

# Pets, Companion Animals, and Domesticated Partners

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Gary Varner's paper addresses both conceptual and normative questions about pets. Answering the conceptual question—"What are pets?"—is essential, he says, for grappling with the normative questions—such as "What do we owe pets?" Drawing with only minor modification on Deborah Barnbaum's treatment of the conceptual issues, he suggests (with some reservation and qualification) that for something to be one's pet it must meet four conditions: (a) One must have affection for it. (b) It must live in an area that is significantly under one's control and must either be prevented from leaving that area or voluntarily choose to remain there. (c) It must lead a dramatically different kind of life from one's own, and not be simply smaller and furrier than oneself. (d) It must be dependent on one and have an interest in its continued existence.

The author then distinguishes pets from companion animals and domesticated partners.

Turning to the normative questions, the author first argues that for at least some kinds of animals the practice of pet-keeping is morally justified. This is because it genuinely benefits the pets and the humans that keep them. The author then considers the content of one's obligations to one's pets. He concludes that those who keep pets should: (a) provide for pets' psychological and physical needs; (b) ensure that the pets have a life that compares favorably with the life they would likely have had had they not been pets; (c) all things being equal, keep pets that are also domesticated partners or companion animals; and (d) cultivate a domestic partnership with their companion animals, insofar as this is practicable.

Gary Varner wrote "Pets, Companion Animals, and Domesticated Partners" for this volume.

## INTRODUCTION

Pets are ubiquitous in human society. Most domesticated species are agricultural; and we tend to think of the first domestication, of the dog between 12,000 and 14,000 years ago, as a practical part of the transition from paleolithic hunter-gathering to neolithic agriculture. However, in his excellent overview of pet ownership, ethologist James Serpell notes that in one early burial site, dated to about 12,000 years ago in what is now northern Israel, an elderly human was buried with a five month old domesticated dog. "The most striking thing about these remains," he says, "was the fact that whoever presided over the original burial had carefully arranged the dead person's left hand so that it rested, in a timeless and eloquent gesture of attachment, on the puppy's shoulder" (Serpell 1996, p. 58). By three to four thousand years ago, the Egyptians were worshipping cats in ways that would make the most eccentric contemporary pet owner look ordinary by comparison. And, as Serpell notes, almost all "tribal peoples" studied in modern times have kept pets of various kinds. He concludes that "The existence of pet-keeping among so called 'primitive' peoples poses a problem for those who choose to believe that such behaviour is the product of Western wealth, decadence and bourgeois sentimentality" (p. 53).

Although philosophers have written much about the moral status of non-human animals (henceforth animals) since the 1970s, they have had little to say about pets specifically, despite the fact that over half of all households in the developed nations today include pets.<sup>1</sup> Of the three best-known books on animal welfare and animal rights, only Bernard Rollin's *Animal Rights and Human Morality* (1992 [1981]) contains more than a passing reference to pets. In *The Case for Animal Rights*, Tom Regan mentions pets only in the course of discussing the concept of euthanasia (1983, p. 114), and the index to the book does not even mention pets or companion animals. And in the preface to *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer (1990 [1975]) went out of his way to emphasize that he was not "inordinately fond of dogs, cats, or horses in the way that many people are: (p. ii), later mentioning pets only when giving the address of an organization to contact concerning vegetarian diets for them (p. 257) and in relation to the U.S. Animal Welfare Act (pp. 72, 76), which was originally motivated by concern about pets being stolen and sold as research animals.

A computerized search of *The Philosopher's Index* for 1940 through July 2000 returned only 13 titles or abstracts of English language works including the words "pet" or "pets."<sup>2</sup> Ten of these contained no discussion of pet animals:

<sup>1</sup>Serpell cites European Pet Food Federation statistics for 1994 indicating that over half of European Union households included pets. In August of 2000, I gathered the following statistics from internet sources. According to The American Veterinary Medical Association's Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook, <http://www.avma.org/pubinfo/pidemosb.htm>, 58.9% of U.S. households own pets. And "Pet Net" of Australia, <http://www.petnet.com.au/statistics.html>, brags that the nation leads the world with 64% of all households owning pets and 53% of those without pets wishing they had one or more.

