

Philip Wollen



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Philip Wollen ist Philanthrop und Tierrechtsaktivist aus Australien. Der frühere Vizepräsident der Citibank setzt sich bereits seit Jahrzehnten leidenschaftlich für Tiere ein und spielt nicht mit dem Gedanken, damit aufzuhören. Swissveg durfte ihm ein paar Fragen stellen.

Looking at the future, what makes you hopeful?

We should first understand why it is perfectly reasonable for a rational person to lose hope in the first place. In human history 100 billion people have lived; 7.5 billion are alive today, and they torture and kill 2 billion land animals every week, and stab and suffocate 1 billion ocean animals every 8 hours. If humans were killed at the same rate we'd be wiped out in 1 weekend.

The oceans are dying in our time. By 2048 all our fisheries will be dead - the lungs and the arteries of the earth. And the oceans sequester more CO₂ than all forests of world combined.

Trillions of fish are ground up into pellets to feed livestock. Vegetarian cows are now the world's largest ocean predators. 10,000 entire species are wiped out every year because of the actions of one species. We now face the 6th mass extinction in cosmological history.

If any other organism did this a biologist would call it a virus. It is a crime against humanity of unimaginable proportions.

On that basis, it is reasonable to ask "Do humans have the right to be hopeful at all?"

I believe that Anthropocentrism (the quaint notion that humans are the central focus on the planet), is the ultimate crime.

Carl Sagan imagined cosmological time compressed into one year. So the Big Bang occurs on 1st January. The whole year passes. The sun, moon and stars arrive on New Year's Eve as the clock starts chiming midnight. After that came the animals.

A puny, biped, human mammal with an opposable thumb, belatedly shows up at one second to midnight, arrogantly proclaiming that everything that had occurred in the past was "divinely planned", with his precious

needs in mind. This tortured logic must surely offend our intellect. We need another Galileo and Copernicus to remind us we are not the centre of the universe.

But enlightened people now understand our place on earth – and our responsibilities too.

Today, powerful people are investing heavily in “meat substitutes”. The potential is so great that even meat companies are buying shares in these companies. Many restaurant groups are either going vegan – or increasing the number of vegan options on their menus. And medical science, climate science, ethics and economics are now coming independently to the same conclusion: Consumption of animals is destructive, unhealthy, and cruel and in a macroeconomic sense, highly unprofitable.

Victor Hugo said there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. But I say “There is nothing more destructive than a bad idea whose time has passed. The time for meat has passed”.

So despite all the evidence and all the gloom, I remain cautiously hopeful. I recall Albert Camus’ words in his book, *Return to Tipasa*: “In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer”.

How should small NPO’s deal with the activities of the lobbies from the meat and dairy industry?

For a start, they must stop thinking and behaving like small NPOs. We are not small in numbers. We are not small in energy. We are not small in ethics. We are not small in intelligence or in “information”. We are small in cooperation and mobilization.

The movement has become highly Balkanized, with a disproportionate number of “keyboard warriors”, arguing amongst themselves, indulging in petty squabbles and “analysis paralysis”.

The lobby groups exploit social media, provoking distractive and destructive arguments amongst activists, and watching the ensuing battle from the sidelines in glee.

It is with strategic planning and relentless execution that the battle for veganism will be won.

In the asymmetric battle for animal protection, victory will not come by arguing about who is the “purer” vegan. It will come from building a broad church where everyone is welcome - regardless of where they are on the vegan continuum when they join.

The anthropologist, Margaret Mead said “Never doubt that a few committed people can change the world. It is the only thing that ever has”.

There are only 13 million Jews in the world. But they play a vibrant role in international affairs. Look at the number of Nobel Prizes they win every year.

Trix and I sat in the Stadium at the Sydney Olympics, full of pride, as Australia with a population smaller than Florida won more Medals than every country in the world, except the US and Russia.

Tibet’s population is only 3 million. But who hasn’t heard of the plight of the Tibetans?

But there are over 600 million vegetarians and vegans in the world.

That is bigger than the US, England, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel - combined!

If they were one nation they would be bigger than the 27 countries in the European Union!!

They are bigger than NATO. They are bigger than OPEC

Despite this massive footprint, they are still drowned out by the raucous huntin’, shootin’, killin’ cartels who

believe that violence is the answer - when it shouldn't even be a question.

The intellectual battle for veganism has already been won – by the vegans. The evidence in favour of a vegan world is overwhelming: Animal cruelty, greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient run-off poisoning the oceans, clear-felling the forests, human health, zoonotic diseases, fiscal budgets blown to smithereens by Medicare, climate change, ocean acidification. The list is exhaustive.

Anyone who does not understand these facts is incredibly cruel, profoundly ignorant or deliberately obtuse.

The bluster and bullying by governments and their paymasters in the meat and dairy lobby is evidence of their moral cowardice, not their strength.

