Prejudice and Progress in Animal and Environmental Protection

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When push comes to shove, as the saying goes, might makes right. This ethic is rationalized by the neo-Darwinian beliefs in the evolutionary superiority of *Homo sapiens*, and in the survival of the fittest. And it is followed to the letter by Imperialist and Marxist and Scientistic doctrines of material wealth and knowledge as power, the acquisition of which is synonymous with the good of society (achieved via economic growth and industrial expansion).

This good of society thus perceived determines the values, ethics, and morality of that society. But when this perception and determinations are based upon the supremely subjective values of materialism (be it Imperialistic, Socialistic, or Scientistic) that are bound by the belief that might makes right, then there is grave injustice: and unnecessary suffering and destruction.

Loren Eisely wrote, "The Eden of the eternal present that the animal world had known for ages had been shattered at last. Through the human mind, time and darkness, good and evil, would enter and possess the world." This happened when, according to philosopher G. Naganathan (*The Theosophist*, Winter 1990, pp. 109-110), "a selfish 'I' started tenanting this mind, and the inexorable Time's Arrow started on its course, with all

the incubus of the past and the future, the inevitable concomitants of rectilinear time, to which man got enslaved." And with temporal linearity being imposed upon a non-linear matrix of cyclicity, we see the emergence of other illusory linearities, such as the linear hierarchical belief in man's superiority over women, animals, and all life, and the linear notions of industrial productivity and bioengineered efficiency.

In Western industrial society today, and in its crumbling Third World colonies, the linear neo-Darwinian and simplistic theories of natural selection, survival of the fittest, and evolution to some more perfect or superior state are alive and well. They are being acted out every day in the market place of world commerce and trade, and taught every day in places of education and worship alike.

Consequently, we are both witnesses to and victim-participants today of an increasingly violent, idealistic/moralistic, unjust and corrupted society. It has become dysfunctional because it has been corrupted by the notion that might makes right: that man has some evolved or God-given power of dominion over animals and all of Earth's creation, and therefore the right to exploit any and all life for profit and for societies' mutual benefit.

As Liam Brophy, Irish chronicler of social movements including animal rights, points out, the Christian theocracy of our industrial technocracy

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endorses and advances this human-centered attitude. It is one of prejudice against those millions of people who support the human, animal, and environmental rights movements and who oppose all injustices against any and all life. Liam Brophy (*The A/V Magazine*, Dec. 1990, p. 8) cites one such Christian patriarch, named Cardinal Ratzinger,¹ who sees these movements as being based on "somewhat anti-technical, somewhat anti-rational concepts of man as united to nature, and have an anti-humanist element."

"Man as united with nature," is what the theocracy and technocracy of these times reject, regard as pagan, heretical and antisocial, thus evil. Theirs is a prejudicial attitude toward a certain view of the nature of reality, of our being as united with nature as we are related to other animals and to the soil, air, and everything living or non-living around us and within us. This latter, non-linear, holistic spiritual view gives equal and fair consideration to the rights and interests not simply of all peoples, but of all creatures and creation.

From Cardinal Ratzinger's prejudicial perspective, this life or creation-centered spirituality is wrong and evil because his prejudice is based upon an erroneous belief in human superiority over and separateness from nature, whom pagans call the Earth Mother of us all. Prejudice is based upon fear, as Liam Brophy states: "It is indeed a negative attitude rather than a thought-out judgement, a hasty or premature appraisal of individuals and groups, an emotional and rigid view of those who feel their prestige or positions threatened, an antipathy based upon faulty and inflexible generalizations."

The fear of many who feel threatened by the concerns and aims of the animal and environmental protection movement is real. They speak to a radical change in relationship with animals and the environment which is not "somewhat anti-technical, somewhat anti-rational," to cite Ratzinger. This relationship is based upon the rationality of compassion and justice and speaks to the appropriate use of technology to enhance the well-being of all life on Earth by respecting the natural biodiversity and ecological as well as economic interdependence of all life and of every life community, human and nonhuman, wild and 'civilized' alike. It is based on such radical antisocial/antiestablishment action as protesting trophy hunting, coursing deer, bear and badger baiting, and myriad other abuses of our power of dominion over the animal kingdom,² notably vivisection and the 'factory' farming of animals. As

Liam Brophy writes (*op.cit.*), "[t]he bigoted, irrational and erroneous prejudices of the uninformed have been given sanction by some scientists in order to discredit campaigns of compassion." But to voice concern over the acceptance of animal suffering in the vivisection laboratory, and its scientific and medical value, is to be judged anti-science, anti-progress, and anti-society, placing concern for animals over concern for humanity, and for those people (children and the sick and handicapped especially) who might benefit from the medical advances that might someday come from experimenting upon animals.

Likewise, to voice concern over the plight of the spotted owl, the old forests of the Pacific Northwest, and indigenous American Indians, is to seem to put concern for animals, the environment, indigenous and minority peoples (who are "primitive" and not part of the GNP) before jobs for thousands in the agriforestry, timber-export, real estate, and construction industries. Those who question the wisdom of using pesticides without any other integrated pest-control program, and the prudence of raising billions of livestock primarily for their meat, are seen as anti-establishment radicals—even communists, anarchists, and pie-in-the-sky idealists. Many of like mind were burned at the stake as heretics and pagans by some of Cardinal Ratzinger's apostolic predecessors.