<sup>2</sup>A search in all languages returned only one additional hit, an article on the general question of interspecific justice, published in Dutch and Flemish: Wouter Achterberg, "Interspecificke Rechtvaardigheid," *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*, 74 (1982), pp. 77-98.

However, not just any profoundly different thing that one is fond of and keeps in the house can literally be said to be a pet. Several years ago "pet rocks" and "Tamagotchis" were marked as "pets" in the United States. Barnbaum herself owns a Tamagotchi for which she proclaims affection:

The Tamagotchi has a liquid-crystal display, which shows a small creature. My Tamagotchi has several functions, all controllable via three buttons. I can push buttons that allow the small creature [to] appear to eat sandwiches and candy, play games, and give it medicine if it appears to be sick. The Tamagotchi beeps at me if it wants attention. If I fail to attend to the Tamagotchi in the proper fashion, the display will tell me that I have killed the small creature. I admit that I have gotten attached to my Tamagotchi, and if the display tells me that I have killed it, I will feel sad, feel that I have failed it somehow. (p. 41)

As a non-living thing, Barnbaum notes, a Tamagotchi has no interests which its owner affects. It fails what she proposes as a fourth and final criterion for pethood:

4. *The dependency criterion:* "The dependency criterion requires that there is something external to me which depends on me, and which has an interest in its continued existence."

However fond one is of a Tamagotchi, or a computer or a car, and however inclined one is to feel sad if one fails to meet its needs, these things are not really pets, and the explanation seems to be, as Barnbaum's characterization of the dependency criterion suggests, that their needs do not define interests. Barnbaum does not analyze the notions of "need" and "interest," but an interest, I take it, is any morally significant need or desire. More precisely, one has an interest in the fulfillment of one's needs and desires if and only if their fulfillment creates intrinsic value. Fulfilling the needs of a car is a good thing, but only because cars are of value to humans—fulfilling the needs of artefacts creates only instrumental value. To have interests, a thing must have a good of its own which makes the world a better place when life goes well for it (Varner 1998, pp. 6, 25).

Barnbaum assumes that all living things have interests in this sense. Elsewhere I have defended this claim at length (1998, chapter three), but I disagree with Barnbaum about one implication she draws from it. At one point she writes, "By my mind, plants and fish are equally dull pets. A Venus Flytrap is a slightly more interesting pet than a Ficus Tree, but not by much (but that is merely a personal bias)" (p. 42). By Barnbaum's criteria, houseplants are pets, because they are profoundly different than us, we are fond of them, we keep them in the house, and they have interests, the fulfillment of which depends on us tending to their needs. But to me it sounds like a category mistake to call a Ficus tree, or even a Venus Flytrap, a pet. Why? I think it is because plants cannot move, in the sense of voluntarily deciding to go, nor does it make sense to speak of holding them captive. This is why I would modify Barnbaum's domicile criterion in the following way:

2'. *The modified domicile criterion:* If something is your pet, it must live in an area that is significantly under your control or influence, and it must either be prevented from leaving that area or voluntarily choose to remain there.

A horse in a barn farm from its owner's house meets this condition, as do housecats who return after being let outside, and fish in a livingroom tank. The cats stay voluntarily. The horse might or might not choose to stay, but it is every bit as much prevented from leaving as the fish. Still, it is not literally a category mistake to call a plant a pet. For if an extraordinary species of plant were found which did occasionally pull up its roots and go, it would not seem to me like a misuse of the term to talk about such plants being kept as pets. Indeed, among what have not been classified as animals since the taxonomic revisions of the 1980s, members of both the Monera and Protista Kingdoms are capable of motion, and while they would make very unusual pets, both bacteria (in the Monera Kingdom) and paramecia (in the Protista Kingdom) could satisfy the modified domicile condition. And among what remain classified as animals, some fail the modified domicile criterion, for instance barnacles and sponges. So it seems to me that while an animal as simple as a starfish can be a pet, the barnacles and sponges it shares a tank with cannot.

