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PEACEABLE KINGDOM OR GLOBAL NEMESIS

Rationalizing Inhumanity

How much animal suffering and environmental desecration a civilization will accept reflects the degree of emotional maturity and physical and mental health of its populace. From material affluence and poverty alike arise the materialistic values and economic rationalizations that would justify environmental pollution, habitat destruction, factory farming, and vivisection. The values of materialism are resistant to change because they stimulate the economic-industrial treadmill. In both capitalistic and socialistic societies this treadmill is sanctified by the belief that productivity, material goods, and power are redeeming virtues that serve the greater good of society. The social, economic, and environmental problems that this treadmill escalates are not simply "the price of progress": they help create more jobs, more bureaucracy, and more problem-solving research and development—a classic "multiplier" effect where the benefits purportedly outweigh the costs.

Yet the primary beneficiaries of the industrial treadmill are neither the workers nor the consumers nor the patients, but rather the multiple support industries: the agrichemical, pharmaceutical and medical-technology industries, as well as governmental regulatory bureaucracies and their legions of lawyers, researchers, lobbyists, and investors. Well-funded researchers argue that more animal suffering in research is justifiable in order to find "cures" for degenerative diseases such as cancer (a disease related to over-consumption), industrial pollutants, and agricultural poisons. Similarly, the hidden costs of factory farming—animal suffering, consumer health hazards from drug residues, the extinction of the small and mid-sized family farm—are obscured by the PR myth that this is the only way that food can be produced cheaply for the benefit of the consumers, a myth that is further endorsed by the belief that meat is a dietary necessity. Again, the primary beneficiaries of this agricultural treadmill, where farmers are forced to "get big or get out," are neither the farmers nor the consumers, but those support industries that have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

It would be fair and accurate to suggest that organized biomedical research and veterinary medicine are economically dependent upon society's exploitation of animals on the scale of billions of lives each year. Little wonder, then, that major agribusiness organizations have aligned themselves with the biomedical establishment to oppose recent legislation to provide laboratory animals with better legal protection. It is no mere coincidence that both agribusiness and the biomedical industry (and their land-grant state and ideologically-aligned private universities) should perceive the animal welfare and rights movement as a threat to their sovereignty. Other industries regard the conservation and environmental movements as a similar threat. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that a conspiracy exists between the agricultural industries, organized biomedical research, and doctors and veterinarians. The values these groups stand for and share (more medical power over disease) merely reflect our culture's belief in dominionism, Cartesianism, and the virtue of economic and military power as the key to world peace and prosperity. The very formulation of modern medicine is conceptually flawed and needs to be challenged on ethical, scientific, and political grounds.

Organized medicine and biomedical research focus primarily upon treating the symptoms of disease because this approach is traditional and also more profitable than preventive medicine and public health programs and research. Preventive medicine (and ecological medicine), in addressing the causes of most of the chronic degenerative and occupational diseases, genetic and birth defects, allergies, and mental disorders that afflict us, is a highly political issue which reveals the illness at the root of the industrial establishment. It focuses upon the negative health consequences of the contamination of our bodies, air, food, and water with industrial pollutants and agrichemical residues. Preventive medicine has been virtually repressed by the medical establishment, which seeks to maintain its power by addressing only the symptoms of disease, not the origins. Most research conducted on laboratory animals to find "cures" for human diseases, as well as the tests to establish "safe" or tolerance levels of hazardous chemicals, is unsound scientifically and unethical in terms of the extent of animal suffering involved. Yet it is politically most expedient, giving the public a false sense of hope and security. The medical and biomedical-research establishment represents the flawed and self-serving moral foundation of the industrial establishment in power to-

day. The violence inherent in this establishment and its abuse of power is ultimately self-destructive. Ivan Illich calls this its nemesis.

Power and Nemesis

This analysis is, of course, rejected by establishment apologists of humanistic and materialistic philosophies. A majority of doctors and scientists still have faith in new wonder drugs and advances in technology and so lobby for more medical power, unconditional laboratory animal exploitation, and technological control over nature. The most influential political economists believe that corporate socialism or state capitalism will eventually lead to world peace and prosperity and so lobby for more military and industrial power. As these root causes of our nemesis are denied and the exacerbating symptoms treated as new challenges to be overcome, so the need for a radical change in values is denied, because it is believed that the establishment's world view is lawful and moral. From a narcissistically humanistic perspective, this is true. The legality of the dominant world view is upheld by the establishment's lawyers and lobbyists, who influence, if not control, Congress and the government. From a more egalitarian, holistic, ecological and humane perspective, however, this world view is patently wrong, morally and ethically unsound.

