930s, was firmly rooted in antisemitism and was part of a broader assault on Jews’ position – not least of which was their economic position – in Polish society.\textsuperscript{4} This article does not challenge the basic conclusions of these works. It does extend their analyses, however, by focusing specifically on the content of the Polish animal welfare movement’s opposition to ritual slaughter. Doing so is important for several reasons.

First, members of Poland’s interwar animal protection societies were very active in advocating against kosher slaughter and presented passionate arguments against the practice, and yet we know very little about how these arguments were framed or why. Second, the language and spirit of animal welfare – of a collective moral obligation to identify cruelty and to mitigate animal suffering – permeate the ritual slaughter debates, both in Poland and elsewhere. Many of the arguments used against ritual slaughter from outside animal protection circles, including those for whom antisemitism was a primary motivation, invoked the ideas of animal welfare and capitalized on its perceived moral authority to frame their opposition to the Jewish rite. Animal welfare, in other words, was often used disingenuously by non-animal-welfarists to justify opposition to ritual slaughter.

Third, studying the animal welfare movement’s role in the ritual slaughter debates tells us about the movement itself, about its relationship to Polish society and about the ubiquity and reach of contemporary Polish antisemitism. Poland’s animal protectionists were motivated in their work by an apparently genuine love for animals, and they saw themselves as issuing forceful challenges to the status quo by asking people to think critically about the nature and extent of human obligation to non-human animals. Their movement did not exist to promote antisemitism or to eliminate Jews from Polish economic, social, political and cultural life. And yet, as we can see from animal protectionists’ roles in the ritual slaughter debates, they, too, instrumentalized antisemitism and embraced an exclusionary nationalism to win support for some of their ideas. Consciously or not, antisemitism shaped animal protectionists’ definitions of cruel and humane, painful and painless, backward and modern, irrational and rational. Ultimately, I argue, antisemitism formed an important component of the civilizing discourse that had become increasingly powerful since the nineteenth century. This civilizing discourse was at the heart of what animal protectionists promoted in this period and was reflected in wider societal discourses about the Jewish rite.\textsuperscript{5} Animal protectionists in Poland subscribed to the view that the level of civilization reached by a people was best measured by their attitudes towards animals, the most defenseless of living creatures; compassion, they believed, was a defining feature of modern civility.\textsuperscript{6} Civilized and modern societies were not supposed to be cruel, and because ritual slaughter was defined as cruel, it constituted an uncivilized practice. Given that Jews were the ones who performed ritual slaughter, they in turn were described as a cruel and uncivilized anachronism and as a threat to the national image that animal protectionists wished to project.\textsuperscript{7} Ritual slaughter thus jeopardized animal protectionists’ goal of establishing Poland’s place among modern, civilized
and rational countries and, protectionists feared, risked consigning Poland to the side-
lines of European culture.8

Lastly, we see in the ritual slaughter debates a powerful reversal of the well-known
antisemitic stereotype of Jews in this period as hypermodern, and of “Jewish modern-
ity” as threatening to Polish civilization. Through the ritual slaughter debates we
see that the stereotype of Jewish “liberal-bolshevism” coexisted with the no less
potent image of a “darkest Nalewki.” “Nalewki” referred to the main commercial and
residential street in the Jewish part of Warsaw and was often used by contempor-
aries to stand in for all of “Jewish Warsaw.” “Nalewki” evoked a foreign and crowded
other world – a ghetto of sorts – inhabited by a primitive, filthy, ugly, brutal and chaotic
mass.9 In the face of reason, Europe’s Oriental savages – the Ostjuden of Poland –
clung stubbornly to what protectionists regarded as antiquated rituals; the very word
“ritual” became a pejorative wielded by animal protectionists in interwar Poland to
evoke a past best repudiated.10 The ritual slaughter debates reinforced the view,
already present throughout large parts of society, that there was no room for these
kinds of Jews in “the culture of the future” that animal protectionists were trying to
build, and by implication that there was no room for Jews in Poland generally.11

Animal welfare meets ritual slaughter
Animal welfare movements emerged as part of a broader wave of social reform causes
that took root in the nineteenth century throughout Europe and America. Early animal
welfarists’ goals were to protect animals from wanton cruelty and, at the same time, to
shield society from what many assumed were the demoralizing social effects of witnes-
sing cruelty; animal welfare activism was seen as benefitting both animals and humans.
The emergence of animal welfare movements also reflected a changing view of animals
from mere automata to sentient beings; sentience, especially the capacity to suffer and
to feel pain, became the criterion that would ostensibly govern interaction between
people and animals into the twentieth century.12 In Poland as elsewhere in Europe at
this time, examples of activism on behalf of animals conformed to a welfare-based
rather than an abolitionist or “animal rights” approach, meaning that early protectionists
sought to minimize animal suffering rather than forbid entire categories of animal use.13
Poland’s animal protectionists believed that non-human creatures could and should be
used by people for various purposes as long as the animals were not made to suffer
“needlessly” in the process. (Though of course that definition was itself subject to
much debate.)

Mid-nineteenth-century animal protectionists identified livestock slaughter as one
area where animal suffering was potentially enormous and where, therefore, their
efforts would be most constructive. As urban populations expanded in the nineteenth
century, and as meat consumption rates increased, the meat trade became larger and
ever more lucrative. The slaughtering of livestock began moving away from small
and informal sites – sheds located near butchers’ commercial stalls – and increasingly
into larger and more centralized facilities – abattoirs located away from the city core –
that could produce more meat for more people. Animal welfarists everywhere, in
addition to veterinary professionals, public hygiene experts and other members of
the growing state bureaucracy, called for slaughterhouse reforms and better oversight
over what happened en route to and inside slaughterhouses.14

When animal welfarists pulled back the curtain on slaughterhouses they discovered
that some animals were stunned before exsanguination and that others were not, and it
was not only Jewish butchers who did not stun their animals first. The decision to stun before slaughter reflected butchers’ own preferences (and means, as some stunning mechanisms could be costly), and depended both on the size of animal that was being killed as well as on the type and scale of the butchering enterprise. Large animals like cows, for example, kicked violently at the moment of slaughter; stunning reduced the likelihood of injury to humans while it also arguably improved efficiency in the larger industrial slaughterhouse operations that emerged at this time. Stunning’s popularity increased for practical reasons, then, while it also found energetic advocates in animal protectionists eager to minimize animal suffering in the meat production process. By the twentieth century, protectionists argued that using the latest stunning technologies – specially designed mallets and metal bolts – to stun an animal into unconsciousness as soon as it entered the slaughterhouse reduced the animal’s fear and eliminated its ability to both anticipate and experience its own death; it was a rational and humane choice from both a functional and an ethical standpoint. Stunning before slaughter posed no particular problem for Christian butchers, whereas it presented a clear challenge to Jewish ones, who were religiously committed to slaughtering only conscious animals. Technological developments alone could not have propelled movements against ritual slaughter, however. Instead, these movements capitalized on and benefited from the growth of a new kind of antisemitism, one that was already shaping discourses on a variety of political, national and economic questions in the nineteenth century. The wider social receptivity to seeing Jews as a foreign and pernicious element, as an irredeemable “other,” gave the anti-ritual slaughter movement the traction it needed.

