

Rother Baron:

The Pulse of God

*Eighth Conversation with Paula:
Talk about Animal Rights and Religion*



On Paula's small South Sea island there are no prisons and no army, no parties and no property. She looks at what we take for granted with the astonished eyes of a child.

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"With her wrap-around dress, on which exotic birds screamed in bright colours, her face that seemed to be carved like out of ebony, her thick black hair, in which the sunlight sparkled, and her supple feet whose smoothness formed a striking contrast to the cracked asphalt, Paula looked so alien to me that I stared at her as if she were a hallucination."

from: [How I got to know Paula](#) (Conversations with Paula, Introduction)



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Warfare in the Forest

Rarely have I seen Paula so upset as on the day when we met a hunter in the forest. He was sitting on his high seat and gave us a friendly nod as we passed him on the path. Yet Paula flinched when she saw his rifle and ducked involuntarily, as if the man was about to point it at her.

"Come on," she urged me when we were out of the hunter's reach, "let's get quickly away from here! I don't want to get involved in the warfare."

"But that was just a hunter!" I laughed.

Paula looked at me uncomprehendingly:

"Well – that's exactly what I mean ..."



The Hunter – an Archaic Priest?

It was one of those situations in which I was not sure whether Paula was just pretending to be naïve or whether she really did not know what kind of tasks a hunter has to perform in our country. My reply was correspondingly short: "Don't be silly! You surely know what a hunter is!"

"Yes, of course," she replied wonderingly. "Someone who is on the hunt for other creatures."

I shook my head. "A hunter is responsible for controlling the wildlife population. So you and I have nothing to fear from him."

Paula frowned. "What does that mean – 'control of the wildlife population'?"

"Well, the hunter makes sure that particular wild animal populations don't get out of hand and thereby endanger the ecological balance," I explained to her.

"And why does he need a gun for that?"

Paula wanted to know.

"Well, to shoot surplus or sick animals," I replied.

"What are you saying?" Paula asked back.

"He kills animals just because he thinks there are too many of them? After all, with humans you don't solve the problem of overpopulation by setting shooting quotas either, but by limiting reproduction. The same could be done with animals – if it is absolutely necessary."

Normally, I would not have responded to such a crazy remark. But since I knew that Paula would not give up until I had said something, I sighed and stated: "First of all, I don't know if something like that would be

possible and effective enough. And secondly, wild animals are shot for consumption from time to time anyway. So in a way you can combine the pleasant with the useful here."

Paula stopped and gave me a contemptuous look. "Could you please explain to me what is supposed to be 'pleasant' about killing another living creature?"

"But that was just a casual remark!" I defended myself. "I only wanted to say that the animals that are killed – since we eat meat anyway – are at least used in a sensible way."

"Does that mean that you see in the hunter something like a master of ceremonies?"

Paula questioned me further. "Someone who performs or prepares some kind of sacrificial rite? Is that possibly an archaic remnant in your culture?"

"Oh no!" I laughed. "Meat is quite a normal kind of food for us – and hunting is rather a special case in its production. As a rule, ani-

mals are specially raised for the purpose of meat production."

Paula lifted her eyebrows – that didn't bode well. "Are you saying that you raise animals just to kill and eat them?"

"Well, yes," I conceded, as if Paula had caught me doing something forbidden. "Factory farming and industrial meat production have some negative side effects, of course. But animal welfare laws have been improved a lot recently."

Paula breathed a sigh of relief. "So you are now taking action against those who deliberately kill other living creatures?"

I smiled, but Paula's seriousness made the smile freeze on my lips. "No, that's not what I meant," I clarified. "The animal welfare laws are only intended to prevent unnecessary suffering of animals."

Paula shook her head. "And you don't consider it unnecessary suffering if the only purpose of a living creature is to be killed and eaten by others?"



"Do you believe in transmigration?"

I groaned in frustration. It bothered me that Paula was cornering me again with her questions. She knew perfectly well that eating meat was something quite normal and generally accepted in our culture!

"Don't you eat meat at all?" I asked back.

"Do you possibly believe in the transmigration of souls?"

"In the transmigration of souls?" Paula wondered. "No – how did you come up with this?"

"I just thought ... because you're so insistent that no other living creature should be killed," I replied hesitantly. It annoyed me that I had made that thoughtless remark – so I had unnecessarily opened up a second front of discussion.

Paula still didn't understand me – or did she just not want to understand me? "And what does that have to do with transmigration?" she asked.

"I just assumed you would believe that the souls of your ancestors live on in the animals," I explained with a sigh.

"So you think animals only have their own right to live if they are ennobled by contact with human soul manna?" Paula scoffed.