For the purposes of this paper, I adopt Barnbaum's four criteria with the above modification to the domicile criterion. It is notoriously difficult to define words in a natural language in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, and the above criteria might seem to imply the wrong thing in some cases. For instance, are fish who have been breeding for generations in a backyard pond pets? I am inclined to say that they are, but others think this stretches the notion of a pet too far. Are the anoles, spiders and cockroaches inhabiting my house pets? I think that stretches the notion too far, but these animals have been breeding for generations right inside the house, and if the house were sealed well, they would be prevented from leaving. So the above conditions may not be, strictly speaking, individually necessary and jointly sufficient. We could try to handle such cases in various ways, e.g., by specifying in the modified domicile criterion that someone must intend to prevent them from leaving. That would take care of my cockroach problem (at least conceptually), but many contemporary philosophers doubt that specifying necessary and sufficient conditions is the right way to go about defining terms in natural languages. Nevertheless, the four criteria discussed above characterize a "family resemblance" among paradigm examples of pets (domestic<sup>5</sup> dogs and cats, caged birds and fish, and horses or agricultural animals who are treated like pets), and although they imply that a broad range of other things can be pets—including lizards, spiders, lobsters, starfish, insects, and even slugs—it seems to me that calling these animals pets does not do violence to our pre-theoretic conception of a pet.

Still, these criteria raise a number of interesting conceptual questions, two of which it is important to discuss here, because they are directly relevant to the question of what we owe pets. One question is: Are there non-conscious pets? I believe the answer to this is "yes." I cannot go into my reasons here, but I

<sup>5</sup>Although authors (e.g. Waring 1983) commonly use "domestic" and "domesticated" interchangeably, strictly speaking, a "domestic animal" would be an animal kept in the house, which may or may not be domesticated. Thus many working animals, and farm animals, even if they are treated as pets, are not "domestic" animals, and some domestic animals, e.g., tamed wild ones, are not "domesticated."

She characterizes this as "a constraint in the way understanding of music is a constraint on the violinist who is not at war with herself" (p. 27). There is evidence of such profound understanding of constraints during cooperative pursuit of a goal in so-called "clever disobedience acts," as an example of which she describes how one of her dogs "created" the "strategic down" of police and military dogs:

One day I was teaching a lesson and had my Airedale, Texas, with me for backup. The handler was having trouble with her dog, a Mastiff, so I had to take over. The Mastiff went for me. Texas left his "down" and put himself between me and the Mastiff. Once things were under control again, he, without prompting from me, returned to his "down" position at the edge of the training area. Here the simple "down" exercise became a lively and thoughtful posture police dog handlers sometimes call the "strategic down." It was the dog's grasping and acting on his own understanding that here expanded meaning. Before the incident, "Down" for this young dog has simple meant, "Lie down and hold still until you hear from me again." In the course of the incident with the Mastiff, Texas both created and learned a strategic down. A police officer, or a soldier, or a robber might leave her dog on a down with a view of one entrance while she went to cover the other; with a little experience, dogs come to understand the strategy in question. Once they grasp the point of the arrangement, they are controlled by their own understanding of the strategy, just as their handlers are. (Hearne, pp. 28-29)

And for animals to do such creative work "at liberty," the work must itself be interesting and gratifying, as Hearne says it is for search dogs: "For a dog with the capacity for it, search work is thrilling, transcending..." (Hearne 1995, p. 31).

Dogs working "at liberty," and in ways that emphasize and exercise the animal's mental and/or physical faculties in a healthy and satisfying way (for the dog), are the paradigm case of what I call domesticated partners. The partnership they have with their humans includes the affection and care owners typically give to pets, but the working dog exercises its faculties in a setting and command structure that are both natural to and healthy for it.