The precise timing of the debates about slaughter methods varied throughout Europe, but in each context the “discovery” of ritual slaughter sooner or later precipitated campaigns to either limit or to ban the practice altogether and to replace it with what protectionists called “rational slaughter” alternatives. Animal protectionists played a role in these campaigns everywhere they occurred, and in all contexts the debates about ritual slaughter engaged questions about the place of Jews in the given society. Instead of pursuing ritual slaughter through existing animal welfare legislation – which many countries passed in the twentieth century and which would have required showing that kosher slaughter clearly violated basic animal protections – legislators framed the bans more narrowly. Typically, legislation established the imperative to stun livestock animals before exsanguination, but did not name Jews or ritual slaughter explicitly, and thus, on the surface, the Jewish targets of the bans were invisible. Given that Jews were religiously instructed to slaughter only conscious animals, however, legislative imperatives to stun animals before slaughter in fact constituted an assault on Jewish practices specifically.

The legal requirement to stun animals before slaughter was passed in Switzerland in 1893 (kosher meat could still be imported), Finland in 1902 (with exemptions for Jews confirmed in 1903), Norway in 1929, Soviet Russia in 1931, Britain in 1933 (with exceptions for Jews and Muslims), Sweden in 1937, and in 1938 in both Hungary and Italy. In Germany there had been a very active debate about ritual slaughter since the late nineteenth century, and individual municipalities had imposed restrictions or bans on kosher slaughter as early as that time. But it was not until April 1933, just after the Nazis came to power, that a complete federal ban on ritual slaughter was passed; unlike some other European contexts, where arguments about religious freedom mitigated the extent of the bans, there were no exceptions in Nazi Germany to the prohibition, and the legislation also restricted the import of kosher meat.
In Poland a motion to prohibit ritual slaughter had been raised in the Polish Sejm in 1923, but it failed to gather momentum, and in 1928 there was another attempt – also unsuccessful – to limit ritual slaughter in Warsaw.\textsuperscript{24} It was not until 1936, with examples from Western Europe in full view and in a climate of increasing antisemitism and general economic insecurity, that stunning before slaughter became a legal requirement in Poland; the legislation permitted exceptions for reasons of religious ritual under certain specific conditions. Polish animal protectionists had formed an important voice in the campaign against ritual slaughter that culminated in the 1936 legislation.

There were two major animal welfare groups in interwar Poland along with several smaller ones. The Society for the Protection of Animals (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zwierząt) was the oldest, having started in the Russian partition in the 1860s. The League for the Friends of Animals (Polska Liga Przyjaciół Zwierząt) was formed in 1927 by breakaway members of the Society who, dissatisfied with what they called the Society’s “all talk and no action” attitude, felt that they could achieve more for animals in a separate organization.\textsuperscript{25} Though specific details about the groups’ members remain elusive, both tended to attract middle-class Christian men and women who lived in Poland’s large and small urban centers. Each was based in Warsaw and had branches throughout the country. In 1936 the Society and the League reconciled and formed a new joint body, the Union of Animal Welfare Societies in the Republic of Poland (Zjednoczenie Towarzystw Opieki nad Zwierzętami RP); membership was in the thousands on the eve of World War II. Each of these groups shared similar basic objectives – to protect animals from cruelty while at the same time inculcating what they called a “humanitarian ethic” in the newly independent Polish nation – and each worked to meet these goals through a variety of means: by maintaining a system of animal cruelty inspectors that patrolled streets in search of violations of Poland’s 1928 animal protection law (which animal welfarists had lobbied for); through charitable campaigns and educational efforts, aimed at youth in particular; by supporting animal shelters and hospitals; and by writing about various animal-related topics in the press of the day in an effort to increase awareness about animal welfare.\textsuperscript{26}

Each of the groups also maintained a newspaper during the interwar period, and it is from these that we can discern their public positions on a variety of topics, ritual slaughter included. The Society for the Protection of Animals published Friend of Animals (Przyjaciel Zwierząt) from 1918 to 1920 and then again from 1926 to 1931. The League for the Friends of Animals published World of Animals (Świat Zwierzący) from 1929 to 1937. The new Union of Animal Welfare Societies continued using World as its press organ, but changed the paper’s name to World and Friend of Animals (Świat i Przyjaciel Zwierząt) to reflect the new partnership between the Society and the League.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, the League for the Protection of Animals in Lwów, which had its start as a branch of the Society for the Protection of Animals before establishing itself as an independent entity, published In the Defense of Animals (W Obronie Zwierząt) from 1935 to 1939.\textsuperscript{28} The animal welfare press, which reached animal welfarists across Poland, was united in its opposition to ritual slaughter during the entirety of the interwar period.

Yet while it is important to recognize animal protectionists’ strong opposition to ritual slaughter – and to identify the antisemitism contained within it, as will be shown below – we must also understand that the question moved in and out of focus for them. Protectionists were not fixated on this one issue to the exclusion of others; banning ritual slaughter, in other words, was just one of the many goals animal protectionists set for themselves. A survey of the (in)frequency with which ritual slaughter
appeared in the animal welfare press supports this view. For example, articles about ritual slaughter turned up in Friend only in 1929 (and the paper folded in 1931, so before the explosion of interest in the topic in the mid 1930s).\(^{29}\) This timing was likely precipitated in part by the May 1929 meeting, in Vienna, of the International Congress for the Protection of Animals. The Congress brought together over 400 delegates from 170 animal welfare organizations around the world, Polish ones included. Participation in the Congress energized Polish animal protectionists, who wrote enthusiastically about the meeting in their newspapers. Most notably, Friend reported that the Congress delegates had voted unanimously in favour of a resolution to make slaughter without stunning illegal in all countries.\(^{30}\) It was after the Vienna meeting that Friend engaged in more concerted agitation against ritual slaughter; doing so brought Poland in line with broader trends in international animal welfare activism.

World of Animals had only just been established in 1929, right before the Vienna meeting, and during that year and throughout 1930 most issues of World included at least one article condemning ritual slaughter.\(^{31}\) World’s interest in ritual slaughter was moderate at best from 1931 through to 1934, and then rose once more in 1935, when the topic was making headlines in the general press and amassing support for the prohibition side. Issues of World are not available for 1936, the year that the Polish Sejm passed a partial ban on the ritual, though we can expect that the anti-kosher slaughter message of 1935 continued. Lastly, ritual slaughter was discussed regularly and condemned forcefully in In Defense of Animals. In Defense had started publication in 1935, in the midst of an already well-established campaign against ritual slaughter and at a time when antisemitism was being used regularly to structure arguments against the practise. Broad public opposition to ritual slaughter by this time presented animal protectionists with an opportunity to align their movement with the mainstream, to thereby “normalize” it and attract supporters to the wider animal welfare cause. The public, which had never shown all that much sustained interest in animal welfare, finally seemed to be paying attention to a topic that, for better or worse, had been framed as an “animal welfare issue.” The animal welfare press capitalized on this momentum.

A bloody spectacle

Even while Polish animal welfarists distributed their energies across a wide range of issues, they were acutely conscious of the fact that Poland existed at the epicentre of Europe’s ritual slaughter “problem” given that the number of ritually slaughtered animals in the country was especially high. This granted Poland the dubious distinction of being at odds with “the civilized West,” as animal protectionists repeated time and again, which in turn threatened Poland’s reputation internationally.\(^{32}\) What was at stake, therefore, was not just the fates of those animals destined for ritual slaughter. Polish animal welfarists cast their opposition to the practice in terms of a battle of cultures and a struggle for civilization over “the grim barbarism of the East” – an “East” typified by Polish Jews, the Ostjuden, and their foreign practices.\(^{33}\) The President of the League for the Friends of Animals, Romuald Mandelski, denounced ritual slaughter in a 1929 article in World with the provocative phrase “barbarous murder.” He explained that the practice was “inconsistent with the spirit of the times and the state of culture” and that,

In reborn Poland, which has produced such a humanitarian law for the protection of animals [the 1928 animal protection law] there should be no place for the murder of
animals in the name of rituals that were commanded a thousand years ago … and which today are considered obsolete by all civilized peoples and considered unnecessary even by the enlightened portion of the Mosaic faith.34

For Mandelski the free practice of ritual slaughter undermined the successes that Poles had achieved in the field of humanitarianism and threatened Poland’s position in an imagined hierarchy of civilized European nations.35 This was troubling for a state that had only just been formed in 1918 and that was eager to prove its worth as an independent nation.