"Well," I replied meekly, "I don't know your beliefs – and so I thought ..." I didn't finish the sentence – I didn't even know myself what I had been thinking when I made that remark.

Where and what is God?

We stepped out into a small clearing. As the branches of the trees grew from the side into the open space, the light merely dripped down on us as if through panes of glass. Only a narrow cupola of sky arched over us.



"I actually thought that our religious ideas would not be so far apart," Paula remarked after a while. "'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God' – isn't that what it says in your holy book?"

I nodded, surprised that Paula knew the Bible. What was she getting at?

"You see, and that's exactly what we believe in, too," she claimed boldly. "That the Word is with God in the beginning means that nothing is there in the beginning. Only when God divests himself of his word, that is, of his spirit, when the latter unfolds outside the primordial cell in which it had encapsulated itself before the beginning of time, does the universe come into being, and with it everything else that exists. Consequently, everything existing is permeated by the divine spirit and therefore also possesses its own dignity and its own right to exist."

"According to this logic, no one would even be allowed to cut down a tree," I objected.

"Strictly speaking, that's true," Paula confirmed. "But in the world as we know it, one existing thing is constantly being absorbed by another. Thus, in order to obtain firewood or material for building a house, it is certainly permissible to cut off something from the tree – all the more so as trees shed twigs and branches from time to time any-

way. You just have to be careful not to destroy its whole existence."

People would probably still be living in caves if everyone followed this principle, I thought to myself. For my answer, however, I concentrated on another, in my opinion more powerful argument: "And what about the predators? Are they a work of the devil in your eyes?"

"That's something else," Paula dismissed the objection. "When one animal kills another, it always does so to survive. The predator is simply created that way – it has no other choice. Humans, in contrast, always have a choice, especially when they live in the kind of world you have created for yourselves. They can easily survive without killing other living beings."

"But sometimes that is exactly what is needed to restore the balance in an ecosystem," I pointed out. "Nature does not always manage to regulate itself."

"If nature doesn't manage to do so, it's usually the fault of humans, who threw it out of balance beforehand," Paula contradicted me. "The same hubris that leads us to destroy the self-regulating cycle of nature makes us believe subsequently that we alone, the self-proclaimed crown of creation, can repair the damage."



Human Hubris and Divine Breath

We left the clearing and entered a dense spruce forest. Inside it was so gloomy that I first had the impression of being surrounded

by complete darkness. Only gradually did my eyes get used to the new light conditions.

"Do you know what I think?" Paula asked me after we had been walking in silence for a while. "I think that this self-congratulation of man as the 'crown of creation' is basically founded on a deep existential uncertainty. After all, what really distinguishes humans from other living beings is their ability to reflect on themselves, to become aware of themselves and their life conditions".

"Oops!" Paula uttered. In the twilight of the forest, she had almost tripped over a rotten branch. But she didn't let that rattle her and continued her train of thought unperturbed: "But what does it see, the poor little human worm, when it looks into the mirror of its own existence? – That it is condemned to death from birth and that its existence will be over after only a fraction of a blink of an eye! And what does it do then? It proclaims itself the 'crown of creation' and thus lulls itself throughout its life into the illusion of

being almighty and thus also immortal. In other words, man uses his special spiritual abilities only to lie to himself about his true destiny. And it is precisely this combination of blindness and assumed divinity that has – so it seems to me – an enormous destructive potential."

A wagtail landed on our path and hopped in front of us, looking for food on the soggy forest floor. Whenever we had almost reached it, it flew a few metres further and then led the way again.

"Fortunately, even the Earth is only an insignificant fragment in the great blueprint of the universe," Paula continued her train of thought. "The self-dynamic development of the divine spirit is in no way influenced by the demise of Earth. This can only happen through the logic inherent in this dynamic itself – through the fact that the divine spirit at some point strives back into its origin, that it once again withdraws into itself, in order to subsequently divest itself of itself

once again. This is what we call the pulse of God."



We stepped out of the forest and silently climbed a small hill, from which we had a wide view out into the country. One ridge of hills followed the next, until the green waves merged in the distance and got lost in the milky dusk. It was like looking at a lake whose surface was rippled by a gentle wind. While we looked out into the imaginary lake, Paula's words echoed in me. When I looked up, the pale crescent moon was already visible in the sky. Didn't the moon, too, I

thought involuntarily, follow a kind of silent pulse in its ever-new blossoming and fading? I turned to Paula. But when I wanted to share my thoughts with her, I noticed that she had closed her eyes. Devoutly, she sucked in the fresh evening air, immersing herself in the pulse of life that the balmy summer wind was fanning around her cheeks.



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