

From “Dominion” to Domination: The Duplicity and Complicity of Matthew Scully



Mathew Scully (pictured here between two of his fellow enthusiastic enablers of war crimes, Michael Gerson [left] and David Frum), is not just a hypocrite or opportunist. He is a menace to all life, beings, species, and nature.

By Dr. Steve Best, Ph.D.

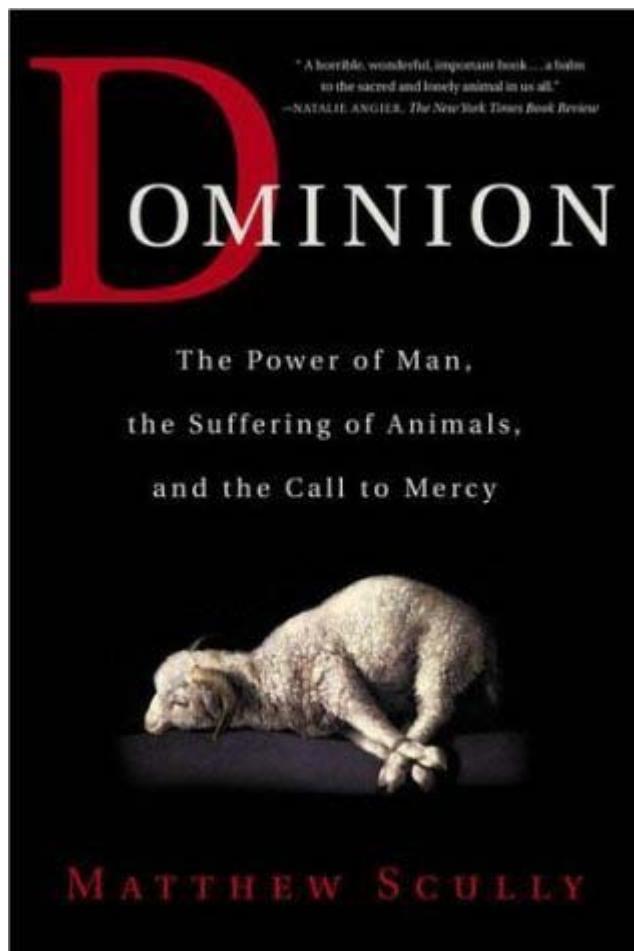
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In 2002, arch-conservative Matthew Scully wrote a book called, *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and The Call to Mercy*, that was universally and uncritically acclaimed by the animal advocacy movement. Because this movement is overwhelmingly single-issue in its focus, and in most cases doesn't care about a person's views or politics except how they relate to animals, no one had a problem with the fact that Scully was a senior speechwriter for President George W. Bush. He wrote some of the key fear-peddling diatribes that got Bush elected and he was recently re-enlisted to help Bush sell the Iraq war "surge" to the American people.

As someone who is concerned about a person's overall political standpoint, and who would not embrace a Leftist who is a speciesist anymore than an animal rights person or vegan who is a racist, I had some serious problems with Scully and the fawning adulation of his book by virtually the entire

animal advocacy movement. Many people, such as Karen Dawn (the founder of DawnWatch.com), saw it as a key sign of progress that the conservatives were embracing the animal cause (in welfarist form), and thus concluded that animal advocacy could be introduced to an entire new audience of people—some very rich, powerful, and influential ones at that.

No one mentioned that Scully had blood all over his hands by sycophantically serving Bush-Cheney (providing the “eloquence” they lacked) and the neo-con invasion and occupation of Iraq – all at the cost of more than 100,000 innocent Iraqi lives, over 4,000 US troop deaths, countless US troop casualties and destroyed lives, and over three trillion dollars. [i] And all based on lies and blatant deceit by Bush and his henchmen, all of whom – were there any justice in this country or backbone in the Democrats – would have been impeached and jailed for crimes of the highest order.



