

Opinion

John Stockwell

More and more frequently, ethical vegetarians and people interested in animal rights are recognizing their common ground. Vegetarianism is obviously not all that is necessary for animal liberation. Vegetarianism is, however, an essential component of any arrangement for human living compatible with the continued existence of animal nature. Phrases like "the community of living beings," "kinship with all life," "interspecies identity," and the like, mean precisely that—and at the level of the individual animal rather than only at the level of endangered species. If it is an issue for the members of the human species to learn to live together, then this issue is also literally a real one which applies to the relationships among different species in the interspecies community. Humanity must find new ways to live, new "food," and the space for nature to exist must be reclaimed—meaning either that human population must be (democratically) reduced or that radically novel ways of co-existence must be discovered. Yet, the indigenous "old ways" of humanity, too, must be sustained and allowed more impact upon the present, if only because the processes extinguishing the gods, tribes, and species are the same. The only way I know to think about this is to recognize that there must exist forms of human living not yet chosen which in a sense "substitute" for aspects of the old ways (particularly for the killing of animals) but which not only do not diminish or vitiate the ways of the tribe but instead constitute the fuller realization of ancient realities.

A contention such as the one I am here making will seem, I imagine, unacceptable to, for example, the coastal Eskimos of northwest Alaska. How the cessation of killing might be achieved there is not for me to say, nor am I able. Perhaps the identification made there of the soul of the people with the whale holds the most pregnant possibility. I am aware that plants enter little into diet along that shore, that a disagreement exists in world "whaling" circles re "quotas"—and that for the people of that coast this disagreement stems from traditional diet, then

from actual needs based on custom and population within that tradition, and finally has to do with a justifiable determination on the part of the Eskimo people not to let agreements reached by the non-native world at large (no matter their expression of international cooperation and particular, if limited, measure of humane and ecological concern) have the effect of further undercutting the subsistence ways of the people. Yet, we learn from Mowat's recent Sea of Slaughter that at present in the native bowhead hunt the "sinking loss" resulting from modern hunting methods and weapons is 80 percent."



The forms of human living "not yet chosen" are the same forms and choices which can constitute for us a new civilization, a humane world at peace. Such a civilization was the goal of Schweitzer's Philosophy of Civilization (1923), in which most extensively appears his philosophy of Reverence for Life. The "fuller realization of ancient realities" in one important way has to do with the image of the peaceable kingdom, an image which has been invoked also by Gerald and Patricia Mische in Toward a Human World Order (1977):

As the human community moves more deeply and irreversibly into life as an interdependent, global society, it may be critical to relocate deep in our psyche this sense of community and integral relatedness of life forms that was highly developed in our tribal parents but which has all but atrophied in modern individualism.

The peaceable kingdom is not merely sentimentally a pastoral vision. Nor is it a vision of nature "red in tooth and claw." It is a vision of a "future primitive" state to come, in which Death is accepted and there is no killing, and in which Reverence for Life is the common ground of human activity.