As far as animals and the environment are concerned, more laws, hard-won and ever more costly to uphold, are not enough. Without a fundamental change in moral and ethical values, a change from within the heart of reason and compassion, our civilization's nemesis is inevitable. Such a transformation in awareness is taking place. The many crises we face today will force us, ultimately, to live responsibly and in reverence for the sanctity and dignity of all life. Such a religious, spiritual world view is the antithesis of what today masquerades as fundamentalist religious politics, just as the power of planetary cooperation is the antithesis of power as national military security and world control.

Our current obsession with power and its illusion of security is ruining our economy and the well-being of society because the arms race is exorbitantly expensive. Industrial and military expansion, our inhumane and ecologically unsound agricultural system, our incessant demand for more non-renewable natural resources are all based upon

the dominionistic and commercialized exploitation of life for the good of the market economy. The results are pollution of the environment, increased human health problems, and the destruction of the biospheric ecosystem. Our true security lies in ecological balance—harmony with nature. Our current attitudes, wants, and values create imbalance and are our nemesis.

The “cold war” is not about human rights, democracy, free enterprise or socialism, or about the rights of all peoples to self-determination and the rights of all creatures to exist. It is about the power conflict between the equally materialistic ideologies of capitalism and socialism. That they are now in a destructive conflict attests to their reciprocal deficiencies. Both ideologies lack the wisdom and humility to see that love is the ultimate power. They believe instead that their way of power is the way to world peace, health, and prosperity. But when this power is wielded impersonally and destructively against nature, animals, and even the populace as a whole, how can it lead to peace and prosperity for all?

The negative social and environmental consequences of the industrial machine are contrary to the principles of true democracy and common sense morality. Society is harmed by the destruction and pollution of the environment, especially by the petrochemical industry, agribusiness, mining and forestry, and the hydroelectric and nuclear power industries. These industries barely acknowledge the problems they create, which the populace, through taxation, pays for twice-over: through ineffectual government oversight, research and regulation, and again through ill health, anxiety, and unemployment. The industrial nemesis is occurring as society can no longer afford the military, political, medical, and social costs of its imbalance with nature. It is ironic that under the Reagan administration, military spending is at the expense of those very same social institutions — health, education, and welfare — that the ‘arms race’ purportedly protects.

As few of the populace understand the causes of their suffering or feel empowered to do anything about it, so even fewer appreciate the connection between their helplessness and the suffering of helpless animals whose exploitation the industrial establishment insists is necessary for the good of society. If this rationalization of animal suffering is allowed, then human suffering of the same origins must likewise be

justified, in the name of national security, progress, or the “greater good.” This connection has been borne out historically in the genocide of Native Americans, the extermination of buffalo and wolves, and the exploitation of labor under slavery or capitalist industrialism. As long as the humanistic and materialistic moral foundation of our civilization continues to be accepted as an historical truth, which holds that might makes right and that the suffering of a few is justified for the benefit of many (which I term biological fascism), then nemesis will be inevitable. The lack of respect for human and animal rights and for the sanctity and dignity of all life is a symptomatic cause of our nemesis.

Love and the Ethic of Humaneness

The more inhumanity, animal suffering, and destruction of nature there is, regardless of the rationalizations, the more critical is our spiritual condition. Today we face a crisis in values of global dimensions. The more we apply power over the world, the more impaired we are psychologically. The path of power for power’s sake is the mind-set of the materialist’s dominion over all life that denies others, humans and animals, equal and fair consideration. This mind-set perceives other beings as inferior or as objects or instruments lacking any interests, rights, intrinsic value, or souls.

While many may feel that global nemesis cannot be averted, the apocalyptic revelation that absolute power corrupts and destroys absolutely and that, to quote Black Elk, “Nothing can live well except in a manner suited to the way the Power of the world lives and moves to do its work” may be our redemptive realization. It is the redemption of love, as reverent stewardship of all life, rather than the atheistic and materialistic dominion over Creation and Creator alike. Without a total reversal from love of power to realizing the power of love, our nemesis will be assured.

A mature love that nurtures non-possessively, where empathy is the bridge of souls, links us with nature and all life to give our lives a sense of purpose and security that power alone can never achieve. It is the kind of love that sees others without prejudice, demand, judgment, or selfish desire save that of personal fulfillment through harmonious relationships. It is the kind of love that respects others’ rights and interests and nurtures others to bring out the best in them and in

one's own nature, morally and spiritually. It is the best way for us to raise children and to care for animals and the environment. This love is the essence of being humane, of having reverence for the sanctity and dignity of all life and acting in responsible accord with the rights and interests of all living things.

