

WHEN DOES ALL THE KILLING END?

By Dr. Michael W. Fox

Most of us who have had a close relationship with another animal can openly reflect on Goethe's observation that "Every creature is a word of God." Atheists can contemplate the wonder and sanctity of life. If we all embrace democracy and understand what Dr. Albert Schweitzer concluded that "Until man extends his circle of compassion to all living things, man himself will not find peace,." then we must embrace equalitarianism: Of giving others, human and non-human, animal, plant and microorganism, equal consideration before harming or killing.



I am glad that I was able to catch and release outdoors a Yellow sac spider who recently gave me a painful bite on one cheek. I was relieved that I was able to quell my instinctual reaction to kill, turn the other cheek and practice what I preach: The doctrine of *ahimsa*; not harming/non-violence. But we may all wonder what kind of God could create venomous creatures, pests, parasites, predators and pathogens.

**The Yellow sac spider *Cheiracanthium inclusum*,
before release. May 5th 2019**

Many species of microorganisms, plants and animals are opportunistic and invasive. But we should exercise the precautionary principle before "playing god" and seeking to eliminate such threats to our own and to domestic animal health, agriculture, aquaculture and forestry, to avoid harming beneficial species. Insecticides kill beneficial insectivores and pollinators. Like military weapons, ever more potent biological weapons such as pesticides and antibiotics are no solution and cause collateral damage.

Such restraint is implicit in equalitarianism: In giving equal consideration to other species we believe should be killed we may pause and consider not just collateral damage but also the troublesome species' significance and role in dysbiosis as indicators of systemic imbalance and other problems which should be addressed rather than exterminate. This is the essence of prevention to temper the virulence and spread of disease-causing organisms. In the process we might then become less of an opportunistic, invasive, parasitic, pathogenic and predatory species ourselves.

Considering the predatory human population will soon reach 8 billion, using plant-derived nutrients as alternatives to meat, fish and other animal produce is a vital response to the Climate and Extinction crises, along with other bioethically inspired initiatives in industry and commerce. The mass killing of fish and other marine life by the fishing industry, by acidification, plastics and other pollutants, is one of the most neglected issues upon which our own future depends.

Bioethics, empathy and science-based, as articulated by the late Van Rensselaer Potter, MD (see his 1971 book *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*) links environmental health with our own health and well-being* As one of the pioneers advocating One Health, Dr Potter was not alone in

seeking to rectify the anthropocentrization of Western medicine with its many iatrogenic and adverse environmental consequences, including environmental contamination by excreted pharmaceuticals from people and animals.*

Killing animals and having them suffer to advance human medicine and to test new products from pesticides to military weapons has been subject to decades of ethical and protocol consideration. Significant reductions in such animal use would be forthcoming with the One Health concept being put into practice, politics and education.

Without bioethical as well as clinical evaluation and justification, the decision to euthanize a human or other animal may be nothing more than convenience-killing rather than compassionate mercy killing. Rational objectivity, without bioethics, can lead to objectification of the subject which makes killing easier. Objectification is the seed-bed of prejudice and discrimination (with regard to race, species etc.), sown by disinformation and ideology. Objectification severs empathy and where there is psychosis, delusional and dissociative, can lead to hate-crimes and mass killing.

The mass killing to control highly infectious diseases in farmed animals is considered a necessary act of instrumental rationalism. But such killing might be avoided if the animals were not kept under disease-promoting conditions as on overcrowded industrial animal farms that depend on drugs and vaccines to make a profit selling meat and other animal products. Millions of healthy pigs were slaughtered, many buried alive, to help control the spread of African swine fever in China and many other East Asian countries in 2019.

Instrumental rationalism enables objectification of other sentient beings variously perceived as dangerous pests, food and other commodities, even trophies and biological specimens, making their killing normative and of no concern. Sport hunting and killing animals for pleasure, notably coyote-killing contests, are still culturally accepted in America. Not until 2019 was the deliberate killing by crushing, burning, drowning, suffocation, impalement or other violence causing serious bodily injury to animals outlawed in the U.S. as a federal crime under the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act. But incomprehensively its enforcement is limited to violations that occur in interstate commerce and on federal property. Forensic psychiatry has established a history of harming and killing animals in childhood and adolescence in many adult, homicidal psychopaths and sociopaths.

State and federal government agencies continue to persecute predators, killing wolves, cougars and other carnivores whose beneficial ecological services, keeping deer and other cervids healthy, optimizing biodiversity and ecosystem health, have yet to be fully recognized. Such often indiscriminate predator control policies resonate historically with the persecution and killing of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, genocide, speciesicide and ecocide being coins of the same currency.

Being called on to kill clients' animals is one stress factor associated with a higher incidence of suicides and other mental health problems in veterinarians providing euthanasia services. Workers in animal shelters have received death threats for euthanizing unadopted animals while those working in clinics have been also killed for meeting women's right to terminate their

pregnancies. The pro-life sentiment can have regrettable consequences in morally divided and conflicted communities.

The annual killing of millions of dogs, cats and other unowned and abandoned animals in shelters and impoundments around the world is a tragedy many communities are seeking to rectify. Opposition to euthanasia of unadopted animals and no-kill advocacy means suffering for thousands of “TNR” (trap-neuter-release) cats released from shelters in the U.S.: Life-long confinement for potentially dangerous, unstable and often formerly abused dogs: Incarceration and frequent starvation for India’s discarded cattle, the killing of whom is prohibited under religious decree.