A humane and sustainable society is a society that endorses and promotes a humane (to the animals), socially just, and ecologically sound agriculture. The obstacles to achieving such a society, which must be global to function, lie in the prejudicial attitude toward animals, wild and domestic, toward people, indigenous, eccentric, and "pagan" in spirit, and toward the natural world seen as a human resource exclusive of any sacred quality or inherent value.

It is this attitude of prejudice, this form of insanity that is based on and fomented by the juices of a collectively insatiable and destructive egotism that is the nemesis of a consumer society (that ultimately consumes itself); this attitude is reinforced by the notions and demands of an illusory sense of superiority over the rest of Creation. If this were not the case, then we would not have a society that supports a technocracy and theocracy that rationalizes the use of chemical poisons, destroys forests and dams rivers, in large part to extract resources to raise food to give not to the poor and hungry, but to fatten livestock for their own profit and conspicuous consumption.

The global livestock cult and industry, that treats cattle as capital, is the most primitive form of liberal capitalism rooted in the religiously sanctioned domination of the lives of other animals often at the expense of their own psychological and physical well-being, which the well-documented animal "factory farm" justifies on the unjustifiable grounds of public appetite, profitability, necessity and efficiency.

Until such farms are at least environmentally neutral, if not yet bioregionally enhancing like the good livestock ranch, and do not waste animal wastes and pollute the groundwater, soil, and atmosphere with these normally recyclable livestock byproducts, we will, as American Indian Chief Seattle warned over a century ago, suffocate in our own wastes: in the wastes of the insatiable egotism of a global, industrially voracious and destructive consumerism, which the ancient cattle cult and modern livestock industry perpetuate.

To make the livestock cult and industry compatible with the principles of a democratic and life- or Creation-centered, equitable global society, they must be integrated with an environmentally neutral, biologically regenerative, biodiversity-enhancing and Earth- or Creation-centered attitude and public policy of respect and reverence for all life, including native peoples, peasant and family farmers, and the last of the wild.

The heart of prejudice is selfishness. The last roiling wave of human selfishness that is now engulfing the darkening world, is already consuming itself. The sweetness of self-righteous pain and outrage are of no help to those who suffer and who bear such knowledge and witness the arrogance and indifference of this selfish age. This selfishness arises in part from the fear of being possessed or controlled by, and being a subject of, nature (thus an integral part of nature). The ideal and illusion of a supreme being in control of nature and thus separate from nature is the root of this selfishness and the root cause of the insanity of the times. An inhumane society, that is so human-centered as to value jobs and economic growth over the protection of environmental quality, biodiversity, cultural diversity, and respect for human and animal rights, is an insane, prejudiced society.

The only corrective to the inevitable nemesis of this kind of society, its non-sustainable agricultural and other industrialized institutions of animal and environmental exploitation, as well as its overt and covert forms of human exploitation, is in the ethical, political, spiritual, and economic values and percepts of the human, animal, and environmental rights and protection movements.

These are based not on the quasi-liberal notion that "all people are equal," but on the egalitarian and conservative view that while human and nonhuman animals are different, they are morally worthy of equal and fair consideration. Likewise the natural world or environment should be accorded equal and fair consideration in relation to the interests that society has in economic growth and sustainable development.

All people are not equal, nor are animals more or less equal than human beings. The interests and needs, and therefore the rights of people are as different as those of other animals. Animals need no claim to the right to an education, or to vote, just like the rich have no need or right to subsidized housing, medicine, or food. All living things have interests and claims (or entitlements) which we, in exercising our power of dominion, should consider with the same merit as we consider those of our own kith and kin. This ethic of respect and reverence for all life is thus cast not in the narrow human-centered circumferences of personal or community or national interest, but in the more embracing if not boundless spirit of compassionate concern for all sentient life, and for biotic communities and nations other than our own.

Sexist, racist, speciesist, and anti-Nature forms of prejudice abound under the aegis of religious and politico-economic dogma. Such selfish prejudice violates the integrity of other beings and Beingness itself—the Sanctity of Nature, the natural world, and the inherent worth of all aspects of Earth's creation.

The ideologies of biodynamic, organic, regenerative, humane, socially just, and sustainable agricultural and other perma-industrial practices are anathema to the mind set and aspirations of an inhumane and thus insane society. The antidotes—humility, empathy, boundless compassion, and irreverent passion—are within the reach of all who acknowledge their fallibility, mortality, vulnerability, kinship with all fallible, mortal and vulnerable life, and who recognize the interdependence and inherent value and significance of all life on this beautiful and sickening planet, Earth Mother of us all.

Notes

¹ who had Dominican and Creation-concerned priest Mathew Fox silenced for a year in 1989.

² For further examples and documentation, see M. W. Fox, *Inhumane Society: The American Way of Exploiting Animals* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).