This sentiment was echoed by prominent animal welfare activist Janina Maszewska-Knappe. Maszewska-Knappe was the leader of the League’s Committee against Ritual Slaughter, editor of the League’s World of Animals in the early 1930s and a prolific writer on a variety of animal-related topics. At the start of 1936, during the height of the wider campaign against ritual slaughter, she published The Battle against Ritual Slaughter in Europe. This book is typical in its definition of ritual slaughter as unmitigated animal cruelty and in its dire prediction that the continued toleration of the Jewish rite in Poland threatened to place, as she warned, “a stain on the cultural worth” of the nation. Throughout the book Maszewska-Knappe advocates for the immediate abolition of ritual slaughter. But what is unusual is Maszewska-Knappe’s own professed preference for vegetarianism; few of Poland’s leading animal welfarists were vegetarians.36 Maszewska-Knappe in fact began her book with visions of a meat-free future, a future in which both the ethical and the health-related problems of meat consumption were finally widely understood. But at the same time she recognized that this “rational” future was a long way off, and in the meantime, Maszewska-Knappe argued, society had a collective responsibility to ensure that livestock animals were slaughtered in as humane a manner as possible. Quite simply, Maszewska-Knappe stated, an individual (and nations) could not be regarded as “cultured and ethical” without fulfilling this most basic “moral obligation” to animals.37

Animal protectionists were frustrated by what they saw as Polish Jews’ uncompromising defense of ritual slaughter but hardly surprised by it, given that, as they believed, Jews were generally indifferent to the welfare of animals. “The worst demoralizer of the population and the cruelest in terms of animals,” one contributor to World and Friend of Animals stated plainly, “are the Jews.” Jews possess “an absolute lack of compassion” and “a cruel disposition toward animals,” and they set for “us,” Christian Poles who are “by nature rather gentle and humanitarian,” a bad example; Jews “inculcate cruelty in our nation.”38 Jews were urban creatures well known for their aversion to the very animals that ethnic Poles adored, particularly dogs and horses.39 Poland’s Christian animal protectionists saw an important part of their work as mitigating the effects of Jews’ presence in Poland and promoting a “rational, cultured, and what’s more – Christian – attitude to animals.”40 One needed to look no further than St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals who graced the front cover of a 1931 issue of Friend, to understand the vital role that compassion towards animals played in Christianity, protectionists said.41 In their analyses of ritual slaughter animal protectionists reached for powerful discourses, familiar in Europe since the Enlightenment, that invoked Christianity and “the civilized West” as their intellectual and moral heritage, and used it in contrast to the supposed barbarism of Jews and Judaism.42 The inescapable conclusion was that Jews were an impediment to improving animal welfare and to securing Poland’s status as a civilized nation.43
“Typical” Jewish brutality was reflected, for example, in a couple of anecdotes supplied to the animal welfare press by a Christian butcher, someone readers would have recognized as an authority on livestock slaughter (and as one whose livelihood was jeopardized by the very existence of a ritual slaughter industry). The first described the butcher’s incredulity at witnessing a Jewish man beating and kicking his exhausted cow as he walked it to a slaughter facility. In an act of completely senseless cruelty, the butcher wrote in World, the Jew “twisted [the cow’s] tail until it broke.” When the animal could bear the pain no longer it fell down. But still “the Jew” hoped that he could trigger the animal’s mobility by employing even more violence and “thereby avoid the costs of a wagon.”

Poland’s Christian middle-class animal protectionists generally explained other similar instances of animal cruelty – the beating of work horses or the tormenting of street dogs – by invoking what they assumed was the innate brutality of peasant and working-class cultures. Jews were not generally singled out in the animal welfare press for particular animal cruelty – except when it came to slaughtering. On this question, Jewishness, and the inherent cruelty that was assumed to be a fundamental part of Jewish identity, became the most powerful explanation for Jews’ perceived actions, and by implication for Jews’ generally pernicious effect on Polish society. Jews were not accorded differentiated spots on the class hierarchy but were instead treated as a homogenous group, all the members of which were or had the potential to be brutal.

In a second example the butcher described a different Jewish man throwing a living calf onto a wagon that was still bloody from the flesh that it had earlier been used to transport. When the wagon arrived at its destination, the butcher described the Jewish man hurling the calf into “a cold and empty stall.” There it waited for “a day or two” without food and water before being picked up by a livestock dealer, another Jewish man, who heaved it roughly onto a different wagon that was already filled to over-capacity with calves. It was only a Żydzisko, the butcher recorded, using a pejorative form of the word “Jew,” who could make a “comfortable” seat for himself on top of the mass of brutalized animals: “His conscience does not bother him that he acts like this… This inhumane conduct freezes the blood in the veins.” The final stop was the slaughterhouse, where the animal suffered further cruelties that the author left to his readers’ ready imaginations, imaginations that were already accustomed to thinking about Jews as practicing secret rituals and undertaking nefarious activities against innocents.

These anecdotes subtly suggested to readers of the animal welfare press that if they really wanted to understand what happened inside the slaughterhouse, they first had to appreciate how brutally Jews generally treated animals outside the slaughterhouse. By placing ritual slaughter at the far end of a continuum of cruelty perpetrated by Jews against animals, the practice became further evidence of Jews’ pathologically cruel nature. In the process ritual slaughter was stripped of its status as a sacred religious practice and a constitutionally protected religious freedom. The term “ritual slaughter,” in other words, evolved into an evocative shorthand for describing a whole set of Jewish attitudes towards animals, attitudes that in turn were taken to explain Jewish approaches to civilization, modernity and humanity.

It was of course inside the slaughterhouse, however, that the contrast between the civilized and the primitive – between Catholicism and Judaism – was drawn most clearly. A petition against ritual slaughter sent by the Lwów Society for the Protection of Animals to various government bodies in 1936 described what happened once an already-tormented animal reached the site of Jewish slaughter:
The animal is led into the hall, where the floor is flooded with blood and where its companions in misfortune, tied up with chords, wail, roar and wheeze in slow agony. When an animal’s turn finally comes they tie together its legs, flip it brutally on its side and slice its throat, after which begins a many-minute-long exhausting exsanguination. Sometimes the animal is still alive when they strip off its skin.

This example worked to arouse readers’ revulsion because it relied on a shared assumption that Christian slaughter did not look like this, that Christian slaughter was orderly, humane and fast. Moreover, in suggesting that Jewish butchers were (uniquely) unconcerned with confirming death before skinning an animal, such descriptions raised the specter of the dangerous and bloodthirsty Jew who might conceivably do to humans what he was already known to do to animals. The description also functioned to muddle the definition of where “ritual slaughter” began and ended; apparently the cruelty and indignity associated with kosher slaughter started well before the ritual cut and continued even after the cut had been made. Was ritual slaughter, then, really about a better method of killing and then bleeding an animal? Or was it merely an excuse for Jews to exercise an innate viciousness towards animals?

