Francione: We're all Michael Vick

By GARY L. FRANCIONE

UPDATE 8/14/09: Michael Vick was released from prison on May 31, and on July 27, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell conditionally reinstated Vick. The Philadelphia Eagles have given Vick a one-year deal with an option for a second year.

In a conversation yesterday, someone said to me, “How am I ever going to watch an Eagles game and see that guy on the field and not think about those dogs?” My response: “How can you enjoy an Eagles game when you’re eating one of the dogs that is used in dog fighting? How can you enjoy an Eagles game while you’re eating a hamburger or a hot dog made from animals who had a life and death every bit as horrible and unnecessary as Vick’s dogs?”

He did not have an answer.

Here is a Daily News op-ed I wrote on the topic that ran on Aug. 22, 2007.

MICHAEL VICK has, according to his lawyer, agreed to plead guilty to federal dogfighting charges against him.

Over past weeks, there has been an enormous amount of coverage of the dog-fighting operation sponsored by Atlanta Falcons quarterback Vick, who, along with three other men, has been indicted on federal felony charges.

The details of the charges claim that Vick sponsored illegal dog fighting, gambled on dog fights and permitted acts of sadistic violence against animals. The talks shows have been described as “human community” condoning dog fighting and calling for Vick to be punished. Nike and Reebok have suspended products endorsed by Vick.

Please let me be very clear from the outset: I think that dog fighting is a terrible thing.

But I must say that the Vick case rather dramatically demonstrates what I call our “moral schizophrenia” about animals.

That is, if one thing is clear, it is that we do not clearly think about our moral obligations to animals.

In this country alone, we kill more than 10 billion land animals annually for food. The animals we eat for as much as the dogs that are used in dog fighting.

There is no “necessity” for all of this meat, dairy or eggs. Indeed, these foods are increasingly linked to various human diseases and animal agriculture is an environmental disaster for the planet. We impose pain, suffering and death on these billions of animals because we enjoy eating their flesh and the products that we make from them.

There is something bizarre about Reebok and Nike, which use leather in their shoes, suspending products endorsed by Vick.

In one of my books about animal ethics, I introduced a character named Simon the Sadist, who derived pleasure from “unnecessary” suffering on animals - and pleasure, amusement and convenience cannot count as satisfying the “necessity” requirement.

But then I asked the further question: How are those of us who eat animal flesh and animals any different from Simon? He enjoys bloodstaining dogs - we enjoy the taste of flesh and animal products. But we and Simon both kill sentient beings (although we may pay others to do the dirty work) because we derive enjoyment from it.

According to reports, authorities removed from Vick’s property a “rape ścian” used to hold dogs up for mating. “Rape rails” are used to hold cows for impregnation. When a dog is involved, we are involved - when a cow is involved, we ignore it.

Michael Vick may enjoy watching dogs fight. Someone else may find that repulsive but see nothing wrong with eating an animal who has had a life as full of pain and suffering as the lives of the fighting dogs. It's strange that we regard Michael Vick may enjoy watching dogs fight. Someone else may find that repulsive but see nothing wrong with eating an animal who has had a life as full of pain and suffering as the lives of the fighting dogs.

It’s strange that we regard as morally different from, and superior to, the former. How removed from the screaming crowd around the “necessity” requirement.

In this country alone, we kill more than 10 billion land animals annually for food. The animals we eat suffer as much as the dogs that are used in dog fighting.

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