

The Value of Life

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Have you ever wondered what value government agencies place on your life? You may be flattered to learn that up to now, as an average U.S. citizen, you have generally been considered pretty valuable. That may be changing.



Despite the depressed economy caused by the 2008 global recession, you might have noticed that the cost of *removing* (a mole hunter's euphemism for *killing*) a mole in your garden (or, as we say in the U.S., your yard) has increased from \$35 to \$90 for each near-blind little mammal.

At first, I thought this indicated that the value of a mole's life had increased by \$55. However, on further reflection, I realized that a mole's life is now worth \$55 less than it was previously. In effect, the value of an American mole's life was negative and is getting more negative. They are worth far more dead than alive.

- *It is interesting to note that, reputedly like snakes, there are no moles in Ireland.*
- *Darwin cited moles as an example of mammals that have organs (e.g., eyes) that have become vestigial and are being phased out by natural selection.*
- *Moles are considered to be a pest in the U.S. while, alternately, in Germany, they are a protected species.*

Geese, on the other hand, might be deemed worthy or worthless depending on where they happen to live. In an affluent residential enclave with tree-lined streets, richly-fertilized lawns, and man-made goose ponds (i.e., manicured lakes strategically-placed for sunsets and reflections), they aren't worth poop.

For example, around America's suburban lakeshore villages, (where much of the human population can recount 60-80 years; rarely leave their heated and air-conditioned incubators; and enjoy the benefits of Medicare while railing against creeping Socialism), complaining residents often prevail on the State Department of Conservation to *control* (the urban grass farmer's euphemism for killing) the wild goose population. The Department is happy to comply (albeit, without fanfare).



Alternately, the same Department of Conservation (*We are the NRA!*) actively accommodate waterfowl in the hunterland by creating habitat and growing feed so that gunners (a.k.a., sports enthusiasts) can, ultimately, shoot them.

From this, one might conclude that, whether through birth control or being shot to death, a Canada goose is not worth very much alive.

Pigs seem to be another interesting case. For their unfortunate role in transmitting diseases to those ignorant of the means for protecting themselves from pathogens, they earned a bad reputation early on. From Leviticus 11:7, the dietary laws of Judaism forbade the eating of pork in any form, condemning the pig as an unclean animal. The eating of pork is also prohibited in Islam, among Seventh-day Adventists, and in some other Christian denominations. Statistics aren't available, but McDonald's probably doesn't sell many bacon cheeseburgers in the regions where these views are firmly held. (*Fries with that?*)

Still, it would seem pigs must be worth something. Each year, our porcine imports from Europe and the Orient are cultivated by the millions on nutritious U.S. feed (3-4 pounds of grain per pound of pig) until they weigh about 250 pounds. (Do the arithmetic; math not required.) Pigs are culled after just six months and sold for about \$150 per 'belly', the cut of meat used to make bacon slices. (Actually, they are sold by the pound, e.g., \$170 per hundredweight in 2015. This metric more accurately reflects what is really in store for today's new, low-fat, genetically-manipulated porker.)



When one thinks about it, for all the loving care administered to the development of the young piglets in their computer-controlled incubators and communal macro-environments, one might conclude that the life of a six-month-old pig really doesn't have any value. After all, it is not going to be lovingly cared for in a home (or yard) and taken to the veterinarian for periodic checkups until it dies of old age. Instead, it is on its way to becoming someone's lunch. Big chunks of it will be stored in someone's freezer.



Also, while the world's 20 billion chickens can live up to 5-10 years, 50 billion broilers are dispatched annually after only 5-9 weeks. Housed in large, ventilated sheds providing, at least, 0.5 square feet per bird being bred for fast growth and large breasts, many of these bird's legs cannot support their own weight at culling.

In 2015, the price of beef cattle declined even as the nearly hundred million members of the U.S. herd became the '*fattest they have ever been*'. This was attributed to cheap corn and more days of feeding before slaughter. Cows are slaughtered at 14 months and 1,000 pounds while calves are cashed in between a tender three and sixteen weeks of age.

So, what does this cursory evaluation of the value of animal life tell us? For one thing, we begin to recognize that the value of life is highly dependent upon location, age, and the intent of the guys with the guns and checkbooks.