Nor could I understand the praise over Scully’s book. Really, *Dominion* is two books: the first sections are indeed well-crafted and hard-hitting critiques of factory farming and hunting. But the bulk of the

book was just nauseating, amateurish, antiquated medieval/early modern natural law theory which tried to justify the critique of animal cruelty in cosmic laws, rational imperatives—as if the issue of animal welfare or rights were not controversial and could not be seen in endless ways by diverse groups of people. It had a very uncomfortable authoritarian tone to it: here are the moral laws of the universe; here is moral truth. And he urged the same naïve Socratic belief that contaminates the thinking of the pacifists who dominate the animal advocacy movement – the idea that if we can only reason with people, show them this “Truth,” they will no longer abuse animals. As if there were no violence and cruelty in the human heart, no desire to dominate the weak, no lust for profit off slavery of any group.

And consider the subtitle: notice that he is calling for MERCY (to the slaves) not LIBERATION (of the slaves). And we needed a burdensome arsenal of arcane metaphysics, philosophical, and legal theory to reach this conclusion? A few rights/abolitionist voices tried to expose the severe limitations of this overwrought speciesist and welfarist tome, but they were drowned out by the roar of the multitudes celebrating the movement’s “revolutionary” breakthrough into new social sectors — so “new,” in fact, that there were now more white, elite, and “privileged” people in the animal advocacy/vegan movements than before.



To whatever degree he cares about animals, Scully’s real constituency are rich, white, Republicans and — having written speeches for Bush in the aftermath of 9/11 — he had already

become a shining star in the firmament of right-wing ideologues and corporate fat cats, each of whom need the best PR and BS teams they could assemble. And thanks to the fawning adulation of the likes of Karen Dawn, Scully overnight became the new darling of the animal movement. When not making the rounds of Congress or aerial warfare conventions, Scully continued to write speeches for Bush and anyone on the Right with the right fee. And, as it turned out, as so many of us were bracing ourselves for the nauseating Republican National Convention in early September 08, not wanting to hear another disingenuous word from "straight-talking" McCain but curious to hear about unknown Alaskan female governor whom he shrewdly chose to win Hillary's armies of disaffected, we learned — at this crisis moment and critical juncture for the Far Right — that Matthew Scully stepped in to write the kind of speech the McCain team thought necessary to disguise their malignant and predatory policies in terms of populism and family values. Right-wing soldier that he is, Scully stayed up the entire night before the speech and gave the magic words to which Sara Palin only had to give life in order to sell this sordid spectacle and sham to the US public and bring us another 4 more years of Bush—or probably much, much worse.

The moment was tense. The stakes were high. An unknown — a woman! — was walking onto the stage to accept her party's nomination for Vice President. But could she prove herself at the podium? Thanks to Scully's adroit words and Palin's androgynous mix of feminine soft talk and macho militarism, the chronically anxious Right erupted into a roar of elation as they felt they had, with the addition of Palin, finally found the ticket they wanted — one entirely devoted to militarism and privatization, increasing their already obscene levels of wealth and waging a full-blown culture war against abortion, sex education in the schools, the ban on prayers in public places, and so on.

Well, as the right-wing pundits droned on all next day, Palin/Scully "blew it out of the water." Even Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Joseph Biden said she was going to be "a tough debater" and had "a very skillfully written ...speech." And one awestruck fan gushed, "Palin sounded at times like she was speaking a foreign language as she gave voice to the beautifully crafted words that had been prepared for her on Wednesday night."

Congratulations, Scully, you did it! You galvanized and unified the most reactionary forces of the country that want to finish the job — on the Constitution, liberties, privacy, human rights at home and abroad, the United Nations, international justice, restrictions on trade, unions, animal protections and

the environment — that Bush brought to such a high level in eight years. There is nothing innocent about what Scully does: he is a hack, a propagandist, a demagogue, a mouthpiece for nihilistic ideologies that are anything but “pro-life.” To the degree that Bush, Cheney, McCain, and Palin are truly menacing forces — who threaten not only neighboring nation states but the entire planet itself, Scully is their Paul Joseph Goebbels: a total ideologue, a skilled orator (on paper), and a devotee to the party line.