Aside from the dog, a range of animals seem more or less suited to becoming domesticated partners. Because they are widely used in a variety of ways—agriculture (as draft animals, cutting horses, etc.), for transportation, and in entertainment—horses are, along with dogs, the most visible working animals, and like dogs they are well suited to becoming fully fledged domesticated partners. Horses were domesticated in various places between 1500 and 6000 years ago (cf. Clabby 1976, p. 52, Waring 1983, p. 10, and Budiansky 1997, p. 40). By modern times the wild horse (*Equus przewalskii*, the progenitor of the domesticated horse) was left only in Mongolia (Clabby 1976, photo caption opposite p. 52), and now only in zoos (Waring 1983, p. 2). Although people sometimes think of horses as solitary animals, they are intensely social, living in herds of from three or four to twenty or so in the wild (Waring 1983, p. 142). Indeed, so-called "stable vices" (behaviors such as gnawing on wood, excessive water consumption, stereotypes, and "cribbing" the upper incisors against fence posts [Budiansky 1997, pp. 102-03]) may result from solitary life being imposed on such a highly social

animal (Clabby 1976, p. 78).<sup>6</sup> Horses develop a variety of relationships with other horses. Mares and their foals groom and play (Waring 1983, p. 61), but all horses normally develop long-lasting peer relationships in the herd. Peer group "friends" engage in mutual grooming and generally spend time close together (Waring 1983, pp. 155-56).

Horses removed from a herd will also readily form attachments to surrogates, including their human owners or even a barn cat. It is this instinct that humans draw upon in establishing their relationship with domesticated horses. An extreme, but extremely effective, method used by some trainers to deal with recalcitrant or aggressive horses that refuse to accept human control is to deprive them of any social companionship for as much as 23 hours a day; social contact (even with a nonequine) becomes so valuable to a socially deprived horse that it very quickly comes to accept and bond with its trainer. Our horses' affection for us, their owners, is unquestionably real, grounded in a basic instinct to form friendship bonds; it is slightly bruising to our egos, though, to realize that they bond with us only for lack of better company. (Budiansky 1997, pp. 84-85)

Horses also understand and act in accordance with dominance hierarchies. Mares are herded by stallions in the wild, and in captivity mares sometimes take over this function (Waring 1983, p. 146). Training horses is easy if started while they are young, and the direction a rider gives the horse is at least loosely analogous to mares being herded and to horses' general tendency to "follow the leader" in dangerous situations (Clabby 1976, pp. 78, 84). Thus although feral horses fare better than feral dogs and, unlike dogs, horses typically require restraint to prevent them from straying at least temporarily (especially in the company of other horses), horses are well suited to becoming domesticated partners. While I doubt that draft horses much enjoy their work, I find it entirely plausible that other sorts of working horses, for instance dressage horses and thoroughbreds, do, at least sometimes or under the best circumstances. Budiansky observes that both thoroughbreds and dressage horses appear to be playing when they work: "Training and learning may explain why a horse can be made to perform these tasks, but seem inadequate to explain the undeniable enthusiasm that many horses show for these pursuits" (Budiansky 1997, pp. 99-101).

Some tamed wild animals probably also enjoy, and genuinely benefit from, working with humans. For instance, Sea World San Antonio features performing orcas, dolphins, and sea lions, but they also have both sea lions and dolphins who do not "perform" aside from begging for fish from visitors during designated feeding hours. After comparing the lot of the two during a visit, I feel confident that the performing animals are far better off. First, because the training process provides far more mental stimulation than does begging from tourists. To learn a complex performance routine, an animal must solve a long series of problems over the course of months of training. The begging animals,

<sup>6</sup>Another factor probably is that confinement prevents horses from spending most of their time foraging and walking. Wild horses spend half or more of their time grazing and nearly 10% of it walking or running (Budiansky 1997, p. 105 and Waring 1983, p. 222).

