



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Animal Rights Absurdity

by Scott McPherson

The “animal rights” group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) sued fast-food-chain KFC last summer for allegedly misreporting the way it treats its chickens. PETA’s legal argument was that KFC was misleading the public, a valid complaint if true.

But PETA’s broader objectives are not so sound. According to the organization’s [website](#),

PETA believes that animals deserve the most basic rights — consideration of their own best interests regardless of whether they are useful to humans. Like you, they are capable of suffering and have interests in leading their own lives; therefore, they are not ours to use — for food, clothing, entertainment, or experimentation, or for any other reason.

Important note: Although PETA might gladly have it otherwise, it is currently not illegal to kill animals for food, clothing, entertainment, or experimentation.

Nevertheless, the law is considerably convoluted on the issue of “animal rights.” For instance, on July 4, a dog entered the yard of Texas veterinarian Mircea Volosen who, fearing the canine was there to kill his chickens, proceeded to kill it with the whack of a mallet. Volosen is free on \$2,500 bond and awaits trial for felony “animal cruelty.” Interestingly, PETA has yet to release a statement praising Volosen as a fellow defender of chickens.

So let’s get this straight: In the eyes of the law, it’s wrong to kill an animal that is about to kill one of your animals, but it’s all right to kill an animal during, say, hunting season? KFC can slaughter animals every single day with impunity, while Volosen faces a jail sentence for cruelty?

What exactly is the moral basis for this legal disparity? If animals have the right to be free from cruelty, then surely they have the far more pressing right to not be killed for any reason at all. Right?

Consider an analogy: It’s acceptable to kill your neighbor — as long as someone eats him afterwards. Any rational person would properly identify this as complete insanity.

Yet we tolerate the irrationality of laws regulating the “welfare” of animals. Simply put, it doesn’t make sense to charge someone with animal cruelty for killing a dog, when people legally kill animals every single day and for reasons that are at times quite trivial, such as sport (hunting), convenience (animal control), and fashion (fur coats).

The confusion and inconsistency lies in Americans’ failure to fully appreciate that the concept of rights applies only to human beings. Rights define how *humans* must behave towards other *humans*, because without them we would descend into chaos and barbarism.

The right to *human* life is the standard of all other rights; to the extent that any action infringes on this right, it is unquestionably *wrong*. For example, human beings must work and acquire property in order to live; hence to deny someone his property is to take from him part of his *life*.

Humans cannot exist without being able to control their environment; therefore they observe a moral system of individual rights that demands respect for their accomplishments in furthering their own lives. Regardless of how one defines the origin of rights, they are logically applicable only to humans.

Animals, however, do not require rights. They cannot warrant moral equity with humans when morality means nothing to them.

Animals do not have rights — they are the property of those who own them, to do with as they please.

This isn’t to say that we should condone animal mistreatment. Anyone who would needlessly hurt an animal should rightly be condemned by his fellows — just as we condemn other unsavory conduct.

Applying the idea of basic rights to a dog, cat, rat, or frog, would not elevate animals to our level — it would make human life literally impossible. For in having to defer to the “best interests” of an animal, we would logically have to subordinate our own. Perhaps *that* is what PETA is after.

Scott McPherson is a policy advisor at The Future of Freedom Foundation.

This article was originally published in October of 2003.