While Jewish slaughterhouse workers were unusually pitiless, according to animal protectionists, it was the character of the ritual butcher (shohet) himself – a man who was “always brutal,” according to League President Mandelski – that made ritual slaughter particularly savage. Shohetim were portrayed as incompetent and unprofessional, as men who were sometimes not even trained in slaughter and, as a result, frequently made the ritual cut in the wrong place or used too dull a knife, therefore prolonging the agony of their animal victims. The ritual slaughterers formed a class of men who had long ago forfeited claims to humanity, according to another contributor to World. They slit animals’ throats “with sadistic slowness,” we read, and maintained “cold, cruel perverted faces” while managing to remain immune to their bovine victims’ “frightened, hopeless and pleading eyes.” Once the killing started, the air of the slaughterhouse quickly became filled with the wheezing sounds of dying animals, with the fumes of hot water mixed with warm blood, as well as with the “incessant szwargot” (Yiddish “jargon”) and the “wild shouts and profanities . . . worthy of the stone age of ape-humans who indulge in this bloody orgy.” Jewish masculinity – and by extension the whole of Jewish society that collectively sanctioned the rite – was portrayed as primitive and deviant, as a threat to Poland’s animals and, ultimately, to Poland itself.

The perceived threat resonated all the more forcefully because ritual slaughter recalled the medieval myth of ritual murder. The blood libel legend held that Jews killed unsuspecting Christian children and used their blood to make unleavened Passover bread. This legend resurfaced in Europe in the late nineteenth century as a new breed of aggressive antisemitism gained ground, and it became useful to antisemites and opponents of ritual slaughter alike – who were often one and the same – who wished to show Jews as a cannibalistic people and Judaism as a religion obsessed with blood and blood rituals. The perceived focus on exsanguination in ritual slaughter confirmed for critics Jews’ obsession with blood; we have the reference to “bloody orgy” above, for example, and Janina Maszewska-Knappe repeated frequently in her writings that Jews in modern-day Poland were stubbornly attached to their “cult of blood” and their “bloody sacrifices.” As Jolanta Żyndul shows in Blood Lie, there were no allegations of ritual murder in interwar Poland. But the general pattern of ritual murder accusations was reproduced obliquely in the discourses about ritual
slaughter, with children replaced by innocent animals; in both scenarios it was the bloodthirsty knife-wielding Jew who threatened the innocents. Moreover, it was not uncommon for critics to describe ritual slaughter as “ritual murder” or simply as “murder,” as League President Mandelski did when he used the phrase “barbarous murder.” Others routinely described ritually slaughtered animals as being “tortured” and “attacked.” Even at the International Congress for the Protection of Animals that had met in Vienna in May of 1929, a rabbi’s defense of ritual slaughter was met with shouts from the crowd of “Down with the murderous rabbi.” This association of Jews with the worst kind of criminality – with murder – was made in earlier periods as well and appeared in such infamous cases as the Jack the Ripper murders in London in 1888. Suspicion there about the brutal murders of prostitutes at one point fell on a Jewish ritual slaughterer, described in the press of the period as a caricature of the “Eastern Jew,” a swarthy sexual maniac who applied his skill in butchering livestock to the butchering of women.

In their defense of ritual slaughter Jews in Poland and elsewhere rejected the sharp contrast that critics drew between so-called humane slaughter and kosher slaughter, and countered that ritual slaughter was in fact less rather than more painful for an animal stunned – often improperly and only partially – before slaughter. Animals slaughtered in the ritual way, they said, lost consciousness very quickly – within seconds and not minutes as detractors liked to claim – and therefore the question of cruelty that animal protectionists raised was a red herring. They called on their own veterinary experts to support this position, especially to confirm that the convulsions that ritually slaughtered animals sometimes exhibited – and which critics took as evidence of distress – were merely reflex motions and did not prove either consciousness or agony. Poland’s animal welfare press did occasionally publish Jewish defenses of ritual slaughter (usually in the form of excerpts from or reviews of books) that outlined these and other similar arguments. But such attempted defenses were routinely dismissed by animal protectionists, and there was no real effort in their press organs to present a genuine debate about the question. This led Jews in turn to accuse the animal welfarists of antisemitism and of hiding behind humanitarian arguments. They added, too, that real humanitarianism was inconsistent with promoting hatred towards another group, and was not selective in the animal welfare causes it supported. (It is worth noting, however, that animal protectionists were commonly criticized in this period for caring more about animal suffering than they did for human suffering, and for generally being selective and hypocritical in the specific causes they adopted. Thus animal protectionists were disparaged for eating meat, for example, or for wearing feathers and furs, and for hunting.)

In addition to the ethical reasons Jews had for preventing unnecessary animal suffering there were also practical reasons: an animal hurt in preparation for the ritual cut, during shackling and casting (which restricted animals’ movement before and during slaughter), would be considered treyf – not kosher – and therefore not appropriate for Jewish consumption; that stunning was understood as wounding an animal formed one of the bases of the argument against stunning in the first place. Jewish supporters of ritual slaughter reiterated, too, that the ritual butchers underwent extensive professional training in the butchering of animals and in Judaism more generally. They were licensed to perform the work they did, and, far from being men of ill repute, were respected members of their communities who worked under the close supervision of a rabbi. Ritual butchers were appointed by and responsible to the kehilla, which also paid them a salary. And salaries were not contingent on the ratio of slaughtered animals
to kosher meat produced. This was done so as to keep the shohet incorruptible and to ensure that animal flesh that did not meet the definition of kosher (because the animals was found to be sick) was not in fact approved for consumption.70

Jews suggested, too, that the personal intimacy between animal and slaughterer which was evident in the rite confirmed Jews’ humanitarianism rather than violated it, as critics charged. And yet it was this intimacy – the supposed closeness between man and animal at the point of death – which further challenged emerging definitions of civilization. According to Norbert Elias, civilization advances when our collective distance from killing – defined not necessarily as the act of depriving an animal of life but as our attitudes towards that act – increases; the more that killing and death disturb us, the higher our civilization becomes. Ritual slaughter disrupted this assumption.71 In slicing the throat of a fully conscious animal, protectionists said, and in elevating slaughter into a formal ceremony, the Jewish ritual butcher – and by extension all Jews – rejected the imperative of civilized modernity to enforce a modicum of distance from death.

Situated at the centre of these debates was of course the defining act of what protectionists called humane slaughter: stunning. Protectionists operated on the assumption that all stunning was “good,” or at least better than no stunning at all, and despite evidence to the contrary they perpetuated the notion that “all” Christians stunned livestock. Yet even into the interwar period Christian butchers (both those working in centralized slaughterhouses and those providing meat for their own personal needs) sometimes chose to forgo stunning, especially when it came to smaller animals like pigs, sheep and fowl. And in some parts of Poland there was a continued belief that pigs bled better, and their meat was tastier, if the animal was killed with a stab to the heart. Indeed, pig slaughter was rarely discussed in the animal welfare press; it was of course only Christians who consumed pig flesh, as Jews were forbidden from eating animals, like pigs, that were not ruminants.72

There is also very little sustained analysis of what so-called humane stunning actually looked like in practice. One preferred method still in use in interwar Poland, for example, involved plunging a poleaxe into an immobilized animal’s skull to thereby destroy brain tissue before beginning exsanguination. Another was simply to pound an animal over the head with a sledgehammer to render it unconscious.73 Jews argued that these methods of stunning were themselves cruel, and added that botched stunning attempts meant that several blows to the head were needed in order to render the animal fully unconscious.74 Indeed, similar criticisms of stunning had long been made by slaughterhouse reformers throughout Europe. A formal study by British slaughterhouse inspectors in the late nineteenth century, for instance, showed that the first blow to the head was often insufficient to stun (especially large) animals. This happened for many reasons: because the animal was improperly immobilized and therefore moved before the initial strike; or because the first blow was made with insufficient force or in the wrong spot, sometimes penetrating the eye or the side of the head rather than the brain; or because the stunning equipment or the man operating it was simply not up to the task at hand.75

