

A New Moral Imperative

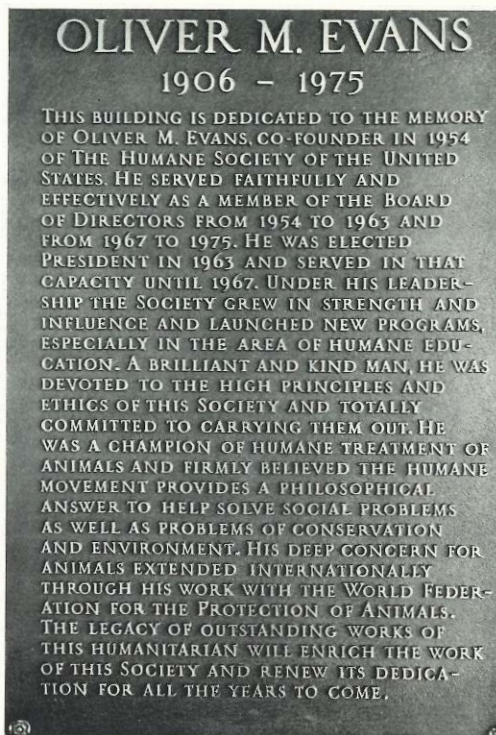
by Oliver M. Evans

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 industrialism what is left to us of wild creatures and the ecologies that support them. If our housing projects, farms, industries, and sportsmen continue the present rate of exploitation of our once bountiful continent and the seas around it, species after species will reach extinction and man's turn will inexorably come. Legal restraints are so obviously needed that Congress cannot avoid legislation on the basic issues much longer. Pray that they will act with wisdom and courage.

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The humane movement is in full support of the position taken by these three eminent persons. Their facts are beyond question and their logic incontrovertible. There is a daily outpouring in the media of concern and alarm over man's survival. But the humane movement holds there is another even more important dimension to this acute problem than their appeal for an environment in which survival is possible.

Will 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, considerate people rather than of warped personalities driven by uncontrollable and irrational emotions? Obviously not. In fact, these emotional problems are most acute in advanced industrialized countries where affluence is widespread.

The world's exploding populations, densely 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 influences are brought to bear.

If man is to survive, much less reach his full potential of love and joy in life, fundamental and positive 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 humanitarians. 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 clamor 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 for 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; technology must be controlled to serve compassionate, benevolent purposes.

Although governments of men of good will in western societies can bring a reasonable share of the goods of this world to every one of its members, to bring peace and security and to add quality to life, benevolence must play a major role. Its value must be recognized and its precepts widely practiced.

In an important part of our humane programs, grants and scholarships are given to scholars to enable them to undertake studies in science, philosophy and theology designed to win acceptance and support of our credo among intellectuals.

Concurrently, curriculum materials for primary and secondary schools are being developed by professional experts. In the early grades these materials are designed to instill in school children attitudes of active benevolence to all creatures and, in the later grades, to offer reasoned and logical proof that the principle of active benevolence is morally right and necessary for the survival of western society's significant values. The use of these materials is expanding rapidly.

This moral imperative, this credo, embraces and supports all the traditional goals of the organized humane movement. In fact, it places animal welfare work in its proper perspective as part of a tremendously important basic crusade for a better world instead of being a minor activity of a few sentimentalists. Active benevolence means a positive contribution to one's fellow men and fellow animals alike.

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HSUS President John A. Hoyt joins Mrs. Oliver Evans and her son, Sam, (left) at the dedication.