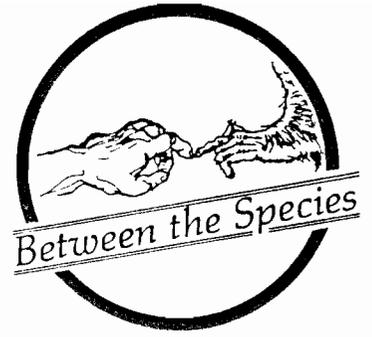


DREAMS AND REALITIES — HARNESSING OUR POWER



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I: The Dream

Those of us who work for change, reform of any kind, have dreams, images of utopia which sustain us in our darker moments. Mine was given to me by Charles A. Reich, an American lawyer, in his book The Greening of America (Penguin, 1971). Reich was taking a deeper look at America's disaffected youth, at the hippie and "flower power" culture of the 60's and early 70's, trying to understand and explain the deeper meaning that young people were searching for. He did find and explain it, and his last powerful image, that of flowers pushing their way relentlessly up through cracks in the concrete pavement, has remained with me ever since. That image has sustained my hopes and continued to feed my dreams in times of darkness and despair.

The dreams of the 60's have not died; they have been transformed. What happened to the hippies and the revolutionary students? Some of them sold out, having their ideals corrupted by money and superficial power. Others "dropped out," unable to live in a society they deplored. They started "alternative" communities or left, seeking the wisdom of Eastern sages. The rest of us grew up. The dreamers of the 60's became priests, politicians, lawyers, social workers: reformers, fighters for just causes. In the 80's we stopped revolting and set about turning the dream into a reality. In the 60's we had studied philosophy and politics. We recognized intellectually that our societies were fundamentally corrupt, subscribing to values which were unjust, and could not fulfill real human needs. We thought the problem could be attacked from the outside, that our institutions could be reformed, our economies made to serve our deeper needs, our political systems forced to dispense justice. With the idealism of youth we thought that we

could succeed where so many others before us had failed.

In the 80's we stopped intellectualizing. We found that in order to change the world, we must first change ourselves. We discovered that lasting, meaningful change is never won by force but by a consensus shift in values, that moral power does not lie in the hands of government and legislatures but in the unlocked human potential of millions of half-awake individuals. Slowly, painfully, through psychotherapies, spiritual searches, holistic health practices and a whole range of other tools, we started to explore our own potentials and unlock our power. No longer were we reading books and dreaming of a new age. We were experiencing a new way of being--and the New Age was already here.

II: The Reality

My dream is a world in which the defenseless will no longer be exploited by the mighty. Since animals are the largest group of voiceless, exploited individuals on planet Earth, part of my dream is a general acceptance by society of the concept of animal rights. It cannot be achieved in the sort of society in which we currently live, but then neither can justice and deep fulfillment for most human beings. Thus, the animal rights movement is but a small part of a much greater whole. It is part of our moral and spiritual evolution.

Futurists and visionaries talk about a New Age, an age of enlightenment, in which there will be a synthesis of the arts and



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sciences, of knowledge and spiritual wisdom, where old systems of politics and economics will be transformed, where all the dormant, truly human potentials will be unlocked, where all people will be working co-operatively, and where the shadow of The Bomb will disappear. The acceptance of animal rights seems possible in such an age, but is the very concept of such an age hopelessly utopian?

Those of us who have seen glimpses of the beginnings of this fundamental change, who have felt and experienced its power, do not think so. We feel that already we are part of something very exciting. But, at the same time we are living in the harsh reality of the 1980's, and there are many pressing practical problems with which we have to deal.

What can we do, for example, about the problem of animal experimentation in this world, now? With comparatively simplistic issues of animal exploitation the answers are clear. If we look at an issue like the circus, we can simply decide that the spectacle of performing animals is both distasteful and immoral. People can be persuaded to this view without too much difficulty. When enough of us agree and boycott the circus, the circus will cease to exist. The same might be said about exploiting animals for food. If enough of us ever agreed that this was immoral and stopped eating meat, the practice would end. There would be severe practical problems if such a change were to come about suddenly (which is inconceivable), but there is no moral dilemma, any more than with the circus. We do not need to eat meat any more than we need to watch performing animals--we do it from choice.

The issue of animal experimentation is very different. Though many animal experiments might be dispensed with without great loss to any of us, the price of dispensing with others would be a grave one. To some, immorality is immorality, and that is simply the end of the matter. To others, the use of animals in the testing of life-saving drugs and vaccines and in the development of new surgical techniques seems to be the lesser of two evils. To whichever view one subscribes (and few remain consistent with their ideals to the point of death when conventional medical treatment is required), the fact remains that society as a whole will take much per-

suading to the heroic moral view. Meanwhile, millions of animals remain incarcerated in our laboratories.