Nevertheless, my own view, based on the lack of scientific evidence to the contrary, coupled with my own fairly extensive experience with cats, is that their affection for their humans is genuine. The fact that cats' apparently affectionate behavior has biological functions unrelated to affection entails neither that the behavior is not affectionate nor that it is misplaced. Remember that cats (and all other domesticated animals) lack the expressive potential afforded by the syntactic structure of language. So if cats do seek to express affection for their human keepers, they must use whatever vocabulary of expressive sounds and gestures they have at their disposal, and this vocabulary is limited to a range of signals that evolved to manage relations among cats prior to domestication. Consequently, in evaluating deflationary claims like those in the preceding paragraph, it is significant to note which such signals cats do in fact use with their humans. First, note that we do not hear of tom cats marking their humans with urine, the way they mark territory in the wild (and household objects when confined). Cats "marking" of humans with scent glands on their faces and necks, that would be reserved for marking landmarks in the wild, should hardly be dismissed as unaffectionate behaviors, given that cats in domestic settings are dealing with animals with whom they entered into communal living very recently in evolutionary terms. Similarly, that they adapted other parts of their limited expressive vocabulary to a new use, including behaviors previously reserved for kitten-mother interactions, should hardly surprise us, given the domestic cat's heavy dependence on us and their species' relatively recent domestication.

So I believe that cats really feel affection for their human keepers, but I also know that cats are more difficult to train than dogs and many other animals. Cats do not readily accept command hierarchies the way dogs and horses do, they are most effectively trained with rewards rather than punishments, and, when punishment is used, it is best arranged so that it looks unrelated to the human administering it (Wright and Walters 1980, p. 153), which makes it hardly count as "punishment" at all. Cats *can* be trained, though. Although I have never heard of rescue cats or drug sniffing cats, skilled trainers do turn them into movie "actors," and an owner with enough patience and a good understanding of how to train them can teach cats to respond to simple commands like "no," "come," "get down," "collar on," etc.; not to do certain things, like jump up on the kitchen counters or try to go out the front door of the house; and even where to sleep on the bed, e.g. next to the non-allergic partner in a human couple (all of these are things I have taught my own cats). Cats who have access to a safe outdoor environment or a sufficiently interesting indoor environment can be endlessly stimulated mentally and physically, so while cats are less likely to become fully fledged domesticated partners, they are eminently suited to be companion animals.

The discussion in this section reveals that the notion of a pet is surprisingly complex. So far I have made the following distinctions:

A *pet* is any entity which meets the affection, discontinuity, dependence and modified domicile criteria.

A *companion animal* is a pet who receives the affection and care owners typically give to pets, but who also has significant social interaction with its owner and would voluntarily choose to stay with the owner, in part for the sake of the companionship.

A *domesticated partner* is a companion animal who works with humans in ways that emphasize and exercise the pet's mental and/or physical faculties in a healthy way.

Here I add just one more:

A *mere pet* is a pet which<sup>8</sup> is neither a companion animal nor a domesticated partner.

Some animals, like spiders and fish, are congenitally incapable of being more than "mere pets" for humans. Spiders and fish, I am assuming, have no conscious desires, and so if they stay with their human keepers, it is not out of any conscious desire for human companionship. Other animals are quite capable of being companion animals, or even domesticated partners, but fail to be only because their relationship with their human keepers is insufficiently friendly and caring. For instance, the dog abandoned to a tether in the back yard, for whom no one feels affection, may very well crave human companionship, but the affection is not reciprocated. And a human could love a dog who, through previous mistreatment perhaps, is incapable of reciprocal affection.

### NORMATIVE QUESTIONS: WHAT DO WE OWE PETS AND WHICH KINDS ARE PREFERABLE?

In approaching normative questions about pet keeping, it is important to keep the above distinctions in mind. For I think that some of the above kinds of relationships we can have with pets are morally preferable to others, and of the philosophers who have directly addressed the normative questions of what principle(s) ought to govern our treatment of pets and why, none has had much to say about animals other than dogs, or about dogs as anything other than companion animals. In this section, I will summarize Rollin's, Burgess-Jackson's and DeGrazia's discussions of the content and basis of owners' obligations to pets, noting how what they say might apply to a wider range of animals, and then clarify and defend my claim that some kinds of relationships we can have with pets are preferable to others.

