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ABOLITIONIST ONLINE EDITORIALS

Must Love Dogs ... to Death

By Jeff Perz

The Abolitionist Online asked Jeff Perz to comment on PeTA's killing policy. This is his response.

Note: Since this article was written PeTA was eventually nailed for charges of littering not animal cruelty for dumping dozens of dogs and cats in a rubbish bin. [Editor]

PeTA's Position Statement

In "The Disturbing Facts About 'No-Kill' Shelters", PeTA makes a couple of points that appear to be consistent with animal rights. Since PeTA is not an animal rights organisation¹, however, it also makes several suggestions that are anti-animal-rights, and it does all of this within an overall context of legitimising both the exploitation and murder of non-human animals.

First, PeTA correctly implies that most shelters that are labelled "no-kill" do not have adequate resources. Instead, however, they have employees whose actions show a lack respect for the rights of the non-human animals². The result for the non-human animals, as PeTA correctly notes, is that the shelters "warehouse them for years on end"³ and this implies that they die slow miserable deaths.

Second, PeTA correctly observes that when no-kill shelters are full, they are forced to turn away non-human animals, many of whom end up in kill shelters that use painful methods of execution. PeTA proposes the alternative of diverting funds from no-kill shelters to sterilisation programs. That way, new non-human animals are never born and thus are never subjected to suffering and death.⁴

The above two policies, taken in isolation and described in the best possible light, are consistent with animal rights. When the above two policies are considered in the context of PeTA's overall statement, however, it becomes clear that they result in the abhorrent violation of animal rights, murder and grievous assault.

A positive reading of PeTA's "The Disturbing Facts About 'No-Kill' Shelters" would conclude that the vast majority of resources intended for cats and dogs should be put into reputable sterilisation programmes, and any remaining resources should be put into creating many more genuine no-kill shelters that have sufficient resources and staff who respect non-human animal rights. This would be consistent with animal rights but, unfortunately, it is not what PeTA says.

Although PeTA does say that more resources should be put into sterilisation programmes because this serves the long-term goal of stopping "unwanted" non-human animals from being born and then killed, PeTA also suggests that no funds should be put towards genuine no-kill shelters. For, argues PeTA, the presence of relatively few no-kill shelters amongst many kill shelters in a society with multiple millions of dogs and cats who fend for themselves on the streets results in those dogs and cats being funnelled into certain sorts of kill shelters that PeTA disapproves of. Instead, argues PeTA, no-kill shelters should be totally scrapped and kill shelters ought to do their murdering by using painless "humane" methods.⁵

Mutilation by Any Other Name

PeTA advocates "spaying" and "neutering" desexing programmes. In other words, hysterectomies (removing the uterus and ovaries)⁶ and castrations (removing the testes). Hysterectomies and castrations are commonly done so cat and dog owners can more easily control their non-human animal property. These procedures result in acute pain and chronic destructive medical conditions, including very harmful hormonal imbalances⁷. That is why humans never undergo hysterectomies or castrations unless they are taking a last resort to stop the spread of cancer. *The viable sterilisation alternatives – tubal ligations and vasectomies – have little or no ill effects*⁸. Tubal ligations and vasectomies for cats and dogs are more expensive at present because they are not yet common practice and more veterinarians need to be trained in them⁹. Resources should be put into tubal ligation and vasectomy sterilisation programmes for cats and dogs. Hysterectomies and castrations, however, violate the basic rights of cats and dogs: their bodily integrity, mental and physical health, well-being and freedom from pain and suffering. Tubal ligations and vasectomies do not violate their rights.¹⁰

"Unwanted" for What Purpose?

PeTA states that its long-term goal is to "end to the killing" through "a commitment to preventing the births of unwanted animals."¹¹ Why has PeTA distinguished between "unwanted" and "wanted" cats and dogs? The answer is that both are property under the law. "Wanted" cats and dogs are the property of individuals. They are commonly bought in "pet" stores and exploited for their companionship. If they turn out to be "bad" companions, they are returned to the store, subjected to harsh disciplinary treatment and control measures or are "euthanised"—i.e. the killing of *healthy* non-human animals, otherwise known as murder. "Unwanted" cats and dogs, on the other hand, are the property of the state and are viewed as "pests" or "vermin." Thus, the state looks favourably upon their being killed.

By only expressing concern about preventing the births of "unwanted" cats and dogs, PeTA assumes and thus perpetuates the legitimacy of the institution of "wanted" or exploited cats and dogs. Although PeTA recommends not buying non-human animals from pet stores or breeders, and instead recommends sterilisation¹², I would not be surprised if these recommendations disappeared when "pet overpopulation" is no longer a reality. In other words, breeding and selling "pets" for our companionship would be acceptable as long as there were no "unwanted" cats and dogs roaming the streets. This would violate the rights of non-human animals not to be bred—that is, imprisoned, raped, kidnapped and used until "defective".

