

Predation—The Way of Life

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Considerations of the rights of animals have become fashionable and, one hopes, long-term concerns for people of a wide variety of interests and persuasions. In addition to the expected ecologists, zoologists, humanitarians, veterinarians and so on, philosophers and theologians are coming to grips with the existence of life other than man.

In this editorial I should like to emphasize a basic theory of human-animal interaction which will, I trust, be recognized immediately to be true although generally overlooked in the human-animal "rights" colloquy.

The first element of the theory is the simple fact that the universe and this world, as part of that universe, is an *ordered* system. While our understanding of all of the facets of that order is far from complete, it seems irrefutable that such order does exist.

The philosophical term 'cosmology' defines an ordered universe. What we loosely call "Nature" is, in fact, that portion of cosmology which applies to this earth. Nature, then, is the earth as an ordered system. Within that context there appear to be three major laws:

- 1) Survival of an individual life takes precedence over the survival of *another* individual.
- 2) Survival of the species takes precedence over the survival of the individual.
- 3) Survival of life takes precedence over the survival of the species.

It appears that there is a single operator, a single theory, which subsumes all three of these laws: *predation*, the basic interaction among all forms of life from the least to the most complex.

The food chain is hard theory, indeed.

It is unnecessary to belabor the obvious role of predation in the first two laws. The third law has not, perhaps, been clearly stated previously. The extinction of species over the earth's history shows the law at work.

An excellent and provocative exhibit in the Museum of Science in Boston also makes the point. One aquarium contains unpolluted water and the variety of marine life as it may have been in the Boston harbor years ago. The second aquarium is appropriately polluted for the harbor today. While there are fewer numbers and varieties of species, there is still life. Indeed, it would be difficult to find anyplace on this planet, a nook or crevice so foul, so noxious, that something alive was not in residence.

So far two elements of the theory I am developing have been identified: life on earth as part of an ordered system and predation as the operator within that ordered system. However, the theory remains incomplete. What is the ordered system, merely big fish eating small fish and being eaten by yet bigger fish? We yearn for some purpose, some goal, some ends for these means.

The best, perhaps, we can do to satisfy that yearning, omitting metaphysics, romanticism and theological speculation, is to appeal to another time-honored

concept: *equilibrium*. While there may be questions about equilibria in the subatomic world and the cosmic world, there is no reason to doubt, in our world, that equilibrium is the *sine qua non*: for every action there is a reaction. Equilibrium does not tell us *why*; it does not provide a fixed goal, a god, or a good. It just *is*, and that is what we have to go on just now.

Struggle, violence and ugliness will be with us at the millenium because the theory of this earth, the governing cosmology, is that of an ordered system, and that system is ordered because of predatory interrelationships operating around the balancing concept, equilibrium. Remove predation, and there is no order, no equilibrium and ... no life.

Humans are, historically and presently, the most efficient predators that have ever existed on the earth. Humans, however, are not successful predators because they are destroying the host, the living and nonliving earth, upon which they prey.

Human predatory efficiency is based on a single element, the human intellect. The intellect has no natural enemy other than another intellect. There is only one conceivable way to restore the earthly equilibrium that man has so seriously disturbed, and that is by the use of intellect. We have thought ourselves into disequilibrium and have no choice but to think our way out of it again.

There are heartening signs that this process is already underway. It is hoped that the formulation provided will help in the structuring and ordering of the process.