



Looking back at what we have accomplished (or not)

## Description

# We haven't moved the agenda for compassion, equality, peace and opportunity forward

By **Georges R. Dupras**

If my great grandfather was to come back to this world for just one day, he would be in awe of *all that has changed*. He would be amazed about everything mankind has accomplished.

However, in learning about Afghanistan, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Syria, North Korea, etc., his enthusiasm would be short lived. In the United States, he would see a country that spends half of its' gross national product on military equipment, while half of its own population can't afford basic health care. World over, he would see racism, famine, violence, hatred, greed, death and he would know that, in reality, *nothing has changed*.

For all our technological achievements, we haven't moved the agenda for compassion, equality, peace and opportunity forward – not one inch.

Beyond cultural differences, that at times seem insurmountable, there is one other preoccupation that has prejudiced our way of thinking about others; that being economic versus ecological values. I hesitate to use the expression “ethical values” as I'm not suggesting that the one precludes the other.

We are taught to never be satisfied with what we are or what we have; that more is better regardless of the cost and that *what we are* is more important than *who we are*.

We are obsessed – obsessed with economic growth and with changing everything around us – we forget that meaningful change comes from within, when “we” change. Our mindsets are singularly our greatest enemy. Our conditioning denies us our full potential. We live in a world where moderation is perceived as an attack on capitalism. We are taught to never be satisfied with what we are or what we have; that more is better regardless of the cost and that *what we are* is more important than *who we are*.

We are pressured to be motivated and anything less is a lack of initiative. Our definition of motivation is at the very core of our existence. It means that everything commercial takes precedence over that which isn't



predicated on economics. It is argued, that failure to recognize this way of thinking produces a society of sponges.

The word motivation can be defined in as many ways the user wishes to apply it. It is much like science; it isn't so much the science behind a study, but rather the *selected use* of that science. This can also be said of how we understand motivation, and by that, I mean selectively. We cherry-pick, we select only that which suits our objectives. Certainly, an individual must be motivated to invest personal time and effort to protect millions of years of evolution. When applying the word motivation to the protection of the natural environment, without demonstrating an economic return, it becomes difficult for some capitalists thinkers to understand.

My great grandfather would know of another of our many flaws, that being of our ability to rationalize. He would know that our commitment to Native people across the Americas is nothing more than a political word game. He would be saddened by the loss of species, destruction of life-supporting habitats, and he would know that our rationale is nothing more than self-serving.

'When applying the word motivation to the protection of the natural environment, without demonstrating an economic return, it becomes difficult for some capitalists thinkers to understand.'

A friend of mine, who just happens to be a Roman Catholic priest, says that we have lost our moral compass; *lost it, we buried it* under mountains of profit and loss statements.

In our commercially driven societies, nothing is more important than our financial statements – not life itself. We see this in the sale of dangerous products\* to foreign nations having fewer safeguards than ours. Many of these products are banned in our own country. We subsidize the use of some chemicals while promoting others such as mercury in mining operations.

We do this knowing of the health risks to the people handling them. We justify our economic returns by arguing jobs and by insisting that the use of these products is at the discretion of the importing country's and therefore not our concern. These rationales sound a bit like those argued by drug pushers or the NRA defending their constitutional right to sell assault rifles.

The basic formula of capitalism dictates that an economic system be anchored on private ownership. This allows for a select group of investors to oversee the acquisition of resources, production, operations and distribution for profit. All decision-making is made by those who are heavily invested. This has never changed and there is no reason to believe that it will in the future.

Dare I advance that this very definition of capitalism, the one that dictates that an economic system be based on private ownership, is at the root of efforts now being made to re-introduce extinct species? Since these lab species will fall just short of having the full genetic makeup of the original animal, will they be open to private patents? What are the ethical considerations of private ownership of a species? What of the impact these hybrids will have on the natural environment, or on those who live from the environment?

'It [economic development] becomes dangerous when it is allowed to divide people, communities, when the product places undue risk on the natural environment, when it violates the rights of ancient cultures and ultimately endangers the health of lives worldwide.'

There is nothing wrong with economic development, as long as it doesn't become an obsession for a select demographic or one that destroys all in its path in the interest of jobs, votes, personal gain or those of multi-conglomerates. It becomes dangerous when it is allowed to divide people and communities, when the product places undue risk on the natural environment when it violates the rights of ancient cultures and ultimately endangers the health of lives worldwide.



I too enjoy the benefits of capitalism, the one with the small “c”. I do recognize that there is a cost to commercialism, one that must fit within a living budget that benefits *all* on this beleaguered planet. You will note that I use the term “all” rather than Mankind as surely it goes beyond man.

Yes, my great grandfather would be amazed, but he would also be disillusioned that we have sacrificed our most valued gifts, those of compassion and kindness, in the interest of a privileged demographic.

My father’s generation fought a war in which many died, others crippled and families destroyed. For the last sixty years, others have been fighting a different kind of war. A war against ignorance, conditioning and greed. They have learned that the only way to set a new all-inclusive course is through their example, one day at a time, step by step. For this I salute all those individuals who risk being marginalized, ridiculed, disparaged, even arrested\*\* – you are the true heroes.

\*Asbestos, mercury, Light Armoured Vehicles

\*\* Passive actions such as giving water to food animals on the way to slaughter

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**Georges R. Dupras** has advocated for animals for over fifty years. A member of the International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA), a Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada (AAC), Quebec Representative of Zoocheck Canada and past Board member of the Canadian SPCA, he worked on the original Save the Seal campaign in 1966 that culminated in the founding of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in 1969. Georges Dupras has published two books, *Values in Conflict* and the eBook *Ethics, a Human Condition*, and currently lives in Montreal, Canada.



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