"There Are 'rights' and Then There Are Rights":¹³ PeTA's Double Standard

Regarding PeTA's argument that no-kill shelters cause more deaths by indirectly funneling non-human animals to kill shelters, consider the following quotation from PeTA that I have modified so that it refers to human refugees instead of cats and dogs:

"No-kill" refugee camps should really be called "leave-the-killing-to-someone-else" refugee camps. Even though the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders are usually well meaning, they can never put up enough tents to house the millions of human beings who are dispossessed by war and famine each year. When "no-kill" refugee camps turn people away because their facilities are already bursting at the seams—what happens to these people? If they don't die of starvation or get killed by militants, they go to camps that never turn away a refugee in need, camps that have made the difficult choice to take in every single human refugee brought to them, including those who are diseased, badly injured, aggressive, elderly, or unsocialized after spending their lives at the end of a chain in a sweatshop—people who have little chance of being adopted by rich Westerners. They take them all in, even if all they can offer the refugees is a meal, kind words, a loving touch, and a painless release [i.e. death by lethal injection] from an uncaring world.

For example, the Director of Refuge In Peace (R.I.P.) in Uganda says "There's not a 'no-kill' refugee camp in this country that does not turn people away every single day. It's a sham and a scam as far as we're concerned."¹⁴

In other words, human refugees should be given a final meal, music should be played on the way to the lethal injection chamber and refugees should be given a "loving touch" of death. Respecting fundamental human rights is "a sham and a scam".

Of course, PeTA does not make the above claims with respect to human animals. The above parody is a PeTA quotation that has been modified so that non-human animals have been replaced with human animals. But this parody shows PeTA's double standard: human animals have the fundamental right to life, but non-human animals do not. PeTA's double standard must be rejected, and with the following understanding:

With respect to human refugee camps that are full to capacity, the unintended side-effect of turning away people who may then die is not caused by the camps. Rather, these deaths are caused by war and starvation, which have root political causes. The causes of war and starvation should be addressed whilst simultaneously creating no-kill refugee camps, and forgetting about the ludicrous idea of having "kill refugees". This is what we already do because humans have rights. Similarly, with respect to cat and dog shelters that are full to capacity, the unintended side-effect of turning away cats and dogs who may then die is not caused by the shelters. Rather, these deaths are caused by breeding cats and dogs and by those who operate "kill shelters". These root causes should be addressed whilst simultaneously creating no-kill shelters, and forgetting about the oxymoron of "kill shelters". This is what we should do because non-human animals have rights.

Not Surprising

Last June, two PeTA staff were charged with cruelty to animals.¹⁵ PeTA staff took dogs from shelters and then personally killed them.¹⁶ "PeTA says it routinely picks up animals at ponds to have them adopted or, if necessary, euthanized. ... Among the dead animals, though, authorities found a female cat and her two 'very adoptable' kittens taken from Ahoskie Animal Hospital, veterinarian Patrick Proctor said. "These were just kittens we were trying to find homes for," Proctor said. "PeTA said they would do that, but these cats never made it out of the county."¹⁷

An *anti*-animal-rights organisation, the "Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF)", focuses its attention on exposing and condemning animal welfare groups such as PeTA. I strongly reject the basic anti-animal rights assumptions of the CCF. Nevertheless, it has uncovered the officially documented fact that "From July 1998 through the end of 2004, PeTA killed over 12,400 dogs, cats, and other 'companion animals' – at its Norfolk, Virginia headquarters."¹⁸

In 1991, PeTA had a non-human animal "sanctuary" called Aspen Hill where it killed *healthy* rabbits and turkeys.¹⁹ PeTA said it did this because it wanted to spend the money that would have been required to house the rabbits and turkeys on its other campaigns. At the time, PeTA's budget was over six million U.S. dollars per year.²⁰ Imagine if, during the time when humans were slaves, someone giving runaway slaves refuge murdered the slaves in order to spend more resources on other, more effective, anti-slavery advocacy. The right to life of the people in question would have been violated. The essence of a right is that it protects the individual regardless of how others might benefit. Without this principle of right, vivisection conducted upon either human or non-human animals would be justified. PeTA uses the same ends-justifies-the-means mentality that is used to justify vivisection in order to justify the murder of healthy cats and dogs in so called "shelters". We would never tolerate this if it were applied to human beings. Thus, animal rights activists should reject PeTA's killing policy, and the organisation itself.²¹

NOTES:

"Perz on Abolition,Veganism and the Work of Gary Francione" By Claudette Vaughan, *Abolitionist Online*, Issue 1, August 2005. http://www.abolitionist-online.com/interview_jeff_perz.shtml

"The Disturbing Facts About 'No-Kill' Shelters". By PeTA. *Cruelty-Free-Living*, Fall 2005. <http://www.PeTA.org/Living/AT-Fall2005/nokill.asp>

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Technically called ovario-hysterectomy, which is the most common procedure for female cats and dogs. Ovariectomy, removal of the ovaries only, also refers to "spaying" but is a less common procedure.