Whereas Obama is known to have fairly progressive views on animals, **Palin is an aggressive supporter of hunting and herself an avid hunter. She goes so far as to champion aerial hunting of wolves and threatened to sue the EPA if they listed the polar bear as an endangered species.**[ii] Beyond her regressive views on animals, she has helped mobilize the base of the far Right in a way McCain could not do himself because she is such an extreme conservative. According to MoveOn.Org:

*****Palin recently said that the war in Iraq is "God's task." She's even admitted she hasn't thought about the war much—just last year she was quoted saying, "I've been so focused on state government, I haven't really focused much on the war in Iraq."***

*****Palin has actively sought the support of the fringe Alaska Independence Party. Six months ago, Palin told members of the group—who advocate for a vote on secession from the union—to "keep up the good work" and "wished the party luck on what she called its 'inspiring convention.'"***

*****Palin wants to teach creationism in public schools. She hasn't made clear whether she thinks evolution is a fact.***

*****Palin doesn't believe that humans contribute to global warming. Speaking about climate change, she said, "I'm not one though who would attribute it to being manmade."***

*****Palin has close ties to Big Oil. Her inauguration was even sponsored by BP.***

*****Palin is extremely anti-choice. She doesn't even support abortion in the case of rape or incest.***

*****Palin opposes comprehensive sex-ed in public schools. She's said she will only support abstinence-only approaches.***

*****As mayor, Palin tried to ban books from the library. Palin asked the library how she might go about banning books because some had inappropriate language in them—shocking the librarian, Mary Ellen Baker. According to Time, "news reports from the time show that Palin had threatened to fire Baker for not giving "full support" to the mayor." [iii]***

Unfortunately, thanks to Scully, Palin's "homespun" speech (professionally crafted by a DC-insider), was a smash at the RNC, and she "hit it out of the ballpark" as nearly every conservative pundit said the following day. And so we have Scully — who wrote a book critical of hunting – to thank not only for supporting a psychopath whose lust for killing animals perhaps rivals that of Ted Nugent, but for reinvigorating a fascist movement that has excellent chances at winning the next election, and taking the US even deeper into the innermost circles of hell, as somehow I suspect that McCain-Palin will be even worse for the US, the world, animals, and the planet than Bush-Cheney.



Karen Dawn of DawnWatch in 2001 at "an evening with Julia Butterfly Hill and Sophie B. Hawkins, hosted by Gloria Steinem."

And yet, still we hear hardly a word from the animal community about what a thug and criminal Scully is and what a traitor he is to the animals, to fellow humans, and to the entire planet. The most pathetic comment I have heard so far is from Karen Dawn, a well-known animal activist and social butterfly who runs the newsletter, Dawnwatch, which comments on media representations of animal issues. Given her social and economic status – the fact that she lives in the affluent area along the California coastline, that she is a regular in the LA party and cocktail scene, that she loves to see and be seen with celebrities – it is not surprising she takes an apolitical view of animal issues, and in fact believes that this movement ought to strive to be a powerful single-issue, DC-based powerhouse like the NRA.

Here is Dawn's self-serving, cowardly, and deplorable commentary the day after Palin's speech:

"The news this week is the Republican Convention, and the animal news is the choice of Sarah Palin as McCain's running mate. Before I write any further on that issue, I need to stress that DawnWatch is entirely non partisan. If you've read [her new MTV-style book] Thanking the Monkey you know of my commitment to non-partisan animal activism. It would be unfair to the animals for their advocates to alienate half of the human population. And in Thanking the Monkey, I explain that the somewhat common assumption [which I personally have argued for in detail] that animal advocacy is a left wing issue is false. Democrat voting records are better on animal issues overall, but the exceptions are shining.

Republicans John Ensign of Nevada, and Christopher Shays of Connecticut are just two of those current outstanding exceptions. And former Senator Robert Smith of New Hampshire, an ultra right wing conservative, is the only person to date to speak passionately against vivisection on the Senate Floor.

Perhaps most notably, one of the finest books ever written [!] on animal protection is "Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and The Call to Mercy." It is by Matthew Scully, who worked as a senior speechwriter for George W Bush, penning the book on his off hours. Scully sees his compassion, or mercy, for animals, and his vegan lifestyle, as perfectly in line with his Catholic conservative values ...

