

I usually regard the “stupid pet tricks” of the animal rights movement with a mixture of indifference and disdain. People For The Ethical Treatment Of Animals (PETA) president Ingrid Newkirk, for instance, gleefully anticipates the arrival of a hoof & mouth epidemic in the U.S. The April 14, 2001, issue of *World* magazine quotes her as “... openly hop[ing] that it comes here It would be good for animals, good for human health, and good for the environment.” According to *The Orange County Register*, April 17, 2001, another recent PETA priority was lobbying Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh to “drop animal products from his [prison] diet.” McVeigh demurred: “...I suggest hitting Ted [the Unibomber] Kaczynski up for his opinions on the subject” he said.

PETA expects a guy who blows up a daycare center to care about animals? Of course, stranger things have happened. Many antivivisectionists support partial-birth abortion. But how does PETA feel about McVeigh's life; the lives of the people he murdered; or do they only care about the lives of the animals he is eating on death row?

Non sequiturs abound in the PETA mind but the organization's odd interest in abortion sets new standards for incoherence. A March 19, 2001 U-Wire story began with an improbable headline which read “PETA woos Boston campus pro-lifers.” The article reported that the animal rights group was launching an advertising campaign featuring the slogan “Pro-Life? Go Vegetarian!” The ads were planned to run first at Boston-area colleges and then at schools nationwide.

Aaron Gross, a Harvard Divinity School student and College Action Campaign coordinator for PETA said his organization “is attempting to convince students that eating meat is incompatible with pro-life beliefs.” PETA's Website (<http://www.PETA.org>) expressly disavows any position on abortion but this cockamamie ad campaign is another example of the organization's penchant for muddled sensationalism.

First of all, pro-life carnivores (omnivores?) are pro-HUMAN-life; not pro-SUBHUMAN-life. PETA, of course, rejects the term “subhuman” as pejorative and inaccurate. Most of its members don't believe human life is more sacred (in either the secular or sectarian sense) than that of other animals. Existential issues are obviously not resolvable by objective analysis but if PETA wishes to plunge itself into the scalding caldron of abortion politics (even while saying they aren't) they need to reconcile a few inconsistencies of their own.

Answering the silly with the absurd, one might ask on what grounds this nincompoop group claims that consuming a cow is more cowardly than chomping a carrot?

Their Website says it's because vegetables lack brains, nervous systems and the like. This is a “form & function” argument and it may be true but it is also a very slender reed on which to hang the advocacy of mass vegicide. Is a nervous system the only way to achieve sentience? Might there also be morally significant alternative means through which to be conscious of and responsive to one's environment?

The San Jose Mercury News, August 10, 1999, featured a story headlined “From chemical weapons to self-preservation, plants are apparently much savvier than we think”:

Biologist Jack Schultz sees plants a little differently than the rest of us.

‘Plants are just very slow animals,’ said the Pennsylvania State University researcher, who is a pioneer in the growing field of plant communication. ‘They have a lot of the same characteristics. They just don't do things very fast.’

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When a plant is bitten by a bug, it can send out a chemical alarm and summon friendly insects to protect it – an ability researchers hope to exploit to protect crops.

It can tell when a neighbor is under attack and quickly shore up its own defenses.

When infected, a plant may even run a fever, researchers report – part of a complex reaction involving the release of salicylic acid, commonly known as aspirin, that appears to keep the infection from spreading.

New studies indicate that some plants may be territorial, protecting their turf by releasing chemicals that keep the roots of others in check.

And their exquisite ability to discriminate between light of different colors allows them to tell when a competitor is getting too close, so they can shoot up quickly and avoid being shaded.

It makes sense that plants would have a wide range of capabilities, Schultz said: 'Since plants can't run away from things, they have to be able to respond to the environment or to the changes around them. They're stuck with where they are.'

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More than 100 species of plants are now known to actively respond to attack by insects or other pests, said Anurag Agrawal, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California-Davis, where experiments over the past 15 years have illuminated these interactions.

