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## Pets to Have “Rights?” George Will to the Rescue

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Columnist George F. Will discussed the Animal Welfare Bill proposed by Britain’s Labour government in a recent Newsweek column. The bill sounds like a parody of political correctness, but it is actually further evidence of how the concept of “rights” has become almost meaningless in today’s political culture.

As Will reports:

*In January 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt envisioned a “world founded upon four essential human freedoms” –freedom of speech and expression, freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, freedom from want and freedom from fear. In January 2006, Prime Minister Tony Blair’s—technically, Her Majesty’s—Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said pets should have five freedoms. The Animal Welfare Bill says the five are:*

- *An appropriate diet.*
- *Suitable living conditions.*
- *Companionship or solitude, as the cat, canary or gerbil prefers.*
- *Monitoring for abnormal behavior.*
- *Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.*

*Well. Politicians’ jokes are usually recognizable as such because they elicit boisterous laughter from the politicians’ friends, families and employees. But there is no evidence that Blair’s government is joking. The Labour Party, having recently saved the foxes from the fox hunters and their hounds, is serious—not to say grim and humorless—about perfecting society.*

More:

*The Times of London reports that pet owners will be supplied with lots of rules. Such as: “Dogs should be introduced to cats very carefully.” What would we do without government to guide us? The pet police, who will be empowered to enter houses and seize animals, will enforce rules like the one that pets must have “mental stimulation” sufficient to ward off boredom and frustration. A nine-point guide about cats “going to the toilet” mandates provisions for privacy. A British headline: get your cat a private loo or expect pet police. Another: labour’s pet police may pounce if your dog gets bored. The Times says a code of conduct for invertebrates, such as lobsters, may be coming.*

*You will not be surprised that in America, it is San Francisco (which has more dogs—an estimated 110,000—than children) that is especially punctilious about codifying animal entitlements. One such is that a dog’s water must be changed at least once a day, and must be served in a nontipping bowl. A San Franciscan who has two Dobermans says pets “need as much care as a child does.” The chairman of the commission that drafted the nontipping-water-bowl ordinance says much of its language replicates that of a Los Angeles ordinance. So there.*

George Will is concerned about what all this says about the proper role of government and the conception of personal rights. I am concerned about the same fiasco from a very different angle — what this says about the confusion of human beings and the animal kingdom.

The animal rights movement is, at least at present, a small but growing fringe connected to radical environmentalism.

They are joined, in this respect, by an altogether different group — animal sentimentalists and indulgent pet owners.

I know, the word “pet” is now politically incorrect. Pets are now “companion animals.” I have noted, however, that the local supermarket still has a “pet food” section, not an “companion animal” section.

The sentimentalizing of animals leads to such leaps of imagination. How are we always supposed to know whether Fido wants companionship or solitude? Who is to decide if an owner is honoring this “right?” Is Fido now to hire an attorney? The gerbils?

Animal abuse is a genuine moral concern, but this is nonsense. If animals have rights in the same way that humans have rights, the system of relations between humans and animals is collapsing.  
Then again, I had better take care what I write. Baxter, my companion beagle, might have an attorney who is reading.

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