In an extraordinary twist of fate, Scully was selected to write Sarah Palin's speech, which aired last night. Let us hope that in the time Scully and Palin spent together working on the speech, he began to influence her thinking. I hope every Republican on this list will urge her to read his book!"[iv]

"Let us hope that in the time Scully and Palin spent together working on the speech, he began to influence her thinking." How naïve and deep in denial can this woman be?! Does Dawn think that Scully and Sarah had a reasonable and open chat about the evils of hunting?! That he gently reminded her that animals are not meat machines to shoot down in cold blood, just as he appreciatively received his lucrative paycheck for selling out the planet by helping some of the most dangerous forces in our history in their bid to win an election? I suspect Scully talked far more with Palin about his fee than her bloody proclivities to kill animals.

Dawn is indeed critical of Palin's zeal for hunting and her abysmal environmental record, but she would rather be an enabler to this carnage than offend her powerful, rich, and influential friends. I do not exaggerate when I draw a line connecting McCain/Palin to Scully and to opportunists like Dawn.

In contrast to Dawn's vapid view that we can bring all people and parties into the animal cause, another animal advocate (infinitely more authentic and profound than Dawn), Norm Phelps, penned (in a personal email to me) some extremely critical remarks on Scully and the far Right:

"I think the fact that Matthew Scully wrote her convention speech (which was a masterpiece of viciousness) should give us all pause about the notion that conservatives

will ever be serious animal advocates. I used to think that AR [animal rights] was a non-political issue and that we should keep it that way in the interests of converting as many people as possible and having the greatest impact on society. I no longer think that. I now believe that the mindset that leads conservatives to pursue policies that are hostile to the well-being of most of humanity (everyone except themselves and those to whom they are close) almost invariably leads them to policies that are hostile to the well-being of most animals (everyone except those to whom they are personally close, such as their companion animals).

“There is nothing that I find more perplexing and discouraging than the blatant speciesism that is rampant in most progressive circles. But in spite of this, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the liberal to progressive end of the political spectrum is where we have to concentrate our efforts and where we will ultimately find our victory. Conservatives can, in many cases, be persuaded to welfarism (properly so called, not as redefined by the so-called “abolitionists”), but not to AR. Scully’s vehement denunciations of AR in Dominion are, I think, an important indicator of this, as is the fact that this man who wrote so eloquently of the suffering of animals could put his gifts in the service of a woman who practices and celebrates all manner of barbaric cruelty to animals. Scully obviously considers the lives and suffering of animals less important than politics as usual.”

Phelps is right to argue that the Left is just as abysmal in its views on animals, and yet draws this distinction:

“The speciesism of liberals/progressives contradicts their fundamental values, which creates an opportunity for animal advocates. The speciesism of conservatives reinforces their fundamental values, which creates a solid wall. But I still think it is dangerous for the AR movement, as a movement, to align with other social justice movements until we have succeeded in raising their consciousness about animals to the point that the alliance can be formed on a basis of at least approximate equality. And I think a lot of groundwork needs to be done before we reach that point. I guess where I’m headed is that we need to be taking that groundwork seriously and getting busy at it—which, of course, is what you’ve been doing for some time now.”[v]

While I agree with Phelps that Leftists are Paleolithic in their views on animals and we should not be too ready to tie ourselves to a human rights/social justice platform as it is, and that we do need indeed to educate the Left, I have also disagreed with him (in quite friendly terms) that animal liberation is winnable without human and Earth liberation and a progressive alliance politics that fights against the main threat to the planet today, which is the capitalist grow-or-die economy.[vi]

But while we examine the problems with both the Right and the Left, let us not lose focus on the idiocy, cowardice, and opportunism in our own movement, for there are far too many “animal advocates” who are in fact advocates for something far less noble: money, power, glory, fame, and self—advancement. If it was not obvious with the writing of *Dominion* six years ago, Scully in particular has since revealed himself to be a sham, fraud, charlatan, prevaricator, hypocrite, and (neo-)con man, an enemy not only to animals, but also a de facto opponent of women, science, secularism, freedom of speech, and the environment.