'Essentially this is analogous to an immune system in animals'

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Cut a leaf with a pair of scissors and the plant barely responds, [Marcel] Dicke [a chemical ecologist at Wageningen Agricultural University in the Netherlands] said. But plop a hungry caterpillar on it, and within a few hours the chemicals are potent enough to attract predators that come looking for a caterpillar to eat.

When a vegetarian decapitates a cabbage it would, therefore, appear they are slaughtering an aware, interactive being. Therefore, categorically denying rights of personhood to any creature without a brain might seem excessively neurocentric to a progressive botanist (progressive as in "enlightened" rather than "liberal," the latter being what leftists used to call themselves before the term became synonymous with failed policies). Perhaps the term "veg-out" should be deemed akin to a racial slur. Could wearing cotton be the moral equivalent of donning wool, or even fur? PETA says flesh-feasting pro-lifers have blood on their hands but we say PETA members have *sap* on theirs!

And what about those other creatures PETA people annihilate so remorselessly – and by the billions? Every vegetarian has an immune system that exterminates bacteria, viruses, rickettsiae, chlamydia, spirochetes and protozoa. And protozoa may be the simplest single-cell organisms of the animal kingdom but they *are* animals nonetheless. How ethically does PETA treat ingested protozoa? Oh sure, PETA members may disparage the microbial IQ but these mini-merchants of mortality and morbidity have proved themselves clever adversaries in the battle to cure any number of dread diseases.

Animal rights advocates might blame their immunosavagery on out-of-control lymphocytes (T cells and B cells) or other leukocytes (granulocytes, monocytes and macrophages). But blame shifting ill-becomes an advocacy group which aspires to be taken seriously on matters of animal ethics. Immunosuppressants are readily available by prescription. And the question returns, who will speak for disenfranchised pathogens?

The bottom line is this: We all kill and kill we must. But what *must* we kill?

If we don't kill animals, malnutrition could make at least some of us vulnerable to a host of ailments, including opportunistic infections. I know, I know. There are nutritionists who argue that plants alone are sufficient to meet our need for high-grade protein, etc. But there are also nutritionists who dispute this claim. Furthermore, most nutritionists are meat-eaters (though taste, it is true, may play a larger role than science in motivating this preference). And there are large populations of people to whom vegetables, by reason of geography, weather, etc., are not readily available.

If we don't kill pathogens, pathogens will kill us and quickly, as in AIDS and other immune disorders. There is no "germ" lobby because germs are the common enemy of all living things. It's kill or be killed by these rapacious, tenacious little assassins. Survival of the fittest.

But how does an unborn child threaten our survival? Overpopulation hysteria is just that. Some of the world's most densely populated regions enjoy some of the world's highest standards of living. Most of the world's privation is more attributable to bad government, bad economics, bad farming, bad distribution, etc., than to overpopulation.

It must also be noted that every significant organization in the pro-life movement recognizes a right of abortion to terminate pregnancies which constitute a substantial and imminent threat to a mother's life. The catch is that the termination procedure employed in a particular case should also protect the unborn baby if it is "viable" (has any reasonable chance of survival outside the womb). Prior to viability, failing to end a pregnancy which threatens a mother's life will obviously result in the death of a baby who will die if its mother is killed by her pregnancy – irrespective of the type of method used to end the pregnancy. Said differently, the nonviable child of an imperiled mother will die whether the pregnancy is terminated or not. It only makes sense, therefore, to save the child's mother by aborting her doomed pregnancy. It is the mother's tubal pregnancy, for instance, not her abortion, which seals her baby's fate.

