IN THE MEDICAL PROFESSION, ONE IS continuously mindful of the value and sacredness of human life and of the virtue in promoting and enhancing it. This applies not only to the immediate and articulate human beings, but also to the least fortunate among us, including animals with severe acquired and developmental defects, some of which may be so profound as to preclude any meaningful communication with others.

Each individual has a unique value, not by virtue of his or her level of intelligence or ability to communicate in a certain way, but by virtue of the energy inhabiting that body which instills recognizable "life" into its protoplasm. This energy, which activates the human brain, allows the physical structures of the brain to achieve consciousness, make decisions, think, feel pain and pleasure. Without such energy, the human body (including the brain) is merely a carcass devoid of these capabilities.

Although scientists are attempting to develop the technology to measure this energy directly, there is currently no consistent way to do so. We can, however, measure many of its consequences. For example, from an electroencephalographic standpoint, electrical activity ("brainwaves") can be measured via the electroencephalogram (EEG). The analogy of this energy in the brain with that in other animals is, upon reflection, self-evident, particularly as it resides in living animals as it resides in living bodies and brains of humans but not other animals.

Scientists have usually focused upon the supremacy of human intelligence or language function. Yet gorillas and other primates have scored higher on intelligence tests designed by and for humans than have some humans. Almost all animals have some form of easily recognizable communication. In other words, it is now clear that at least some primates can be taught sign language and other, verbal language, though none can master our exact vocabulary. Clearly, these animals possess more language function than a child who is three months old and considerably more function than a human born without cerebral hemispheres, who cannot meaningfully interact with the environment or other beings. Although the latter may suffer from sensory and motor malfunctions, the former can be taught to communicate.

Theologians have historically drawn the line between humans and other animals as something separate from the human body and brains which instills the soul in us. Human definitions, that the most important and enduring elements in humans are that which mediate mood and personality. These include centers for pain and touch perception, vision, hearing, taste, and smell, and, in many cases, centers which mediate mood and personality. There has been a general tendency among humanists and theologians to distinguish animal behavior and perceptions of the universe from those of humans. This is not surprising given that the brain structures and other central and peripheral nervous system structures and circuitry, down to the cellular level, are analogous in humans and other animals, and that many of the activities of the brain may be almost indistinguishable. These structures include centers for motor control, a child motor control, a child motor nervous system for pain and touch perception, vision, hearing, taste, and smell, and, in many cases, centers which mediate mood and personality.

Yet it is precisely this life-force energy that will ultimately foster not only harmony between humans and other animals, but also between all living creatures and the whole of nature. All of the natural world is of which we are a part. None is capable of achieving this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself part of the human condition and a foundation for inner security.

In order for humankind to evolve spiritually, there is a need for us as a species to learn to think of other beings as ends rather than means. Perhaps no other physican has epitomized this concept more than Dr. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) through his philosophy of "reverence for life." Schweitzer was so profoundly moved by his religious experiences and his genuine compassion for the suffering of others that he was able to transcend (exist separately from) the human body as a whole. He defined this capacity for this energy, soul, or spirit to transcend (exist separately from) the human body as a whole as soul. Schweitzer's New World Dictionary is "an entity which is regarded as being the immortal or spiritual part of the person, and though having no physical or material reality, is credited with the functions of thinking, willing, and, hence, determining all behavior." If, in the preceding sentence the word "person" were changed to "individual," the resulting definition would fit clearly with what we know about other animals as well as humans.

There is a need for us to transcend (exist separately from) our bodies and brains as well as our senses of touch and pain. We must learn to love the other animals as we do to the human and higher mammals in their mental faculties. The difference in mind between man and higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind. As I reflect upon these observations, I cannot help but feel a sense of great obligation, not only to other human life but to nonhuman life as well. Human-kind's superior intelligence and capacity for making moral judgments do not confer upon us the right to exploit other species (or for that matter other humans) but rather to a responsibility to show compassion for them and assist them.

I cannot help but wonder how we humans would react if an intellectually superior race of beings with advanced telepathic communication capabilities we could not comprehend were to land on Earth. Would they be morally justified on the basis of these additional capabilities to utilize humans in the ways we presently utilize other animals for the benefit of their "superior" race? I am convinced that much of human-kind's present cruelty to animals is the result of a failure to recognize who the animals really are. Dr. Albert Einstein (1879-1955) alluded to this when he commented, "A human being...experiences himself, his thoughts, and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature. It is of the highest importance that we achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself part of the human condition and a foundation for inner security.

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