Acknowledging that stunning methods could be improved did not, however, temper criticisms of ritual slaughter, which were too saturated by antisemitism to be easily dislodged. What this acknowledgement did instead was cause animal protectionists to advocate for better stunning tools.76 Animal protectionists assumed that any problems with stunning, and by extension with humane slaughter, were fixable through scientific research into animal physiology and the development of new technologies.77
twentieth century, new stunning devices had come onto the market and, from protectionists’ perspective, answered critics’ concerns. Slaughter masks and helmets, for example, which directed a bolt or a bullet to penetrate the brain in just the right spot, were celebrated for their reliability. Similarly, the English-made “humane killer” was described as “never missing,” meaning that striking the animal’s head only once was supposedly sufficient.78 “Radical,” produced by the Polish firm S. Nakulski, was also greeted enthusiastically when it came out in the mid 1930s; Radical drove a spike into the animal’s skull and then retreated back into itself automatically, destroying the brain in the process and producing the desired “unconsciousness.”79

By the twentieth century technological developments in the stunning field – and Jews’ continued refusal to adopt them – in turn fed antisemitic stereotypes of Polish Jews as stubbornly resistant to progress and science (with the stereotype of the evil and modern Jewish vivisector offering an interesting contradiction). Polish Jews were singled out as unusually backward in comparison not just with their Christian neighbors, but also with their co-religionists in other places, who according to the animal welfare press did permit certain forms of stunning (like electrical stunning) in ritual slaughter.80 This had the effect of widening further the gulf between Polish Jews and Jews in other countries, but, more importantly for the Polish debates, it separated Polish Jews from the Polish Christian collective to an even greater degree; social integration was neither possible nor, increasingly, desirable.

What reinforced Polish Jews’ apparent backwardness further still was their refusal to acknowledge what critics said were the health risks associated with ritual slaughter. An interest in the relationship between food and health echoed a growing awareness of the hygiene of food preparation and consumption generally – especially meat consumption – in this period. It also reflected a growing interest in public health more broadly, with popular discourses commonly drawing parallels between the state of the human and the national body.81 For animal welfarists no less than for the general public (Polish and Jewish), meat served as a powerfully resonant reflection of culture, status and power; meat and the national dishes made with meat were both nutritionally and nationally significant. This is in part what made the ritual slaughter debates so significant and polarizing in the first place. The proposed ban on ritual slaughter threatened religion and culture in obvious ways, but on a more symbolic level it also endangered the very existence of the Jewish population in Poland by jeopardizing its access to a vital nutritional source.82

Opponents of ritual slaughter both from within and outside animal welfare circles argued that the health risks associated with ritual slaughter were far greater than with meat procured through so-called humane slaughter. The Bydgoszcz branch of the Society for the Protection of Animals, for example, went so far as to warn that animals killed in the ritual way released “poisonous toxins.”83 And the animal welfare press capitalized on the antisemitic stereotype of a “dirty Jew” when it described the shohet wetting his knife with his own saliva before running it across the animal’s throat, thereby apparently transferring whatever germs he may have carried (and he was assumed to carry an abundance) to the flesh of the animal that would be consumed by hundreds.84 Jews argued in response that because the shohet’s duties included performing a ritual examination of the carcass after slaughter to look for anomalies and signs of illness, ritual slaughter was in fact more hygienic and rational – more “modern” – than the alternatives, and as a result functioned to protect public health. They made the argument as well that meat well drained of blood reduced the risk of disease transmission, while it spoiled less quickly, too, making it a safer choice all around.85
Steak, religion and humanitarianism

The health and hygiene arguments were especially powerful ones for opponents of ritual slaughter to use because of the reality that Christians throughout Poland ate beef slaughtered in the ritual way. This was particularly true in cities that had sizeable Jewish populations, like Warsaw did with its several hundred thousand Jewish inhabitants. Warsaw’s beef industry was Poland’s largest and was dominated by Jews, and so Christians ate kosher beef even when there was no religious imperative for them, as Christians, to do so. But many ethnic Poles were ignorant of this reality, and this ignorance in turn supported the stereotype of Jews as a devious and corrupting influence on the Polish national body. As Wanda Melcer, a Polish journalist and vocal opponent of ritual slaughter, wrote in her 1936 book "Black Continent – Warsaw:

Ritual slaughter? InWarsaw there is no other kind of slaughter. Yes, this must be repeated once again: in Warsaw there is no other kind of slaughter. All of us, that includes Christians and Jews, lovers of animals and those who don’t care about such things, pious ladies, nuns in convents, children in nursery schools, in one word – everyone eats meat of animals that die in agony, meat of animals that were cut by a bearded butcher whispering over them ritual spells, meat full of magical properties.

Melcer’s depiction of ritual slaughter was part of a wider assault on what she described as the parochialism of Warsaw Jewry generally and formed part of a broader discourse about whether and how Poland’s Jews should “modernize.” For Melcer as for many of her contemporaries ritual slaughter was a resonant example of what was “wrong” with Polish Jews and with the relationship between Jews and Christians in Poland. As Melcer implied, by purchasing and ingesting Jewish meat Polish Christians exposed themselves to the Jewish supernatural, and risked being polluted by “Jewishness.” Here Melcer drew on the relatively new form of racial antisemitism that saw Jews as biological agents of pollution in Christian communities, all the more dangerous in this case because of how unexpected the method of delivery was and how ubiquitous the source of the poisoning.

From a practical standpoint the Jewish dominance of the beef trade in Warsaw made sense given that Christians could consume animals slaughtered in the ritual way but Jews could not eat meat produced by Christian slaughter. But from an animal welfare standpoint this meant that the number of animals slaughtered in the ritual way was much higher than was needed to serve the observant Jewish population. It meant, too, that Christians were morally implicated in the pain that they believed ritual slaughter caused animals. It was for these reasons that League President Mandelski said that interest in ritual slaughter by “our society” – by which he meant ethnic Poles – needed to remain high. Throughout the ritual slaughter debates in interwar Poland the League called on all members of “healthy-thinking society” to demand that so-called humane slaughter methods be adopted for Christians and by Christians; only this would break “the Jewish monopoly” on slaughter and stop the implicit Jewish pollution of Polish society.

The fact that Jews dominated cow slaughter in Warsaw also underscored the vitally important economic aspects of the whole slaughter question. Ever since debates about slaughter first emerged in the nineteenth century, critics in all contexts pointed to what they said were the financial gains that Jews derived from the practice of kosher slaughter. In Poland critics argued that the Jewish monopoly of the meat trade deprived Christian Poles of employment in that field and yielded unfair economic benefits for
the Jewish kehillot, which collected taxes from animal slaughter and used the money to finance various community services.\textsuperscript{94} Such arguments became particularly pronounced after the death of leader Joseph Pilsudski in 1935 and the transformation of his so-called Sanacja political grouping into what would eventually be called the Camp of National Unity, or OZN. In a marked departure from the Sanacja under Piłsudski, the OZN proved willing to accommodate right-nationalism and antisemitism in the later 1930s, and openly advocated Christian discrimination against Jews in the economic realm. This strategy is often encapsulated in the words of Prime Minister Sławoj-Składkowski from July 4, 1936: “Economic struggle – yes! But no [physical] harm.”\textsuperscript{95} The Polish government encouraged Christians to boycott Jewish businesses, and it defended this action as part of a Christian self-defense strategy, a patriotic form of discrimination against Jews that would lead to Polish economic independence in “their own” country; designed in part to take support from the political right, this approach resonated well with people trapped in difficult economic circumstances.\textsuperscript{96}

