A New Moral Imperative
by Oliver M. Evans

Oliver M. Evans, 69, a founder and former president of The Humane Society of the United States, died on December 16. Mr. Evans, a native of Montclair, N.J., was a director or officer of HSUS throughout its 21-year history. He was serving as treasurer at the time of his death.

In recognition of his outstanding leadership to the humane movement and his personal dedication to animal welfare, The HSUS headquarters building was dedicated to his memory on October 10.

Some time ago on the TODAY show, Roger Caras, Senator Gaylord Nelson, and Hugh Downs agreed that the preservation of all the creatures that inhabit the earth, the air, and the seas is a must. In addition to clean air to breathe and pure water to drink, to survive, they said, we must also make a great national effort to save from urban sprawl and a careless exploitation of our once bountiful continent and the seas around it, species after species will be packed in great megalopolises, cannot for long follow current trends without encountering inevitable disaster. Our riot-torn cities foreshadow a ghastly future unless basic new thinking must develop to give new direction to society. Ranting against the abuse of our natural environment and the evils resulting from our largely uncontrolled industrial free-enterprise system will never meet the needs of the future.

The humane movement provides a philosophical answer and positive programs that impinge on the problems of achieving a healthy society, the problems of conservation, as well as the problems of animal welfare that have been the traditional concern of humanitarianism. All three problem areas, in large measure, spring from a failure to recognize and act upon the moral imperative of Active Benevolence Toward All Living Creatures.

In the humane movement we believe this moral imperative provides the best answer to those basic problems that demand for solution. In the deeply religious context of Schweitzer’s thought, the ethic of ‘Reverence for Life’ fulfilled his quest for a new principle and satisfied his longings. For twentieth century existential man, however, particularly the younger people, the overtones of awe, grandeur, and adoration of a deity connoted by reverence do not fit. On the other hand, active benevolence toward all living creatures is a precise and telling statement of a principle which world conditions cry out. There must be a turning away from the primary in our society of hard competitive striving for materialistic affluence and technological superiority; the preservation of a world environment that can support billions of humans abate the greed, the rampant hatred, or the horrors of modern war that afflict mankind? Will the mere guarantee of the environmental conditions of survival contribute to the formation of mature, reasonable people? Obviously not. In fact, these emotional problems are most acute in advanced industrialized countries where affluence is widespread.

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