Like the politicians he serves, Scully talks out of both sides of his mouth at once and serves each and every contradictory cause that advances his own good. No principled or consistent person writes a book against hunting, and then writes a speech for a vicious defender of hunting and avid killer herself. Can any animal advocate among us ever imagine doing this?! This is the moral and logical contradiction that would haunt a Kantian, someone with a conscience, anyone with principles or moral consistency. But it never troubles a utilitarian-opportunist.



In a nation rife with political and historical idiocy, layer upon layer of confusion, and pernicious myths linking capitalism with democracy and justice, the masses are so easily manipulated by the power elite that they can be convinced that the Clintons (who are at best center left on the political spectrum) are communists!

And nor is his work done. The Far Right loved his Palin speech so much that they will surely contract him again. Without hyperbole, I say that Scully is less a “progressive vegan and animal welfarist” than he is a reactionary and a dangerous man. He has been the words, phrases, metaphors, rhetoric, narratives, jokes, and overall a key voice and mouthpiece of the Extreme Right who want to take this country back to pre-Enlightenment, pre-secular medieval serfdom where rights mean only property rights, liberty falls to security and hierarchy, and democracy is a forgotten dream.



To end by reiterating a crucial point: Matthew (Straight-Laced, Compassionate Conservative, Corporate and Family Values Man,) Scully is not just a hypocrite or opportunist. He is a menace to all life, beings, species, and nature. This is not an ad hominem attack, it is simply a fact. Look who he works for and examine what they do. Because of the gigantic powers he brings to life, puffs up, drives forward, and legitimates with the rhetoric of his folksy, small-town populism, he represents gigantic global corporations that destroy families and communities. Because Scully casts the spell and brings out the smoke and mirrors that cover up lies and package a hideous program of destruction as “progress,” and because he gets the job done, time after time, Scully is a significant danger — and I do not exaggerate — to this entire planet.

Scully’s real project is not “dominion.” It is domination—corporate hegemony of the planet and the advancement of the US Empire. To the extent his discursive artistry helps to disarm Congress and to lull Americans back into their complacent and jingoistic sleep, Scully shares responsibility with Bush, Cheney, Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, Gonzalez, Rice, Halliburton, ExxonMobil, Monsanto, and ConAgra for

turning this beautiful planet into a living hell for most of its inhabitants and for leaving behind a wasteland and battlefield that will prove even more difficult (if not impossible) for future generations to survive, as ever more species vanish forever.

Notes:

[i] For data on the ever-mounting numbers of Iraqi civilians and US soldiers killed and injured, see the Iraq Body Count website at: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>. On the soaring costs of the war, see Linda J. Bilmes and Joseph E. Stiglitz, "The Iraq War Will Cost Us \$3 Trillion, and Much More," Sunday March 9, 2008, The Washington Post, at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/07/AR2008030702846_pf.html.

[ii] On Palin's regressive record on animals and the environment, see John Dolan, "Party whores: Sarah Palin's Big, Sleazy Safari," September 2, 2008, AlterNet, at: http://www.alternet.org/story/97207/sarah_palin%27s_big%2C_sleazy_safari/; "Environmentalists can't corral Palin: GOP vice presidential candidate nicknamed the 'killa from Wasilla'," Associated Press, posted September 4, at MSNBC.com, at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26546967/>; and "'SARAH PALIN SUPPORTS SHOOTING WOLVES AND BEARS FROM AIRPLANES,'" Defenders of Wildlife, at: <http://www.defendersactionfund.org/>. This page includes a disturbing video link to what this barbaric practice that Palin ardently supports looks like in reality.

[iii] "Who is Sarah Palin," MoveOn.Org., at: http://pol.moveon.org/emails/palin_announcement.html?rc=homepage.

[iv] Karen Dawn, "Palin provides vital opportunities for animal friendly letters," September 4, 2008, at: <http://www.dawnwatch.com/cgi-bin/dada/mail.cgi/archive/dw1000000dawnwat/20080904102648/>

[v] Phelps cited with permission in a personal email to me on September 4, 2008.

[vi] Steven Best, "Rethinking Revolution: Animal Liberation, Human Liberation, and the Future of the Left," The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy, Volume 2, Issue #3, June 2006; at: http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol2/vol2_no3_Best_rethinking_revolution.htm

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