

Existential Value

Extract from Pseudo-Humanism (Discourse 8)

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What do people do to meet their growing needs for agricultural lands, for industries, etc.? They bring about large-scale deforestation, but no one bothers to think about the creatures that live in those forests. So the tigers and elephants haunt the villages, kill the people and demolish their houses. Why? Out of their instinct for self-preservation. We have destroyed their natural habitat, the forests, but we never bothered to consider any alternative arrangements for their shelter. We have recklessly destroyed large areas of forests without caring to think that thereby we are

destroying the balance among the human, plant and animal worlds. And we never realized - and still do not - that this wanton destruction of the animal and plant worlds will be of no benefit to human beings. Rather it will be a great loss for human society, because each and every living entity, whether plant or animal, has two types of value: one, its utility value, and the other, its existential value.

Human beings usually preserve those creatures which have an immediate utility value for them: for example, cows. Human beings protect them for their own benefit, because cows have some utility. Nowadays horses have lost their utility value, thus horses are rarely found in large numbers in the streets these days; you don't see many horses around at all. After some time people will have to go to the zoo to catch a glimpse of a horse - they will not be found anywhere else. Since horses no longer serve human needs and their utility value is nil, human beings are not eager to preserve them.



Where has my house gone to?

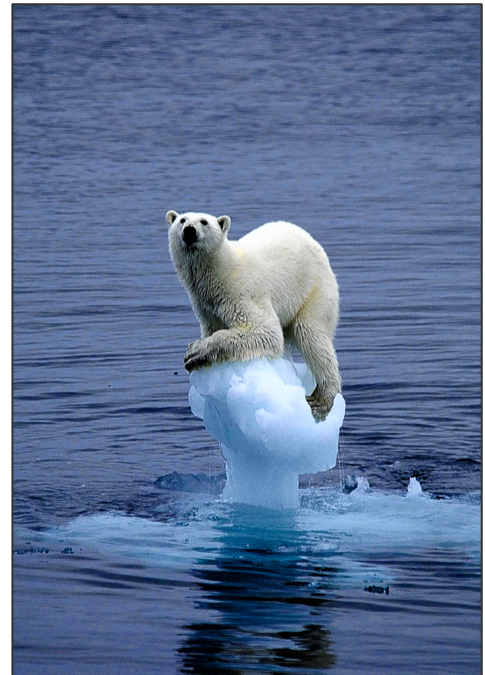
Similarly, when people are able to prepare synthetic milk by chemical process, they will also stop breeding cattle. That day people will either kill the cows by starving them, or they will themselves eat the cows. This is the situation.



Since the outbreak of FMD on November 29, over 1,400,000 animals have been either culled or are destined for slaughter--many have been and will be buried alive. Pigs are ruthlessly buried alive, and this will continue to happen because the Korean government has refused to vaccinate the animals against foot-and-mouth disease.

Who says that those creatures who have lost their immediate utility value have no right to exist? No one has the moral right to say this. No one can dare to say that only human beings have the right to live, and not non-humans. All are the children of Mother Earth; all are the offspring of the Supreme Consciousness. Most creatures have existential value, although they may not be valuable to human beings, or we may not be aware that their existence has some significance. This existential value is sometimes individual and sometimes collective, sometimes both. Oftentimes we cannot know the utility value, or the collective existential value, of a creature; we wrongly think that it has no existential value. This is the height of foolishness. Because human beings have not advanced very far in the field of knowledge, they are prone to this sort of error.

Even those creatures which have no utility value for human beings, or whose utility value has ceased; which have no existential value for human beings, or whose existential value has ceased; still have the right to live. Even those animals which have negative utility value, instead of positive, and negative entitative [existential] value, instead of positive - human beings will have to try to preserve even those animals by creating a congenial environment for them instead of destroying them. And they will also have to provide adequate safeguards so that those creatures may not prove injurious. If, in the absence of proper safeguards, those undeveloped creatures do harm to humans, the fault does not lie with those creatures but with the human beings. Human beings are endowed with developed intellect - why do they not make adequate arrangements to protect themselves?



One more thing must be said - that non-human creatures have the same existential value to themselves as human beings have to themselves. Perhaps human beings can understand the value of their existence, while other living beings cannot: this is the only difference. Even so, no one has conferred any authority on human beings to kill those unfortunate creatures.



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Now, within the scope of socio-sentiment maximitis there are economically-developed groups [and hence also economically-undeveloped groups]. Within the greater human society, there are different social divisions in some form or other, direct or indirect. As a result, the virus of intra-human conflict, and along with this, inter-creature conflict, is bound to spread. And in this inter-creature conflict, human beings have completely forgotten the utility value and entitative value of other creatures.

Thus humanism cannot be accepted as an ideal path to perfection. Human beings will have to progress further towards perfection:

Hethá nay hethá nay, anya kothá, anya konakháne¹

["Not here, not here, somewhere else, somewhere else"].

We must move ever forward beyond the confines of sentiment.

And does not a still more glorious and effulgent dawn await us there?

Indeed it does.

Reference:

The Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism

Prout in a Nutshell Part 8 [a compilation]

¹ Rabindranath Tagore. -Trans.