It is lawful in this country to kill even a healthy, *full-term* unborn baby (see *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*, 476 U.S. 747 (1986)) if its mother finds its continued existence "emotionally" upsetting

(See *Doe v. Bolton* 41 U.S. 179 (1973)). At a practical level, this means that any doctor can, at any point in pregnancy, kill any baby of any mother wishing the death of her baby. This is true because the wish to abort is irrefutable evidence of the “emotional” upset which would follow any denial of her attempt to terminate. The goal of this judicial scam is to create in the public mind the misleading impression that abortion is or can be meaningfully regulated in this country.

In any event, life-threatening pregnancies are rare in the developed world and hardly the norm elsewhere. More than 9 out of 10 abortions are purely elective procedures “chosen” by parents who simply refuse to be burdened by the imposition of an undesired child. The issue is not survival. It is the evasion of responsibility; the use of violence to get one’s own way.

PETA prattles on about the violence of factory farms which torture, abuse and neglect *animals*, but where’s the outrage over agribusiness poisoning *veggies* with pesticides and herbicides. This chemical catastrophe produces toxic tomatoes and further marginalizes already oppressed insects and weeds. Is it fair to demand free-range *chickens* while ignoring the plight of contaminated *chickpeas*? If *meat* is murder, what about *melons*? And why is Earth First! so adamant in its opposition to clear-cutting redwoods but so indifferent to the harvesting of red beets? Are big, old plants somehow more sacred than small, young ones?

Another PETA problem is their frequent spokesperson, Peter Singer. Princeton’s distinguished professor of perversion wrote in his 1979 book *Practical Ethics*, that “Because people are human does not mean that their lives are more valuable than animals.” We might counter that “Because plants are vegetable does not mean that their lives are less valuable than animals. But now Singer has gone far beyond the ramblings of a nutty professor. He has even outdone his eugenic pronouncement that the life of a healthy rat is worth more than the life of a sick child (whose parents he believes should be given the power of infanticide).

What follows requires a strong stomach. *The San Francisco Chronicle*, March 20, 2001, in a Debra Saunders piece entitled “One Man’s Animal Husbandry,” reports that Peter Singer recently wrote an online book review for a pornographic Website in which he defends bestiality. Saunders summarizes Singer’s position thusly: “You can have sex with ... [animals] but don’t eat them.” On the problem of securing his victim’s “consent,” Saunders paraphrases PETA president Ingrid Newkirk: “Singer does not advocate sex that kills or damages animals or requires them to be restrained. Indeed, Singer condemns sex between men and hens because it is ‘usually fatal to the hen’.” That’s consent? That this devotee of debauchery would be so squeamish over trifling depravities like sadism and bondage seems almost quaint. It is truly a “man bites dog” tale (tail?). How prudish his incongruous rectitude must seem to many San Franciscans. On what grounds would this suddenly judgmental professor deny pleasure to the sadomasochistic community of beasts?

Would nonconsensual sex between a man and a woman be acceptable to PETA so long as the woman weren’t “killed, damaged or required to be restrained?” Can consent reasonably be inferred from a victim’s absence of injury or failure to resist; especially when the victim has only limited ability to comprehend the nature of the act? Singer’s animal standard, if applied to humans, is so permissive that it would violate the sexual harassment and sexual assault regulations of his own employer (see <http://www.Princeton.edu>). In the sexual harassment realm, Princeton prohibits advances toward anyone who has “indicated no interest.” How does a sheep “indicate interest” in bestiality? With regard to sexual assault, the university bars sexual contact with anyone “who is unable to consent.” Can a goat “consent” to buggery? Would Singer require that lambs, foals, etc., reach the “age of consent” before being considered fair game? Would PETA endorse the creation of a North American Man Puppy Love Association (NAMPLA)?

PETA has issues here and they are far more serious than the imagined contradictions of pro-life beefeaters. It gets much worse.