First, however, something should be said about the general question of whether keeping pets is justifiable at all. In light of the foregoing discussion, the answer would seem to be yes, for at least *some* kind of pets. This is not the place to stake out a stance among traditional ethical theories such as utilitarianism versus rights views. Although not a rights theorist myself, elsewhere I have

<sup>8</sup>I say "a pet *who*" when speaking of a pet whom I believe to have a robust conscious life. I say "a pet *which*" when speaking of a pet which I believe lacks such a robust conscious life.

"principle of nonmaleficence" (pp. 259, 274). These differences of detail on the basis of obligations to pets need not concern us here; Burgess-Jackson speculates that part of the reason philosophers writing on animal rights issues have tended to ignore pets is a worry that pointing up special obligations to pets would de-emphasize obligations to "stranger" animals" (p. 166), but the general idea that we acquire special duties to the animals we keep as pets comports with common sense.

As to the content of these duties, the three are again in broad agreement, but here the differences of detail are interesting in various ways. Burgess-Jackson characterizes the duty of pet owners as simply to "provide for their needs" (p. 179), which he illustrates using dogs as his only example. "Not every human need is a dog need" (p. 181), he emphasizes, distinguishing between basic biological needs for nutrition, shelter, exercise, and medical care (179–180), and things like privacy and full-blown education, which are genuine social needs for humans, but have no strict analog among dogs. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that

Dogs need the sort of stimulation that humans refer to as attention, entertainment, or recreation. Dogs need to be rubbed, scratched, petted, and hugged (forms of tactile stimulation); they need to be engaged in various forms of play (structured or unstructured) with their human companions; they need to develop and use their senses; and most importantly, they need to interact with other dogs. Dogs are social beings. They are no less social than humans are, and while it is possible for a human or a dog to survive without interaction (think of a human being in solitary confinement), no human would count it an adequate existence, let alone a fulfilled one. It is a sad fact about our world that many dogs are kept penned or chained in back yards with no chance of seeing, much less sniffing, touching, or playing with, other canines. (pp. 180–81)

Here I think Burgess-Jackson overstates dogs' need for contact with conspecifics. To the extent that humans really substitute for alpha animals in dogs' social environment, dogs may be able to lead perfectly healthy lives (at least as adults) without regular contact with other dogs. To some extent he may be conflating isolation per se with isolation from conspecifics, because in a footnote to the above passage Burgess-Jackson quotes an essay in which James Serpell and coauthor J. A. Jagoe say that "Long periods of daily social isolation or abandonment by the owner may . . . provoke adult separation problems and excessive barking" (p. 181, note #67—emphasis added).

Doubtless contact with conspecifics is good for dogs, as I believe it is for cats, and it may be a more important need for some other animals. My cats initiate play with each other more frequently than with the humans they are familiar with, and although my cats spend time nearby and sleep with us at night, they spend a great deal more time in close contact with each other. Not all cats learn to get along in these ways, but they commonly do, and for this reason it is generally good to have two or three cats rather than just one. And if the remarks about horses quoted in the preceding section are correct, they may have a more deep-seated need than dogs for contact with conspecifics. Commenting on horses' formation of peer relationships with members of other species, Budiansky states

that they do this only when isolated from other horses or trained by humans, concluding that "they bond with us only for lack of better company" (Budiansky 1997, p. 85).

DeGrazia's treatment of pets runs less than two pages (1996, pp. 274–75). Like Burgess-Jackson, he acknowledges a general duty to "Provide for the basic physical and psychological needs of your pet," but he adds that by acquiring a pet, one takes on an additional duty to "ensure that she has a comparably good life to what she would likely have if she were not a pet." He argues that the general "principle of nonmaleficence" implies this additional duty, because "animals should not be made worse off for becoming a pet, since making them worse off would be an unnecessary harm." As DeGrazia recognizes, this "comparable-life requirement" could have strikingly different implications for different animals: "A hopelessly domesticated poodle might simply starve if she were not a pet—in which case, a pretty crummy domesticated life could meet this standard," but "A flourishing monkey . . . might lose a lot by being captured and domesticated." However, he notes, the other obligation, to take care of pets' physical and psychological needs, "picks up the ethical slack" in the case of misshapen animals like the poodle.