"Sexual Hormones" By *Cynologie* <http://www.geocities.com/heartland/prairie/2492/Sexual-hormones.html>

"Health" By *The Society Against Neutering*, http://www.freewebs.com/society_against_neutering/health.htm

"Sterilisation" By *The Society Against Neutering*, http://www.freewebs.com/society_against_neutering/sterilisation.htm

"Ethics" By *The Society Against Neutering*, http://www.freewebs.com/society_against_neutering/ethicsdangorousdogact.htm

"Neutering Male and Female Dogs" By Mary C. Wakeman, D.V.M., <http://www.nelagus.net/animal/v02.html>

"Female Pets" By *PetRights.org*, <http://www.petrights.org/femalepets.htm>

"Male Pets" By *PetRights.org*, <http://www.petrights.org/malepets.htm>

Ibid.

"Veterinarian Listing" By *PetRights.org*, <http://www.petrights.org/vets.htm>

It might be objected that one of the definitions of "genocide" is the mass sterilisation of a group, no matter how it is done. Or, one might object that by performing tubal ligations and vasectomies upon non-human animals (who are incapable of saying "yes" or "no" or understanding the decision) one is preventing them from having babies—something they would be inclined to do if left alone. Thus, it might be concluded that tubal ligations and vasectomies violate non-human animal rights. I disagree for the following reason. Although the mass sterilisation of domesticated non-human animals could be said to constitute a kind of genocide, this would be the only (unideal) response to an immoral genesis that has repeatedly taken place for millennia: namely, a) the imprisonment of paired non-human animals in close quarters for the purpose of breeding and acquiring desired traits that are favourable to the animals being exploited, which is a kind of rape or b) rape by artificial insemination for the same purpose. By continuing to reproduce non-human animals who have been genetically programmed and exploited in this way, one is perpetuating their exploitation and that of their children. It is not in the interest of a dog to give birth to puppies who will, due to past breeding and domestication, exhibit desired production traits of "beauty", docility, obedience, aggression, strength, etc. It is not in the interest of a dog to give birth to puppies who will have these programmed traits at the cost of never being able to survive and flourish in a forest as her ancestors once did and as her wolf cousins currently do. It may be in the interest of a dog in a genuine sanctuary or refuge to have sex with other dogs. Tubal ligations and vasectomies do not prevent this sex in any way, whereas hysterectomies and castrations do. Thus, performing tubal ligations and vasectomies upon domesticated non-human animals does not violate their rights. Rather, doing so prevents them from giving birth to genetically selected "good" slaves. Performing tubal ligations and vasectomies upon free-living non-human animals, however, would violate their rights—because these animals have never been subjected to an immoral human-induced genesis for the purpose of exploitation.

Op.Cit., "The Disturbing Facts About 'No-Kill' Shelters", By PeTA.

Ibid.

Quotation attributed to legal scholar Lawrence Tribe, referring to his alleged view that chimpanzees should be legal persons yet, at the same time, at least some vivisection conducted upon them is morally acceptable.

Parody of original quotation found in *Op.Cit.*, "The Disturbing Facts About 'No-Kill' Shelters", By PeTA.

"Two on PeTA staff charged with cruelty to animals" By DARREN FREEMAN AND SETH SEYMOUR, *The Virginian-Pilot*, June 17, 2005

<http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search>
[requires fee]

<http://www.theconversationcafe.com/forums/showthread.php?t=17376>
[no fee]

Ibid.

Ibid.

"PeTA's Dirty Secret" By the Center for Consumer Freedom, *PeTAKillsAnimals.com*, <http://www.PeTAKillsAnimals.com/PeTAKillsAnimals.cfm>

"Animals Put Down by PeTA" By Arlo Wagner, *Washington Times*, 13 April, 1991, p. A1.

"'Rescued' Animals Killed: Animal Rights Group Denies Euthanasia" By Susan Okie and Veronica Jennings, *Washington Post*, 13 April, 1991, p. A1.

"Notes on the Care of Chickens, Sheep, Rabbits, and Turkeys at Aspen Hill" By David J. Cantor, 4 Humane Innovations and Alternatives in Animal Experimentation, 175, 1990.

Ibid.

Op. Cit., "Perz on Abolition,Veganism and the Work of Gary Francione" By Claudette Vaughan, *Abolitionist Online*.

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