The Polish Catholic Church reinforced these economic arguments against ritual slaughter. The infamous antisemite Father Stanisław Trzeciak was the author of a 1935 book entitled \textit{Ritual Slaughter in Light of the Bible and the Talmud}, and was a self-proclaimed “authority on the Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{97} Trzeciak advocated aggressively against ritual slaughter in the media and, much to the chagrin of Jews, was called by the government to provide expert testimony about ritual slaughter to parliamentarians considering the proposed ban in 1936. He was also an “expert voice” featured in the animal welfare press.\textsuperscript{98} Trzeciak’s opinion, typical of extreme opponents of ritual slaughter, was that the Hebrew Bible never prescribed the practice; here again, in demoting ritual slaughter from a religious requirement to a mere custom, “a cruel superstition,” as one writer in \textit{In the Defense of Animals} described it, the effect was to suggest that the rite was not one of the religious freedoms protected by the Polish constitution.\textsuperscript{99} Trzeciak’s position was that Jews only maintained the fiction about ritual slaughter being a religious rite because “payment for ritual slaughter is extremely high.”\textsuperscript{100} Given that all beef-eaters in Warsaw ate beef that had been slaughtered in the ritual way, the argument ran, and given that the fees for kosher slaughter were reflected in the price of meat, effectively “the whole population of Poland” paid a tax that benefited “only one religious group,” one that comprised just 10% of the population.\textsuperscript{101} The League’s Maszewska-Knappe concurred that ritual slaughter was defended so fiercely by Jews because their communities’ material well-being depended on its continued practice.\textsuperscript{102} The stereotype of Jewish greed joined cultural backwardness to explain the Jewish oppression of animals and the stubborn persistence of ritual slaughter.

Complicating the economic argument further was that Jews preferred to eat only the forequarters of the slaughtered animal, which was the part best drained of blood. The hindquarters, which were bloodier and included tougher muscles, constituted the “leftovers” of ritual slaughter and were sold to Christians. Polish Christian tastes had over time grown to prefer cuts of meat that came from the hindquarters of the animal, and so Poles bought up these cuts of back-end meat quite willingly.\textsuperscript{103} According to Samuel Hirszhorn of the prominent Polish-language Jewish (and pro-Zionist) daily \textit{Our Review (Nasz Przegląd)}, this constituted “complimentary consumption.”\textsuperscript{104} But the animal welfare press, along with the wider press opposed to ritual slaughter, was critical of this arrangement and took it as evidence of Poles’ complicity in ritual slaughter; it was in large part because Poles were willingly to eat Jewish leftovers that the kosher meat industry remained economically viable. This had to change. As one contributor to \textit{World of Animals} noted, Christian housewives needed to be re-educated to
demand front-end cuts of meat.\textsuperscript{105} In a flyer put out by the Bydgoszcz branch of the Society for the Protection of Animals and addressed to “Christian Citizens!” Poland’s Christian women were encouraged to cook with meat from the forequarters so as to realize the “solid front” of Christianity against Judaism which was required to defeat ritual slaughter. If Christians could eat the whole animal, and not just the hindquarters, so-called humane slaughter, dominated by Christians, could compete against Jewish butchers and would eventually defeat what the Bydgoszcz branch called the ritual slaughter industry’s stranglehold on the Polish economy.\textsuperscript{106}

Moreover, if Jews could be made to eat the whole slaughtered animal, a smaller total number of animals would need to be killed in the ritual way. But the implication was that Jews resisted this change so as to dominate the whole meat trade and to thereby maximize their profits. Some critics also charged Jews with artificially lowering the cost of meat from the forequarters (which Jews ate) and inflating the costs of the hindquarter meat (which Christians ate). As a result, Christians apparently overpaid for their meat, and this became all the more objectionable during tough economic times, when the poor were often unable to afford any meat at all.\textsuperscript{107} Jewish defenders of ritual slaughter argued the opposite: that Jews were willing to pay high prices for the only kind of meat that they would eat, and that hindquarter meat, because it was not sellable to the Jewish population, was sold to Christians for a lower price as the leftovers from kosher slaughtering; \textit{Our Review} estimated that Jews paid between 10\% and 40\% more per kilogram of kosher frontquarter meat.\textsuperscript{108} And even if and when opponents of ritual slaughter accepted that non-kosher hindquarter meat was less expensive than kosher frontquarter meat, they nevertheless still argued that Christian slaughterers were adversely affected because they could not compete with the low prices that kosher slaughterers charged for hindquarter meat!\textsuperscript{109}

The Polish partial ban on ritual slaughter, 1936

By the mid-1930s opposition to ritual slaughter was fierce, both inside Poland and outside its borders; most of Poland’s neighbors had already passed partial or total restrictions on ritual slaughter by the time Polish parliamentarians began debating the question in 1936. Animal protectionists’ role in shaping this opposition came about in a variety of ways. Protectionists used their own newspapers, directed at members of the animal welfare movement, to condemn ritual slaughter, and they also occasionally contributed articles to the general press. They conducted ongoing outreach campaigns and they lobbied the government. Perhaps most importantly, they supplied humanitarian arguments and language for antisemites to use in their own condemnations of the Jewish rite, and in the process they handed these opponents a cloak of legitimacy and respectability. It would be a stretch to say that Polish animal welfarists drove the campaign against ritual slaughter, however; they were neither strong nor big enough to do so and did not have that kind of influence.

Sejm Deputy Janina Prystorowa possessed the kind of influence that animal protectionists lacked to move this issue into the Polish Sejm. Prystorowa hailed from the heart of the ruling party’s ranks; she was married to Aleksander Prystor, prime minister of Poland in the early 1930s, and from 1935 to 1938 the marshal of the Senate. On February 7, 1936 she introduced a bill that stipulated that animals should be stunned before slaughter. Given that Jewish law expressly forbade rendering animals unconscious before slaughter, Prystorowa’s proposed law effectively called for a ban on ritual
slaughter in Poland, though, typical of such legislation, the text did not refer to Jews specifically or name ritual slaughter.\footnote{110}

When the bill was introduced, ritual slaughter was already a highly charged topic, but with the proposed legislative ban media attention exploded, and public opinion was weighted in favour of prohibition.\footnote{111} The most contentious question was whether the proposal evolved primarily from antisemitic motives, as Jews argued it did. Given the numerous socio-economic challenges that confronted Poland’s citizens at this time, Jews argued, Prystorowa’s special concern about slaughter animals was difficult to understand. For her part, Prystorowa repeated emphatically that her reasons for introducing the bill were in fact humanitarian as well as economic; she denied that antisemitism had anything at all to do with it. It was a matter instead, she said, of minimizing animal suffering, of breaking the Jewish monopoly on slaughter and of following the West European lead and protecting Poland’s status as a civilized nation.\footnote{112}

The animal welfare press dismissed charges of antisemitism as well, and on the pages of their newspapers celebrated those Jews – usually from Germany or Austria, where there was a comparatively small Jewish population that was far more assimilated into the dominant culture – who argued that ritual slaughter should be abandoned in favour of “humane slaughter.”\footnote{113} Protectionists (and those supporting the ban generally) were especially eager to highlight (West European) rabbis’ flexibility on the stunning prohibition; doing so, they believed, undermined arguments about the essentially religious character of the rite. This distinction for protectionists between Jews in “the West,” who were seen as accommodating and reasonable in their approach to ritual slaughter, and Jews in Poland, who were seen as fanatical and uncompromising, was an important part of the debates. Polish Jews needed to emulate their co-religionists in the West and work to “overcome” this part of their Jewishness. As one writer for \textit{In The Defense of Animals} stated clearly, “Given that the civilized, cultured Jewish world [in Western Europe] has agreed to the ban on ritual slaughter, the entirety of Jews in Poland must reconcile themselves to this as well.”\footnote{114}

Maszewska-Knappe took up the charge of antisemitism directly in her 1936 book on ritual slaughter. She admitted to an “aversion” to Jews over all geographic areas and throughout all times, but she explained that this reflected Jews’ own unwillingness to integrate, their “irrational” resistance to change and, generally, the “backwardness of their religion,” a religion that carried “the dark stain of superstition and rituals.” Unless this changed, Maszewska-Knappe offered, Jews would remain “an open sore on the organism of all nations.”\footnote{115} In other words, Jews were themselves to blame for whatever antisemitism might exist, and, as the ritual slaughter question showed, the causes of this were located in Jews’ conscious rejection of the rational side of modernity and progress.