Rollin's chapter on pets in *Animal Rights and Human Morality* (1992 [1981], pp. 213–240) is largely anecdotal, and does not articulate any specific principles describing the duties of pet owners. However, his chapter builds directly on his discussion, earlier on the book, of the (roughly Aristotelian) notion of a "telos," and how this can be used to articulate contemporary common sense views about how we ought to treat animals—what he came to call in later works "the new social ethic"<sup>9</sup> for our treatment of animals (1995a, pp. 139–168; 1995b, pp. 4–22; and 1999, pp. 35–44). So before discussing Rollin's anecdotes, we should recall his general account of the new social ethic for animals.

Rollin argues that until this century, the ways humans lived and worked with animals basically forced us to respect animals' biological needs and natural desires. Most use of animals was agricultural until recently, and the extensive methods of animal husbandry which predominated made it impossible to systematically neglect animals' needs without also sacrificing profits. In the second half of the 20th century, however, two things changed. First, agriculture moved towards more intensive and confinement-based systems, in poultry, egg, and swine production, but also to some extent in other areas where specialized feeds, hormones, and genetic engineering were used to significantly increase yields. Second, the use of animals in scientific research, including but not limited to biomedical research, blossomed and was increasingly subject to public scrutiny. As a result of these changes, the old social ethic regarding animals, which Rollin characterizes as simply forbidding *cruelty* ("that is, deliberate, sadistic, useless, unnecessary infliction of pain, suffering, and neglect on animals"—1995b, p. 5) became outmoded and has been replaced. The new social ethic

<sup>9</sup>By a "social ethic" Rollin means, "The portions of ethical rules that we believe to be universally binding on all members of society, and socially objective" (1999, p. 9).

birds' wings. A few pages later, Rollin mentions castration and spaying<sup>10</sup> in a similar tone, reminding us that "animals probably enjoy sexual congress as much as we do, and it is for this reason that I support vasectomies for male pet animals, rather than castration, and the development of effective contraceptives" (p. 227). Although Rollin does not mention it, an analogous option is available for females: tying off their fallopian tubes v. removing their ovaries ("spaying" them). I am skeptical, however, that neutering is as serious a violation of animals' *telos* as Rollin suggests by effectively comparing it with the declawing of cats and debarking of dogs. I do not doubt that intact animals enjoy sexual congress. However, humans probably tend to exaggerate what the loss of sexual activity means to animals like dogs and cats, first and foremost, because animals like dogs and cats are not sexually active all the time the way we are. Usually female cats and dogs only show an interest in sex when in heat, and males usually only become sexually aroused around females who are in heat. But there are also various health benefits of neutering. Regarding cats, specifically, intact females are seven times more likely than spayed females to develop mammary cancer (Shojai 1998, p. 360), and toms wander and fight much more than castrated males. Apart from war wounds, I believe that access to the outdoors, especially more "natural" areas, is particularly psychologically stimulating to cats, so an intact male's being prone to wander farther from home is a distinct liability, if there are roads and other hazards in the area. All in all, then, it seems to me that what cats lose through neutering may be less than they gain, and this could well be the case for other animals, for similar reasons. So although neutering is a clear example of the violation of animals' *telos*, it may well be a violation that is justified, all things considered. By contrast, declawing cats deprives them of parts of their anatomy (not only their claws, but part or all of their terminal toe bones—Wright and Walters 1980, p. 157) which they use daily in diverse ways, and the problems which lead to declawing (scratching where humans would prefer they not, aggression, etc.) can themselves be handled in a variety of other, less invasive ways. Similar things could be said about debarking dogs.

