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Wolf-Ekkehard Lönnig

3 September 2018

“The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation.”

Richard Dawkins

**Alfred Russel Wallace 1910/1914:
IS NATURE CRUEL? THE PURPOSE AND
LIMITATIONS OF PAIN**

Excerpts of CHAPTER XIX of his book: *The World of Life*.
A Manifestation of Creative Power, Directive Mind and Ultimate Purpose.
Pp. 375-377, 380-381¹

Und weiter:

***Parasitismus und
Schmerzempfinden bei Insekten
und niederen Tieren***

W.-E. L. an Herrn Sanitätsrat Dr. Dr. med. habil. Joachim Vetter
(Auszug aus Brief vom 20/22. 2. 1993)

Hervorhebungen in Farbe in den Zitaten von mir.

**First: A. R. Wallace² writes/comments on the
topic from *his* evolutionary perspective:**

P. 371:

“About the same period [when J. Arthur Thompson reviewed Darwinism] the late Professor **Huxley** used terms still more erroneous and misleading. He spoke of the myriads of generations of herbivorous animals which "have been tormented and devoured by carnivores"; of the carnivores and herbivores alike as being "subject to all the miseries incidental to old age, disease, and over-multiplication "; and of the "more or less enduring suffering" which is the meed³ of both vanquished and victor; and he concludes that since thousands of times a minute, were our ears sharp enough, we should hear sighs and groans of pain like those heard by Dante at the gate of Hell, the world cannot be governed by what we

¹ <https://archive.org/details/worldoflifemanif00walliala>

² “Alfred Russel Wallace OM FRS (8 January 1823 – 7 November 1913) was an English naturalist, explorer, geographer, anthropologist, and biologist. He is best known for independently conceiving the theory of evolution through natural selection; his paper on the subject was jointly published with some of Charles Darwin's writings in 1858.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Russel_Wallace

³ Preis

call benevolence. Such a strong opinion, from such an authority, must have influenced thousands of readers; but I shall be able to show that these statements are not supported by facts, and that they are, moreover, not in accordance with the principles of that Darwinian evolution of which Huxley was so able and staunch a defender.

It is the influence of such statements as these, repeated and even exaggerated in newspaper articles and reviews all over the country, that has led so many persons to fall back upon the teaching of Haeckel—*that the universe had no designer or creator, but has always existed*; and that the life-pageant, with all its pain and horror, has been repeated cycle after cycle from eternity in the past, and will be repeated in similar cycles forever. We have here presented to us one of the strangest phenomena of the human mind—that numbers of intelligent men are more attracted by a belief which makes the amount of pain which they think does exist on the earth last for all eternity in successive worlds without any permanent and good result whatever, than by another belief, which admits the same amount of pain into one world only, and for a limited period, while whatever pain there is only exists for the grand purpose of developing a race of spiritual beings, who may thereafter live without physical pain—also for all eternity! To put it shortly—they prefer the conception of a universe in which pain exists perpetually and uselessly, to one in which the pain is strictly limited, while its beneficial results are eternal!

None of these writers, however, nor, so far as I know, any evolutionist, has ever gone to the root of the problem, by considering the very existence of pain as being one of the essential factors in evolution; as having been developed in the animal world for a purpose; as being strictly subordinated to the law of utility; and therefore never developed beyond what was actually needed for the preservation of life.

Pp. 375-377:

People will not keep always in mind that pain exists in the world for a purpose, and a most beneficent purpose—that of aiding in the preservation of a sufficiency of the higher and more perfectly organised forms, till they have reproduced their kind. This being the case, it is almost as certain as anything not personally known can be, that all animals which breed very rapidly, which exist in vast numbers, and which are necessarily kept down to their average population by the agency of those that feed upon them, have little sensitiveness, perhaps only a slight discomfort under the most severe injuries, and that they probably suffer nothing at all when being devoured. For why should they? They exist to be devoured; their enormous powers of increase are for this end; they are subject to no dangerous bodily injury until the time comes to be devoured, and therefore they need no guarding against it through the agency of pain. In this category, of painless, or almost painless animals, I think we may place almost all aquatic animals up to fishes, all the vast hordes of insects, probably all Mollusca and worms; thus reducing the sphere of pain to a minimum throughout all the earlier geological ages, and very largely even now. When we see the sharp rows of teeth in the earlier birds and flying reptiles, we immediately think of the pain suffered by their prey; but the teeth were in all probability necessary for seizing the smooth-scaled fishes or smaller land-reptiles, which were swallowed a moment afterwards; and as no useful purpose would be served by the devoured suffering pain in the process, there is no reason to believe that they did so suffer.

The same reasoning will apply to most of the smaller birds and mammals. These are all so wonderfully adjusted to their environments, that, in a state of nature, they can hardly suffer at all from what we term accidents. Birds, mice, squirrels, and the like, do not get limbs broken by falls, as we do. They learn so quickly and certainly not to go beyond their powers in climbing, jumping, or flying, that they are probably never injured except by rare natural causes, such as lightning, hail, forest-fires, etc., or by fighting among themselves; and those who are injured without being killed by these various causes form such a minute fraction of the whole as to be reasonably negligible. The wounds received in fighting seem to be rarely serious, and the rapidity with which such wounds heal in a state of nature shows that whatever pain exists is not long-continued. It is only the large, heavy, slow-moving mammals which can be subject to much accidental injury in a state of nature from such causes as rockfalls, avalanches,

volcanic eruptions, or falling trees; and in these cases by far the larger portion would either escape unhurt or would be killed outright, so that the amount of pain suffered would, in any circumstances, be small; and as pain has been developed for the necessary purpose of safeguarding the body from often – recurring dangers, not from those of rare occurrence, it need not be very acute. Perhaps self-mutilation, or fighting to the death, are the greatest dangers which most wild animals have to be guarded against; and no very extreme amount of pain would be needed for this purpose, and therefore would not have been produced. But it is undoubtedly not these lesser evils that have led to the outcry against the cruelty of nature, but almost wholly what is held to be the widespread existence of elaborate contrivances for shedding blood or causing pain that are seen throughout nature—the vicious-looking teeth and claws of the cat-tribe, the hooked beak and prehensile talons of birds of prey, the poison fangs of serpents, the stings of wasps, and many others.