The Jewish press generally saw Prystorowa’s bill and the discussion that surrounded it as plainly antisemitic, and as an affront to all Jews in Poland and worldwide. Already in February 1936 rabbis from across Poland had formed the Committee for the Defense of Ritual Slaughter (Komitet Obrony Uboju Rytualnego).\footnote{116} Out of this committee came a declaration signed by 827 Polish rabbis, dated February 13, 1936, calling the proposed ban “an assault upon one of the fundamentals of the Jewish religion.”\footnote{117} In addition, Jewish parliamentarians and senators filed a formal protest with the Ministry of Religious Denominations saying that the proposal was contrary to Poland’s 1935 constitution (which guaranteed freedom of religion in Articles 111–13 and 115) as well as to the long history of religious tolerance in Poland, and that it constituted an offense to the community autonomy of Polish Jews, regardless of their religious or
political affiliations. Poland’s Jews were notoriously divided in their understandings of Jewish identity, religion and politics at this time, but the ritual slaughter question produced an unlikely unity of purpose. Many of Poland’s Jewish press organs vigorously defended ritual slaughter throughout this period, Our Review becoming the leading voice in the defense of ritual slaughter, even though its readership included many assimilated (read “European,” “modern” and “progressive”) Jews who might not have themselves followed Jewish dietary laws. The collective Jewish defense of ritual slaughter was about protecting Jews’ status in Poland and about demanding tolerance and respect for minority rights. The bill that was eventually passed in Poland – by the Sejm on March 20, 1936 in a vote of 97 to 75, and by the Senate on March 27, 1936 – was a modification of Prystorowa’s original proposal which would have seen a complete ban on ritual slaughter. The Law Concerning the Slaughter of Farm Animals in Slaughterhouses established stunning before exsanguination as the norm in both public and private slaughterhouses for “horned cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, horses and other warm-blooded animals,” but permitted exemptions for population groups whose religion mandated a “different” method of slaughter. The justification for the exemption was that ritual slaughter was in fact a matter of religious freedom and that to ban it completely would represent a violation of the constitution. The new law was supported by a regulation dated August 26, 1936 and passed by the Ministry of Agriculture with the cooperation of the Ministries of Industry and Trade, Interior, and Religion; the regulation provided details about how the immobilization and stunning of slaughter animals needed to happen, and under what conditions, specifically, ritual slaughter could take place. Both the law and the supporting regulation took effect on January 1, 1937. The imperative to minimize animal suffering during the slaughter process was reflected throughout the April law and the August regulation. For example, Article 2 of the law stipulated that all preparations for slaughter had to be completed before the animal was brought into the slaughterhouse (so as to spare animals a lengthy anticipation of death), and that the flaying of the carcass could start only after death had been confirmed (presumably in response to critics who said that still-living animals were sometimes stripped of their skin). Article 3 stipulated that two species – horses and cattle – could only be killed in slaughterhouses (be they private or public) unless certain special conditions were met, such as if, for example, the animal was in immediate distress, if a given region did not have a slaughterhouse or, in the case of cattle, if the animal was being slaughtered for personal consumption. Conspicuously, there was no mention in this article of pigs – which only Christians ate – implying that pigs could be slaughtered outside of slaughterhouses more easily and with less administrative oversight than was the case with cattle slaughter.

The April legislation also outlined how to handle exemptions to the stunning norm. Those regions of Poland with populations whose religions required a different method of slaughtering animals for food would be permitted to employ that method as long as they formed at least 3% of the population in that area. Provincial administrative authorities would establish the amount of ritual meat, measured in kilograms, that a given community needed per month. In cities with large Jewish populations, like Warsaw, the 3% requirement meant that Jews could still acquire ritual meat, albeit under a significant degree of supervision. Notably, too, the slaughter of animals in the ritual way would need to take place in separate facilities to allow better monitoring; on a symbolic level the separation of “Jewish animals” from non-Jewish ones reinforced the separation of ethnic Poles and Jews more broadly.
Moreover, the calculation of the quantity of meat required for the Jewish population in a given region would deal in whole animals rather than in forequarter meat alone. This was guaranteed by the requirement outlined in Article 4 of the April legislation to divide animal carcasses lengthwise only; dividing the carcass horizontally – with forequarter meat going to Jews and hindquarter meat to Christians – was no longer permitted. This was supposed to ensure that a fewer total number of animals would need to be slaughtered in the ritual way, and so, from an animal welfarist perspective, total animal suffering would be reduced.\textsuperscript{129} It meant, too, that there would no longer be any “leftover” hindquarter meat for Jews to sell to Christians, and so Jews would not be “profiting” at Christians’ expense. This was a clear victory for economic opponents of ritual slaughter.\textsuperscript{130}

Differentiating sources of meat was not difficult after the partial ban came into effect. Only those butchers licensed to sell ritual meat would be permitted to do so under this new system, and their status as sellers of such meat needed to be advertised clearly; at any rate, ritual and non-ritual meat could not be sold in the same shop.\textsuperscript{131} Even if ritual meat was less expensive than other meat, Christians were counseled by critics of ritual slaughter (including animal welfarists) to avoid buying it, for fear of supporting practices that perpetuated “extreme cruelty to animals.”\textsuperscript{132} Doing so was also important because it would help the authorities to develop accurate numbers for the amount of kosher meat that was actually needed by the Jewish population. Estimates suggest that after 1936 about 15\% of Poland’s meat production was kosher.\textsuperscript{133} Violations of the new legislation carried a potential three-month jail term or a fine of up to 3000 zloty; the authorities could also choose to apply both penalties.\textsuperscript{134} Immediately there were criticisms of Jews for not obeying the law, especially for exceeding the quotas.\textsuperscript{135}

### After the partial ban

Animal welfare groups expressed dissatisfaction with what they saw as a compromised piece of legislation, as did the nationalist right and the antisemitic press. The Union of Animal Protection Societies in Poland issued a statement in response to the new law, vowing “to continue to fight for the abolition of slaughter without prior stunning.”\textsuperscript{136} The Lublin branch of the Society for the Protection of Animals described its members as “tireless militants for the culture of the Polish nation” and promised not to give up on their battle with “barbarous cruelty.”\textsuperscript{137} And, as one contributor to Lwów’s *In Defense of Animals* concluded, with the new legislation animals would be divided into the “privileged,” those slaughtered according to “modern views and technology,” and those slaughtered in old, cruel and ritualistic ways. “Should civilization not be the same for all nations that wish to live in civilized states?” this writer asked.\textsuperscript{138} It was this apparent intransigence to accept change that reinforced “the Jewish nation’s” separateness from the Polish collective, a collective that was assumed to be receptive to the ideas and values of the modern age.\textsuperscript{139}

A new proposal to ban ritual slaughter completely was passed by the Sejm in March 1938 but was never passed by the Senate because of the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{140} Nevertheless the Union of Animal Protection Societies greeted news of the coming full ban enthusiastically. Purporting to speak “on behalf of Polish society,” it thanked the government in a public letter that it published in *World and Friend*. The letter read, “In the name of Polish culture, in the name of our Society – which brings together over 90 provincial branches – in the name of all animals and birds protected by our Society, and
especially in the name of countless numbers of unfortunate beings, beaten, starved, tormented and tortured by the pitiless human hand . . . May God reward you for your noble deed.”141

Conclusions

As we have seen, animal protectionists impugned ritual slaughter in a variety of ways: through its association with supposedly innate Jewish avarice and essential cruelty; as a stubborn religious relic of questionable authenticity and unsuited to the modern age; and as a jealously guarded economic benefit wielded by Jews over the Christian beef-eating population. In all of these condemnations of ritual slaughter, animal protectionists relied on, benefited from and contributed to a pervasive antisemitism in interwar Poland.