Our human species has multiplied, prospered, and covered the earth. Now we must learn to replenish and cherish it. The ethic of humaneness has as its essence a humanitarianism that is not human-centered. As humaneness expands the scope of our ethical awareness and obligations toward all creatures, it leads us to think ecologically with respect to the balance of nature and the quality of the environment. Humaneness is therefore more than sentimentality and morality: it is a rational and spiritual concept embodying the egalitarian principle of respect for the sanctity and dignity of all life and for the inherent rights of all living things. Humaneness has revolutionary implications, as indeed it must if society is to be transformed. And we can transform it, by our financial and consumer power (investing and eating with conscience); by assuming responsibility for our health; by educating our children to appreciate the full significance of being humane, responsible citizens; and by exercising our voting power to ensure that those persons elected into public office appreciate the wisdom of humane ethics not as a sanctimonious homily but as a spiritual necessity and a survival imperative.

Historical and Future Perspectives

I have a vision that many humanitarians share of a future Peaceable Kingdom where we and all creatures live in balance and harmony as one family. Theosophically this is an egalitarian, spiritual panentheism, which is expressed as reverence for the inherent divinity of all life. It is a world view presaged by the Lakota Sioux's spiritual belief that we and all creatures are related. This belief the modern sciences of ecology and evolutionary and molecular biology have now confirmed. It is the antithesis of the materialist's human-centered world view, so prevalent today, that excludes animals and Nature, and sets up a hierarchy of patriarchal dominion.

The world view of domination denies any inherent divinity in animals and Nature, believing only in a transcendent divinity and a

monotheistic hierarchy of God over man, and man over woman, animals and Nature. As the subjective dimension of animals and Nature is denied by objectifying them as exploitable resources, the bridge of empathy is broken, changing our relationships from what Martin Buber called "I-Thou" to "I-It." In the process of objectifying and desacralizing Nature and "de-animalizing" animals, we ultimately demean and dehumanize ourselves.

All that we are, possess, and create materially comes from Nature's elements, powers and potentials. Little wonder that our so-called "pagan" ancestors revered Nature as the Great Provider. Nature as matter (mother), vitalized by the spirit (father), constitutes the anima mundi or world soul of the living Earth. This world view was radically changed by the political theocracies of monotheism and further discredited by the scientism of material power and arrogant humanism. Nature was desacralized into inanimate matter (a "dead mother") as reverence for the inherent spiritual divinity in all things was replaced by the belief in a purely transcendent patriarchal God.

The doctrine of original sin no doubt had its origins in the Roman Church's negative attitude toward Nature (St. Francis of Assisi notwithstanding) and to human nature in particular, the "bestly" side of which was equated with the irrational instincts of "lower animals." Animal "traits" most valued in humans include industriousness (ant, beaver), loyalty (dog), pride (lion) — traits that are best suited to serve and lead our industrial society. Captive-raised wild animals are often feared because they may "revert" to the wild and become vicious, a belief that reflects our civilized ignorance about animals, as well as fear of our own animal nature or atavistic potentialities. The doctrine of original sin helped to further the interests of the State and of industrial and colonial expansion by subordinating man, animals, and Nature to theocratic authority for the alleged greater material and spiritual good of all. It has led to the monotheistic human-centered world view of today's patriarchal materialism.

As Father-Mother, God-Nature were divided so that we might vanquish Nature, the God-within-Nature, Pan, was turned into the Devil. Such dualistic thought can be traced back to Aristotle, whose separation of mind and body, spirit and matter was incorporated into Roman Catholicism by St. Thomas Aquinas. In this way the desacrali-

zation and rape of Nature was sanctified. This world view, while claiming religious authority, is a self-serving perversion of the Christian doctrine of reverence for all creation, which respects the subjectivity and inherent divinity of all life forms. Monistic panentheism is dismissed as pagan and heretical since it challenges the presumed authority of patriarchal dominion. Yet the intuitive and empathetic apprehension of an inherent divinity in all things is the very essence of Christianity, as the Very Rev. James Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, observes: "Ecology is the science of the Body of Christ through which we of the earth community learn our sacred connectedness." This "neo-pagan" and Christian panentheism is expressed in these words from Paul Winter's Earth Mass, sung by Susan Osborne and performed in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine: "Grant that I may feel you always in everything. Oh Mystery!"

Our world's redemption lies in the release of the human spirit and the soul of the Earth alike. Our growing awareness of the ecological and spiritual unity of all life must lead us to change our relationships to all creatures from "I-It" to "I-Thou." Living humanely entails considerable self-sacrifice, but in the final analysis it is enlightened self-interest. Only the realization that we cannot exist outside the embrace of I-Thou's spiritual egalitarianism and trans-species democracy can make the difference for us between the Peaceable Kingdom and extinction.