The psychological toll of killing animals every day cannot be underestimated. Slaughterhouse work has been linked to a variety of disorders, including PTSD and the lesser-known PITS (perpetration-induced traumatic stress). It has also been connected to an increase in crime rates, including higher incidents of domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse.

There are billions of organisms upon which our lives, health and economy depend. These inter-relating and co-evolving intelligences in the life-stream, which is part of our food-chain, follow the law of the jungle and ocean where one life takes another to sustain its own. Whatever blooms in excess is consumed, species numbers are balanced and biodiversity optimized in cycles of depletion and restoration adaptation and transformation. Loss of biodiversity to the point of monoculture can mean systemic collapse from disease and shortage of nutrients, as evidenced in commodity crop and aquaculture production.

The better we understand care about other organisms and the more we learn about them the better we will be able to live with those who could cause harm and find the least harmful ways to control them as needed. Extermination is rarely achieved without collateral damage. Saving endangered species and protecting and restoring natural biodiversity, including the microbiomes in agricultural and forest soils, in aquatic ecosystems and in and on our own bodies, are essential components of One Health. Biodiversity and climate stability are interdependent, loss of biodiversity affecting the climate and climatic changes affecting biodiversity.

So are the trees we kill, the planting of millions more and protecting and restoring old forests and other natural, carbon-sink ecosystems being called for to reduce the long-term harms of climate change. Forest encroachment and destruction has blowback on public health, bringing wild animals into closer contact with humans when the animals can transmit zoonotic diseases, potentially setting the stage for a pandemic: This is another illustration of the collateral damage from ecocidal human activities.

. A conceptual, paradigm shift is called for, away from anthropocentrism, implicit in Dr. Schweitzer’s statement above, amounting to an evolutionary advance for our species. Billions of animals suffer and die every year as a consequence of our inhumanity. All forms of cruel commercial, recreational and other culturally condoned animal exploitation and killing must cease if we are to recover our humanity, inhumanity being an existential threat to our evolution.

The abuse and killing of animals for superstitious, religious purposes, such as that of black cats thought to possess evil or bring bad luck; of chickens to take away evil spirits and sickness and calves and kids to appease some deity continue today: Also public spectacles of animal torture and killing as in bull fights, chained-bear and caged-coyote fights and killings by dog packs. Our boundless capacity to harm and kill may yet be constrained by boundless compassion and rule of law. Either evolve or perish, the choice is ours and the Climate Crisis is seen as a call by many to join the Extinction rebellion. Over 50 years ago Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "The day is not far distant when humanity will realize that biologically it is faced with a choice between suicide and adoration." That day has surely come.

*End Note: ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ABOUT HUMAN AND VETERINARY MEDICINES

Residues from billions of doses of antibiotics, painkillers, hormones and antidepressants pose a significant risk to freshwater ecosystems and the global food chain, according to a new analysis. The wholesale use of antibiotics in both medicine and agriculture will have adverse effects on the environment and on human health. When animals and humans ingest medicines, up to 90 percent of active ingredients are excreted back into the environment. (<https://news.yahoo.com/medicines-pose-global-environmental-risk-experts-warn-170419416.html>)

AFTERWORD

The Climate and Extinction Crises should unify humanity, nation with nation---a United Environmental Nations---rather than divide and lead to fighting and killing over finite resources and short-lived economic gain. Better we constrain our non-sustainable appetites and numbers than be at war with each other and fall victim to nature's impartial, indiscriminate correctives which some see as retribution. When some nations sacrifice environmental interests to further non-sustainable economic interests, they harm the whole world, setting up a competitive down-spiral accelerating climate change and economic insecurity. The tsunamis of unbridled capitalism, militarism and totalitarianism were never stopped by anarchism or tribalism. Fatalism and nihilism, like optimism and pessimism, have no relevance where there is existential realism based on sound scientific evidence, bioethics, public understanding, commitment and political will to work to end the constant killing, suffering and destruction.

According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary the word "*Pecuniary*" first appeared in English in the early 16th century and comes from the Latin word *pecunia*, which means "money." Both this root and Latin *peculium*, which means "private property," are related to the Latin noun for cattle, *pecus*. In early times, cattle were viewed as a trading commodity (as they still are in some parts of the world), and property was often valued in terms of cattle." It is no coincidence that cattle, like chattel, are linked etymologically to capitalism. I would describe *pecunitarianism* as the *modus operandi* of those who follow the path of Mammon with addictive zeal to make a deal and profit regardless of the hidden costs, what economists call the "externalities", be they social, environmental, moral or ethical.

This psychosocial pathology has helped bring on the Climate and Extinction crises with much suffering and killing of sentient beings..

The Extinction Bio-apocalypse

The predicted extinction crises is now being confirmed by scientists around the world. There are documenting precipitous declines in the numbers and known species of insects, amphibians, reptiles, fish and birds in more “dead spots” around the world while biodiversity hot spots, notably America’s National Parks, are threatened by invasive species.

America’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement is a step back from what is needed at this time in our biological history: The establishment of a United Environmental Nations which is called now and can resist being paralyzed by party politics; subverted by the corrupting forces of fear, greed, ignorance and denial; and not be divided by wars over natural resources or overwhelmed by the heart-break burden of political, economic and environmental refugees.

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