Although this becomes a bit complicated, on March 12, 2001, in San Francisco, amid much publicity, a homosexual activist named Sharon Smith filed a civil action for wrongful death against neighbors Robert Noel and Marjorie Knoller. The latter are married and both are lawyers. They also own two vicious dogs, both of which allegedly attacked and one of which gruesomely killed a woman named Diane Whipple. Noel and Knoller (as lawyers will) quickly added insult to mortal injury by lamely arguing that Ms. Whipple might have provoked the attack by wearing pheromone-based perfume or using steroids. They also speculated that perhaps the victim hadn’t done enough to escape the dog which was tearing out her throat. Ms. Whipple was a lacrosse coach at St. Mary’s College and Ms. Smith’s lesbian lover.

California law does not permit unrelated “domestic partners” to make claims of this sort but the plaintiff argues that the court should not deny her a remedy on the basis that she was not married to Ms. Whipple while prohibiting her from ever *being* married to Ms. Whipple. Establishing standing in a wrongful death case would hugely advance the homosexual agenda for redefining marriage. Any expressions of misgiving concerning this proposed “reform” would, of course, be hate-

filled and homophobic.

Now comes the bizarre allegation that Mr. Noel and Ms. Knoller were training these dogs, at the behest of inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison, to function as attack dogs; perhaps for a ring of drug dealers. Adding to the otherworldly weirdness of this very sad case, Mr. Noel and Ms. Knoller were reported to have later adopted one of the inmates who had bred these attack dogs.

What does this stranger-than-fiction tragedy have to do with PETA and Dr. Singer? In its March 30, 2001 issue, *The Orange County (CA) Register* published an Associated Press (AP) story stating that criminal investigators now have evidence (including nude photos) suggesting that Mr. Noel and Ms. Knoller were having sex with the killer dogs (this is, after all, *The City By The Bay*). The article quotes police officer Carlos Sanchez who reports that "...investigators believed the dogs, Hera [female] and Bane [male] were being sexually assaulted by Noel and Knoller. Noel has said the issue is nobody's business [this is, after all, *The City By The Bay*]." The more liberal *Los Angeles Times* apparently agreed and discretely censored any mention of interspecies intercourse from its publication of the same AP article.

The point here is that the police aren't treating the alleged bestiality as a private affair among consenting adults (albeit of different species). They see it as rape and must be basing this view on a failure of consent. Would Professor Singer object to this theory of culpability? If so, may we conclude that he thinks animals are entitled to less protection from sexual assault than humans? Does this not out him as a latent speciesist? And if that is his view of sexual assault by humans on animals, what of sexual assault by animals on humans?

The above-mentioned *Chronicle* article also describes Singer's account of a male orangutan which sexually assaulted a female human. He concludes that since we are all "great apes," sex across the species barrier "ceases to be an offense to our status and dignity as human beings." One might then wonder where the sage of Princeton stands on expanding the legal definition of marriage to include matrimony between man and beast? Would he relegate these relationships to the status of mere civil union? Would PETA denounce opposition to inter-species marriage "reform" by calling it mean-spirited bestiphobia?

On a related topic, since chimpanzees have been filmed eating monkeys, why is it okay for a "great ape" to eat lesser anthropoid primates if PETA thinks the greatest of the "great apes" (arguably man) should be denied meat of any sort, monkey or mutton? A high percentage of animals eat meat with total indifference to such taxonomic niceties as phylum, class, order, family, genus or species. Even those New Age pagan deities, the whales and porpoises, eat fish; whales eat seals; and some whales actually eat other whales. Can they all be wrong? If *their* carnivorism is normative, why is *ours* aberrant? If ours isn't aberrant, why is it abhorrent? Could it be because we should know better? Wouldn't that be another example of the arrogant speciesism so shrilly decried by Dr. Singer.

Finally, I am reminded of recent press coverage of a controversy involving a horse breeder whose prized mare was accidentally impregnated by a stallion of lesser lineage. When the breeder sought to protect his derivative reproductive rights with a "choice" to abort this "unwanted pregnancy," animal rights activists howled in protest. Does PETA's professed neutrality on abortion extend only to the killing of unborn children?

Welcome to the abortion wars, PETA friends. And you thought pro-lifers were confused.