Are you still in touch with your former peer group from your time as Citibank vice-president? Are you engaging in discussing veganism with bankers and key players in economy?

I am constantly speaking to a wide range of people – Committed Vegans, and others who I describe as “Vegans in Progress”..... What do I mean?

At some stage most of us consumed animals, including me. There was a time when my favourite food was filet mignon and lobster, a fact for which I am profoundly ashamed today. But I witnessed horrors that most people only see in nightmares. And it affected me profoundly. I didn't consciously decide to become a vegan. Rather, I discovered that is what I had become.

So 30 years ago when I spoke to the “big end of town” about veganism many of them thought I was eccentric – so they smiled politely and said nothing. That was frustrating. 20 years ago some of them concluded that I was not eccentric, so they argued with me on the issues.

Today, with the happy confluence of medical science, climate change, ethics, concealed cameras in the animal slaughterhouses, there is less room for such garbled thinking. Consequently, the conversations are less confrontational and therefore more productive.

Once I have laid out the facts before them, the people in the “big end of town” fall into 3 groups.

Those who refuse to discuss the subject rationally, I treat politely by leaving them alone; Those with open minds, who want to know more, I provide concise information and leave them with material to digest at their leisure; and finally, those who actually “get it” and embrace the new paradigm with vigour. I am delighted to say that these numbers are growing rapidly. Many of them have taken animals off their menu, out of their factory canteens, and have indeed become donors and supporters of the animal protection movement.

Should politics get more involved in the animal rights movement?

I don't think politics should get into animal rights. I think animal rights should get into politics. And I also think politicians should join the AR movement - because laws affecting animals are made by politicians.

Judge White's closing words in the “Bonfire of the Vanities” were “The Law is humanity's attempt at Decency”.

We need a new kind of Jurisprudence, a “foro conscientiae”, a Court of the Conscience; where we can ask the hard question which goes beyond custom, black-letter law, or ingrained prejudice. The hardest question ever asked by Martin Luther King. “Is it Right?”

Or let us take Seneca's words from Piso's Justice "Let justice be done though the heavens fall."

In animal rights activism, where do you see a need for action the most?

The core focus of all AR activism must be on Veganism. Without it, we are simply rearranging the deck chairs on board the Titanic – after it has hit the iceberg.

Veganism is the Swiss Army Knife of the future. One instrument solves our ethical, economic, environmental, water, health problems - and ends animal cruelty forever.

And “activism” is not enough. We need “Pro-activism”. We need to be confident enough, strong enough, informed enough to see the problems before they arise, and mobilize our resources to stop them before they are adopted by money, politics and vested interests.

Do you currently have a specific objective that you particularly care about?

The world crying out for two things: Leadership and the Truth.

I care about Ethics and Truth. You cannot have one without the other.

And we need a culture which treats and respects the lives, rights and interests of others.

And I am not just talking about Animal Rights. I am also talking about Human Wrongs.

We know The Golden Rule “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” from the New Testament of Jesus. But it goes back to the Babylonian Jew, Hillel in 70 BCE. It actually goes back even further to the Analects of Confucius in 500 BCE. In fact, it was enshrined in the human heart long before the dawn of writing.

Because, in the end only 3 things matter. How deeply you loved; How gently you lived; And how gracefully you let go of things that were not meant for you.

Meat was not meant for you.

Are you planning on retiring any time soon?

On the battlefield, one does not “retire”. One can only surrender. I will never surrender. So therefore the word “retire” is not in my vocabulary.

Do you have an idol or someone you look up to? Who inspires you?

I don't have “heroes” but there are many people who possess qualities or skills I admire - Artists, athletes, poets, writers, scientists, musicians and activists. I don't believe there is such a thing as a “hero”. There are people (and non-human animals) who sometimes do “heroic” things. But to describe them as “heroes” is to unilaterally impose upon them an onerous obligation that they did not seek, and could not possibly live up to under all circumstances.

Words from Galileo, in Brecht's Life of Galileo resonate with me. “Unhappy the land where heroes are needed”.

Umberto Eco saw the modern world as a shallow place; where celebrities are made from little more than their glittering surfaces. He compared this with the ancient world – a place for heroes admired for their depth.

It's notable that the Ancient Greeks used the same word for 'beauty' as they did for 'honour'. Their word for 'shame' was identical to that for 'ugliness'. Character mattered. And it mattered a great deal.

In Arthur Miller's book "Death of a Salesman" Willie Loman admires his older brother Ben who brags "When I was 17 I walked into the jungle. When I walked out I was 21. And by God I was rich". Willy was captivated and wanted his two sons to be inspired by their uncle as a role model. At the end of the play, a disappointed Willy Loman commits suicide. I wonder how the story would have ended if Willy's inspirational, heroic brother had said "I walked out with my character?"

Letzte Aktualisierung: 17.09.2018

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