

## Are we the animal-lovers we think we are?: Opinion

Star-Ledger Guest Columnist By Star-Ledger Guest Columnist

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The animals we use for food suffer just as much — if not more — than the animals whose suffering we condemn as cruel.

By Gary L. Francione

On March 16, 2011, the day before St. Patrick's Day, a building superintendent in Newark found an emaciated and shivering dog wrapped in a plastic bag at the bottom of a trash chute. The dog was later named Patrick and his story, including his slow but heroic recovery, captured the minds and hearts of not just those in the Garden State, but people around the world.

Patrick's owner, Kisha Curtis, was accused of abandoning Patrick without food or water before leaving the state in 2011. She has pleaded guilty to animal cruelty charges that carry a sentence of up to 18 months in prison.

To say that many people are unhappy with Curtis, who has now admitted this cruel act, is a grotesque understatement. Look at any online story about her and scroll to the reader comments. The level and intensity of the invective directed at Curtis unquestionably indicates that, as a cultural matter, we take animal cruelty seriously.

We object to what Curtis did because she violated a moral and legal norm that we all accept: that it is wrong to inflict "unnecessary" suffering and death on an animal.

This is why we were outraged with Michael Vick, who imposed suffering and death on dogs because he enjoyed dog fighting. Necessity does not include pleasure. That is why we were outraged with Mitt Romney, who couldn't be bothered with making the proper arrangements to take his Irish setter, Seamus, on the family vacation and, instead, put Seamus in a crate that he strapped to the top of his station wagon. Necessity does not include convenience.

And our moral intuitions aren't limited to dogs. When, in 2010, a bull impaled Spanish bullfighter Julio



Kisha Curtis pleaded guilty to throwing her pit bull, Patrick, down a trash chute in a Newark high-rise.

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Aparicio through his throat and out his mouth, many people, and not just animal rights advocates, expressed the view that Aparicio deserved no sympathy. Bullfights are a form of entertainment; they are not necessary.

Our moral compass is very clear: although we may disagree about when it is necessary to impose suffering and death on animals, we all agree that pleasure, amusement or convenience cannot constitute necessity.

Or do we?

We kill and eat more than 58 billion animals a year worldwide, not counting fish. We don't need to eat animals. No one maintains that it's medically necessary. The conservative Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association) acknowledges that "appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases." Mainstream medical people are, with increasing frequency, pointing out that animal products are actually detrimental to human health.

There is consensus that animal agriculture is an ecological disaster in that it takes many more times the grain and water to produce animal foods than to produce plant foods that are consumed directly. Animal agriculture is a major cause of global warming and is responsible for water pollution, deforestation, soil erosion and all sorts of unhappy environmental consequences. And to anticipate the objection that non-animal foods are beyond the reach of those without economic means, a diet of grains, beans, vegetables and fruits is much less costly than a diet of animal products.

We all know that the animal foods we consume — including the supposedly more "humanely" produced ones that are sold at upscale supermarkets — involve a great deal of suffering. Indeed, the animals we use for food suffer just as much — if not more — than the animals whose suffering we condemn as cruel. And the only justification that we have for that suffering is palate pleasure. We enjoy the taste of animal foods; we find them convenient. There is no necessity for this suffering and death.

So how are we any different from Kisha Curtis or Michael Vick or Mitt Romney or Jose Aparicio? The answer: We aren't.

And it's no answer to say that Curtis and the others engaged directly in the cruel action, whereas most of us just buy our animal foods in neat packages at the supermarket. As any first-year criminal law student can tell you, there is no difference between the person who does the act and the person who pays for someone else to do it.

Kisha Curtis caused great suffering to Patrick for no good reason. She will be sentenced at the end of August. We will feel that justice has been done.

But if we think about it for an uncomfortable moment, we are all Kisha Curtis.

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