Finally, Rollin notes that many purebred lines perpetuate harmful genetic defects, including breathing difficulties and heart problems in bulldogs, hip problems in German shepherds, spinal disease in Dachshunds and Manx cats, deafness and bladder stones in Dalmations, cross-eyes in Siamese cats, and plain stupidity in Irish setters (p. 162). Here again Rollin's examples involve dogs and less so cats. This makes sense insofar as there are far more standardized breeds of dogs than of cats, but other animals kept as pets may also suffer from selective breeding. For instance, the stud book for thoroughbreds was "closed" in 1791, meaning that only horses descended from horses then in the book count as thoroughbreds. As a result, two thoroughbreds picked at random will on average have more genes in common than half-siblings, and the costs of 200+ years of inbreeding are apparent in several ways. First, despite premium

<sup>10</sup>It is only squeamishness that makes us refer to "neutering" males rather than castrating them. "Spay" is indeed easier to pronounce than "ovariectomy," but "castrate" rolls right off the tongue, so we should only say "neuter" when referring to both castration and spaying.

prices being paid for outstanding studs, the winning times for thoroughbreds have not improved for over a hundred years. Second, "More than 80 percent of yearlings show some signs of congenital cartilage deterioration at the joints, and more than 95 percent have upper respiratory problems that can affect breathing" (Budiansky 1997, p. 248).<sup>11</sup>

In my discussions of Burgess-Jackson, DeGrazia, and Rollin, I have emphasized how restricted their examples are: they focus almost exclusively on dogs. I have indicated in passing how some of what they say might apply to cats, horses, and a few other animals, but it is also significant that none of the three distinguishes, as I did in the preceding section, among companion animals, domesticated partners, and mere pets. First, because there are good reasons to think that domesticated partners are preferable in a way to companion animals, and that companion animals are similarly preferable to mere pets. And second, pets capable of being companion animals who are treated like mere pets lead worse lives than those who become fully fledged companion animals or domesticated partners.

As I have defined the terms, what distinguishes a companion animal from a mere pet is that the former gets social interaction with its owner significant enough to make it want to stay for that reason. And as defined above, a domesticated partner is "a companion animal who works with humans in ways that emphasize and exercise the pet's mental and/or physical faculties in a healthy way." Thus a domesticated partner gets all the benefits of being a companion animal, and then some, and a companion animal gets all the benefits of being a mere pet, and then some. So, other things being equal, keeping a companion animal is better than keeping a mere pet, and keeping a domesticated partner is preferable to keeping a companion animal who fails to be a domesticated partner.<sup>12</sup>

Burgess-Jackson and DeGrazia both hold that pet owners should:

1. Provide for pets' psychological and physical needs.

And, DeGrazia adds:

2. Ensure that they have a comparably good life to what they would likely have if they were not pets.

For the above reasons, I believe we should add that:

3. Other things being equal, it is better to keep a domesticated partner or a companion animal than a mere pet, and
4. Pet owners should cultivate a domestic partnership with their companion animals to the extent practicable.

<sup>11</sup>The information on horses in this paragraph is all drawn from Budiansky 1997, pp. 242–43 and 248. Budiansky notes that inbreeding is also a problem in Przewalski's horse, which is the only truly wild horse and exists today only in zoos, but he describes the problem for *Equus Przewalski* in terms of lost diversity (the entire population is descended from 13 individuals) without mentioning any specific health problems (Budiansky 1997, pp. 265–66).

<sup>12</sup>In Varner 1998, chapter four, I defend a variant of Ralph Barton Perry's (1926) "principle of inclusiveness" which underwrites such judgements.

4. Do you think that the following practices are morally acceptable? If so, why? If not, why not? (a) Docking dogs' tails. (b) Declawing cats. (c) Preserving "thoroughbred" lines. (d) Spaying or neutering pets. What do the normative principles Gary Varner outlines imply about these practices?

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### Suggestions for Further Reading on Pets

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