Should we, then, fight for today's attainable reforms, while holding on to our utopian ideals, in order to alleviate the suffering of at least some animals now? In my view, the answer is categorical: to do less is an abrogation of our responsibility to help defenseless animals. They would hardly understand our refusal to push reforms that would ease their pain today on the grounds that to do so compromises our ideals. Personally, I have never seen pragmatism and idealism as mutually incompatible. Some activists appear to agree with me. Alex Pacheco notes:

Realizing that total abolition of some aspects of animal exploitation may never come, we should not simply demand "total abolition or nothing at all," as that often ensures that those suffering today will continue to suffer.

Henry Spira adds:

Dreaming about how great it would be if animal experimentation were totally abolished does nothing to bring that day closer, and it does nothing to help the animals who will suffer tomorrow and every other day we continue to dream.

III: The Synthesis, Harnessing Our Power

The time has come for us to grasp this nettle. We have to stop squabbling about tactics, mistrusting one another, and to get on with the job at hand. New legislation on animal experimentation, for which we have screamed and shouted for over 100 years, is on our doorstep. Whatever that legislation gives us, it will not be nearly enough. It will not put right the fundamental injustice. Laws do not do that. We have laws against racial prejudice, but that prejudice still exists. We have outlawed discrimination against women in employment, but women are still exploited. This is not to say that these laws have not eased the problems. They have, and they have laid a moral foundation upon which we can slowly build. But injustice and exploitation only stops when we reach a consensus view that it should, when we agree that morally we ought to stop it.

Such a consensus cannot be brought about by force. It is a slow process and it will be hindered still more, if we include among our tactics vilification of the opposition. As Spira has put it:

Our aim is not to conquer our opponents. We are not on a macho ego trip. We want to win over our adversaries so that they become our allies. (All three of these quotations are from In Defense of Animals, ed. Peter Singer (Blackwell, 1985.)

Spira's practical words echo a deeper wisdom which those who seek real insight into problems, rather than quick political solutions, have always known:

Whenever you advise a ruler in the way of Tao,
Counsel him not to use force to conquer the universe.
For this would only cause resistance.
Thorn bushes spring up wherever the army has passed.
Lean years follow in the wake of a great war.
Just do what needs to be done.
Never take advantage of power.
Force is followed by loss of strength.
This is not the way of Tao.
That which goes against the Tao comes to an early end.
(Tao te Ching)

I believe that to do what needs to be done, and what is possible to be done, is enough. Justice, and love, in the end will always triumph over evil and wrongheadedness. If we work now, in a pragmatic way, to attain as much as can be attained in new legislation, we will help some animals now, but we will do much more than that.

Laws must be administered. The abysmal failure of the very good (on paper) West German animal welfare act, which the scientists have never accepted, is a potent illustration of the fact that control cannot be imposed from the outside. People are never forced to be good. In working alongside politicians, civil servants, and scientists to administer the coming laws in favor of the animals, we will start to change the consen-

sus. We will lay the foundations for better laws in the future, which will not be so strongly resisted.

The long-term solution has to be one of synthesis and harmonization, not one of confrontation and division. It is significant that some of the visions of the New Age are coming from science itself. New discoveries in physics about the nature of the universe are leading physicists into deep spiritual revelations, into holistic thinking. Meanwhile, materialist biologists continue to take animals apart in order to "understand" with their rational minds how they work. In so doing, biology has learnt much, but it has also missed much, since the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. Biology is a relatively new science, and it has yet to become whole. When it does, biological scientists will become our allies. There is no other way, for it is they who must find alternatives to animal experiments, not merely by substituting tissue cultures for whole animals but by devising whole new ways of looking at pressing biological and medical problems.

We have to help this process to happen. That is why we have to stop vilifying the opposition and to seek constructive dialogue. We need to clear out our own emotional distress in order to do this. Our emotions might sustain us in our fight, but they will not help us in the debating arena, and they will not help the animals. This is not a crusade; there is no battleground; there are no enemies; they are but other members of the human family, in need of enlightenment. If we fail them, we also fail the animals, and we fail ourselves.

There are many individuals in the animal rights movement. Collectively, they represent a tremendous potential power, a force for justice and change. We have only to unlock our individual potentials. Then, we must learn to work together, ignoring the differences between us. These differences are merely superficial. At a much deeper, human level, we are all one. When we learn that, when we really know it from within, then we will be able to harness our power. I believe that we can do it.

Twenty years on from the dream, I still believe that nothing can stop a flower from pushing its way up through a crack in the concrete.