The idea that all these weapons exist for the purpose of shedding blood or giving pain is wholly illusory. As a matter of fact, their effect is wholly beneficent even to the sufferers, inasmuch as they tend to the diminution of pain. Their actual purpose is always to prevent the escape of captured food—of a wounded animal, which would then, indeed, suffer useless pain, since it would certainly very soon be captured again and be devoured. The canine teeth and retractile claws hold the prey securely; the serpent's fangs paralyse it; and the wasp's sting benumbs the living food stored up for its young, or serves as a protection against being devoured itself by insect-eating birds; which latter, probably, only feel enough pain to warn them against such food in future. The evidence that animals which are devoured by lion or puma, by wolf or wild cat, suffer very little, is, I think, conclusive. The suddenness and violence of the seizure, the blow of the paw, the simultaneous deep wounds by teeth and claws, either cause death at once, or so paralyse the nervous system that no pain is felt till death very rapidly follows. It must be remembered that in a state of nature the Carnivora hunt and kill to satisfy hunger, not for amusement; and *all conclusions derived from the house-fed cat and mouse are fallacious*. Even in the case of man, with his highly sensitive nervous system, which has been developed on account of his unprotected skin and excessive liability to accidental injury, seizure by a lion or tiger is hardly painful or mentally distressing, as testified by those who have been thus seized and have escaped. *Our whole tendency to transfer our sensations of pain to all other animals is grossly misleading*. The probability is, that there is as great a gap between man and the lower animals in sensitiveness to pain as there is in their intellectual and moral faculties; and as a concomitant of those higher faculties. We require to be more sensitive to pain because of our bare skin with no protective armour or thick pads of hair to ward off blows, or to guard against scratches and wounds from the many spiny or prickly plants that abound in every part of the world; and especially on account of our long infancy and childhood.

Pp. 380-381:

One of these principles, much insisted on by Darwin, is, that no organ, faculty, or sensation can have arisen in animals except through its utility to the species. The sensation of pain has been thus developed, and must therefore be proportionate in each species to its needs, not beyond those needs. In the lowest animals, whose numbers are enormous, whose powers of increase are excessive, whose individual lives are measured by hours or days, and which exist to be devoured, pain would be almost or quite useless, and would therefore not exist. Only as the organism increased in complexity, in duration of life, and in exposure to danger which might possibly lead to its death before it could either leave offspring or serve as food to some higher form—only then could pain have any use or meaning.

I have now endeavoured, very roughly, to follow out this principle to its logical results, which are, that only in the higher and larger members of the highest vertebrates—mammals and birds, do the conditions exist which render acute sensations of pain necessary, or even serviceable. Only in the most highly organised, such as dogs and horses, cattle, antelopes, and deer, does there appear to be any need for acute sensations of pain, and these are almost certainly, for reasons already given, very much less than ours. The logical conclusion is, therefore, that they only suffer a very moderate amount of pain from such bodily injuries as they are subject to in a state of nature.

I have already shown that in most cases, even from our much higher standard, their death would be rapid and almost painless; whence it follows, that the widespread idea of the cruelty of nature is almost wholly imaginary. *It rests on the false assumption that the sensations of the lower animals are necessarily equal to our own*, and takes no account whatever of these fundamental principles of evolution which almost all the critics profess to accept. There is, of course, a large body of facts which indicate that whole classes of animals, though very highly organised, suffer nothing which can be called pain, as in the insects; and similar facts show us that even the highest warm-blooded animals suffer very much less than we do. But my argument here does not depend upon any such evidence, but on the universally accepted doctrine of evolution through adaptation. According to that theory, it is only life-preserving variations, qualities, or faculties that have survival value: pain is one of the most important of these for us, but it is by no means so important to any other animal. No other animal needs the pain-sensations that we need; it is therefore absolutely certain that no other possesses such sensations in more than a fractional degree of ours. What that fraction is we can only roughly estimate by carefully considering the circumstances of each case. These show that it is certainly almost infinitesimal in by far the larger part of the animal kingdom, very small in all invertebrates, moderately small in fishes and reptiles, as well as in all the smaller birds and mammals. In the larger of these two classes it is probably considerable, but still far below that of even the lowest races of man.”

Second: Parasitismus und Schmerzempfinden bei Insekten und niederen Tieren

W.-E. L. an Herrn Sanitätsrat Dr. Dr. med. habil. Joachim Vetter
(Auszug aus Brief vom 20/22. 2. 1993)

Hervorhebungen in Farbe in den Zitaten wieder von mir.

See, please:

<http://www.weloennig.de/JoachimVetter.pdf>

See, please, additionally

<http://www.weloennig.de/BeautifulFactsPartII.pdf>

pp. 9-11

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