



February 2023

## Hearing the Voiceless

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Solidarity with Animals](#)

Judith Lipton

First, thanks to Eileen Crist for a beautiful [opening statement](#). Thanks as well to my fellow contributors. Of all of the discussions on the GTI, this has been the most profound, and I have learned a lot.

I suggest coupling our discussion with the recent [article](#) in *Vox* about the schism within the American Veterinary Medical Association about how best to cull (kill) animals in large numbers. Apparently, the AMVA condones VSD+, ventilation shutdown plus: sealing housing, reducing ventilation, and then turning up the temperature on captive critters. The animals die like a dog in a hot car. Tens of millions of fowl were killed this way after last year's bird flu epidemic. The veterinary schism is between those vets who are trained and employed to help animals and those who are employed to manage livestock, the nearly 10 billion land animals held in confinement in the US every year.

Should veterinarians represent the interests of animals or of the humans who own and profit from them or of those who enjoy animal flesh and skin and fur? Pets or profits? Many people show love and compassion to some pets, and yet condone their commodification and killing at the grocery store, shoe shop, and dinner table. How do we tolerate such contradictions? Psychologists call it splitting, denial, or compartmentalization. Another term is psychic numbing. *Homo sapiens* have many unconscious mental mechanisms to avoid reality or tilt it for self-serving ends. The same tricks are employed by those who promote the development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons for "defense" and then go to church or synagogue or school and teach loving kindness. As Bertolt Brecht noted, we crave to be more kindly than we are.

There is no market in the US for coats made of cat fur, even angora, or furniture crafted from dog skin. It is easy to reject products made from our household pets. Most would not tolerate the cognitive dissonance required to make dog snout paté. But in China, the preferred form of dog meat is golden retriever, and they are bred as such. One group says yum, the other yuck. It depends on culture, point of view, and identification, not to mention awareness.

Crist valorizes indigenous peoples who lived in closer proximity to animals than modern urbanites and hence showed respect to their prey and habitat. There are still modern cultures that endorse the Buddhist vow to work for the benefit of all sentient beings or something similar. The key is mindfulness, seeing the oneness of all sentient beings, including animals, vegetables, and microbes. We are all one. I am the lamb and the lettuce, made of atoms from nuclear explosions in stars recycled for billions of years. Or as Kurt Vonnegut noted, poetically, God made mud, and some mud has the good luck to stand up for a little while.

Try this: use the Buddhist prayer before meals that begins, "Many labors have brought us this food, let us acknowledge and thank them." For twenty minutes of silent meditation, visualize as many beings between you and your food as you can. Visualize the farmers who raised the food, the people who drove the tractors, and the trucks that brought it to market. Each of these people had parents. They were children. The grocery store workers, and the cooks. Each of these people have families and passions. Honeybees pollinated the plants, and birds spread seeds to grow more plants. Fertilizer came from manure from farm animals, but more likely sacks of chemicals devised by other people and prepared by more. Many humans brought us this food, and many plants and animals as well. But here it gets dicey. If you bought organic soy sauce from Japan, or organic brown rice from India, you know many labors and laborers worked hard, probably for little pay, and then it took a lot of fuel to import it across the Pacific. Unless you only eat locally grown organic plants, you fall into hypocrisy.

I thank the worms that made the soil rich and the microbes within me that make my food digestible. I can see the cloud in a flower and a flower in the cloud. The lotus that grows in the mud. I know I came from dust and shall return, if not to dust then ash. That insight lasts for a few

days or weeks. Then I put on my cashmere sweater, made from the wool of sheep or goats who were probably eaten after they were shaved. My boots are leather with sheepskin lining, dead cow skin, and sheep hair. Next thing you know, I am driving to the store to buy phở, made from dead cows and pigs. Greed quickly overcomes mindfulness. My brain goes into splitting, denial, or compartmentalization. We are often calm in the practice of hypocrisy.

Society as a whole and experts from many fields must address the fact that human beings are animals, just like their prey, dinner, or lunch, and the pyramid of power has no moral justification. We don't know much about animal consciousness. But all animals have receptors that influence their behavior, along with their feelings. They may not have the capacity to perform calculus, Bach, or pickle ball, but they sense and react. Plants have photoreceptors and release pheromones. Trees seem to communicate through underground fungal networks. Bacteria and fungi exhibit behavior such as "quorum sensing," cell-cell communication that allows them to adjust population density by gene regulation. Animals and plants work to propagate their genes and have software to do that. There is no evidence that *Homo sapiens* are uniquely different from other critters, except for the "differential imperative." *Homo sapiens* are not *Homo Sentience*.

How should we move to action, to save the planet from human greed and short-term thinking? It is as Einstein noted regarding nuclear war: Our way of thinking must change, or we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe, dragging most beings—sentient or not—with us.

I have a small amount of hope. Enough to play with my grandchildren. But no expectations. These beautiful beings may be doomed by human stupidity, greed, grandiosity, denial, and compartmentalization among the relatively small number of very wealthy people, mostly white, male, and well-educated, who run The System. They drag the voiceless with them. Those voiceless include all animals and plants and young people and old people and those who lack internet or the education and resources to subscribe to the Great Transition Initiative. The participants in this discussion are resourced and powerful. When we end this discussion, isn't that just another way of passing the buck?

---

## About the Author



Judith Lipton is a psychiatrist and lifelong antiwar activist. She specializes in psychosomatic medicine and psycho-oncology, and is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. However, since the early 1960s, her passion has been peace. In 1979, she founded the Washington chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), and was on the National Board and Executive Committee of both PSR and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. She currently serves on the Committee to Abolish Nuclear Weapons of PSR. She has co-authored eight books on war, aggression, and sex, most recently *Strength through Peace: How Demilitarization led to Peace and Happiness in Costa Rica*, and *What the Rest of the World Can Learn from a Tiny Tropical Nation*.

---

## About the Publication

Published by the [Great Transition Initiative](#).

Under our Creative Commons BY-NC-ND copyright, you may freely republish our content, without alteration, for non-commercial purposes as long as you include an explicit attribution to the Great Transition Initiative and a link to the GTI homepage.



Cite as Judith Lipton, "Hearing the Voiceless," contribution to GTI Forum "Solidarity with Animals," *Great Transition Initiative* (February 2023), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/solidarity-animals-lipton>.

---

## About the Great Transition Initiative

The [Great Transition Initiative](#) is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being.

As an initiative for collectively understanding and shaping the global future, GTI welcomes diverse ideas. Thus, the opinions expressed in our publications do not necessarily reflect the views of GTI or the Tellus Institute.