Through an examination of animal protectionists’ voices in the ritual slaughter debates we see just how embedded antisemitism was in the dominant contemporary conceptions of humanity, civilization, compassion and reason. We also see in the ritual slaughter discourses produced by Poland’s animal welfare movement that animal welfare activism was as much about Poland’s status as a people as it was about the animals’ well-being. While contemporary animal protectionists were genuinely interested in alleviating animal suffering, in this case the suffering of slaughtered animals, they were also committed to raising Poland’s reputation as a civilized and humanitarian nation. Practicing antisemitism, from their perspective, was a way of reaching this goal. As one Dr Alfred Laniewski said at an animal welfare meeting in Jarosław in southeastern Poland in the summer of 1938, the goal of animal welfare activism was “the protection of people from the disgrace which falls on them when they tolerate acts of such wildness and wickedness. In this respect, we [Poles] stand far from west European societies.”142 Reforming Poland’s legislative approach to ritual slaughter represented one attempt to address this profound shortcoming that animal welfarists identified in their country.

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Notes


2. The term “humane slaughter” remained in use into the interwar period. For the Polish context, see “Inspekcje w Warszawie,” *Świt Zwierzący* 3 (1930): 35.


nineteenth-century ritual slaughter debates in Poland see Žebrowski, Žydowska Gmina, 618–20.


20. This argument is made for the German case in Judd, Contested Rituals.


29. The first article on ritual slaughter published in Friend was: Sosnowski, “Listy od przyjaciół,” 4.


37. Maszewska-Knappe, Walka z ubojem rytnym, 8; Maszewska-Knappe, “Rzecznia centralna,” 1; Maszewska-Knappe, Czy Wolno, 7.
41. See the front cover of the April 1931 issue of Friend of Animals.
42. “Co nam czynić należy?” 1.
46. Ibid.
47. See Zebrowski, Żydowska Gmina, 672, for a similar argument about “rituals.”
50. See, for example: “Inspekcje w Warszawie,” 35.
55. For assorted perspectives on ritual murder in Eastern Europe, see the December 2012 issue of Jewish History.
57. Maszewska-Knappe, Walka z ubojem rytualnym, 9.
61. See, for example, APK, ZOZ, File 6, “Wczoraj grupa posłów-rolników wniosła do Sejmu projekt zniesienia uboju rytualnego,” Mały Dziennik, 8 February 1936, 22. See also Modras, The Catholic Church, 236. From the animal welfare press, see “Co nam czynic należy?” 1; Max Müller, “Dlaczego obecnie ubój rytualny jest niezgodny z duchem czasu,” Świat Zwierzący 5 (1930): 52.
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77. In contrast to the ritual slaughter debates, the vivisection debates reflected a great deal more mistrust of science, as Dorothee Brantz points out. See Brantz, “Stunning Bodies,” 186.


80. “Co nam czynić należy?” 1. Electrical stunning had existed since the 1860s but was regarded as too unreliable, especially because it was too easy to kill rather than stun an animal. See Cerkowsky, “Dotychczasowe sposoby uboju,” 4–5; Z. Karpiński, “Najnowsze metody ogłuszania zwierząt przed ubojem,” W Obronie Zwierząt 9 (1936): 2; Maszewska-Knappe, Walka z ubojem rytualnym, 40–3; J.Z., “O zniesieniu uboju rytualnego,” 2. See also: Judd, Contested Rituals, 95, 204; Lewin et al., Religious Freedom, 180–1.


86. J.Z., “O zniesieniu uboju rytualnego,” 1. On the Warsaw beef trade, see Żebrowski, Żydowska Gmina, X, esp. 667. The beef trade in Lwów, Łódź and Wilno was also heavily dominated by Jews. See Modras, The Catholic Church, 237. The ritual slaughter debates focused overwhelmingly on cattle and the beef industry.

87. Wanda Melcer, Czarny Ład Warszaw (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polski, 1936), 125, emphasis in original. The title of this section is a modification of Melcer’s phrase...
“religion has nothing to do with steak” on page 134. Note that Melcer’s book originally appeared as a series of articles in Literary News (Wiadomości Literackie), which counted Poland’s assimilated Jewish intelligentsia among its readership. On Melcer see Żebrowski, Żydowska Gmina, 678–9.


89. Żebrowski, Żydowska Gmina, 667.

90. For an elaboration of Jews’ role as transmitters of disease, see Gilman, The Jew’s Body, 19, 39.


93. Żebrowski, Żydowska Gmina, 614–8; Judd, Contested Rituals, 92, 101–2.


102. Maszewska-Knappe, Walka z ubojem rytualnym, 14–17, 34.

103. “Pierwszy wyłom,” 9. One might speculate, too, about the symbolism of Christians eating meat that comes from the rear end of the animal; animal welfarists never talked about it in these terms, however.


111. Ibid., 56.


113. See, for example: Leopold Stein, “Rabinistyczno-teologiczne orzeczenie w sprawie uboju rytualnego,” Świat Zwierzęcy 1 (1930): 5.


115. Maszewska-Knappe, Walka z ubojem rytualnym w Europie, 18–19.
118. Żydul, “Cele akcji antyżydowskiej w Polsce,” 57.
120. These arguments are made for the German case in Judd, Contested Rituals, 171–7, 184–5; Brantz, “Stunning Animals,” 183.
121. All Jewish and Ukrainian parliamentarians voted for the amended legislation (that is, for the permissibility of some ritual slaughter). Other votes in favour of the amendment came from, among others, parliamentarians Miedziński, Wierzbicki, Hołyński, Szubelski and Downar. A complete ban was supported, for example, by parliamentarians Prystorowa, Żeligowski, Szecel, Dudziński, Podolski and Pochmarski. See “Ograniczenie uboju rytualnego,” W Obronie Zwierząt 4 (1936): 2.
127. This meant in practice that ritual slaughter was not allowed in Śląsk, Pomorze and Poznań provinces, where Jewish populations were extremely small. See “Ograniczenie uboju rytualnego,” 1; Żydul, “Cele akcji antyżydowskiej w Polsce,” 57.
130. It meant, too, that Jews would need to porg or de-vein the hindquarter meat before it could be considered kosher, adding both expense and time to the meat production process. See Berman, Shehitah, 211; Żydul, “Cele akcji antyżydowskiej w Polsce,” 55–6.
131. The sale of ritually slaughtered meat was further regulated by a September 1936 Ministry of Trade decree. See Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 70: 505. 1936.
133. Modras, The Catholic Church, 238.
139. Karpiński, “Najnowsze metody ogłuszania,” 2; Maszewska-Knappe, Walka z ubojem rytualnym, 4.
141. “Na marginesie zniesienia uboju rytualnego,” 11.