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Guest Column

PETA, perverts and horses

By Alexander Rubin
Thursday, July 21, 2005

The death of a 45-year-old Seattle man is forcing an uncomfortable debate into the open. Delivered to a hospital by a friend, who promptly fled, it was found that the man had expired from an acute case of peritonitis; a frequently fatal severe inflammation of the inner surfaces of the abdominal cavity, usually caused by an internal perforation of the gastrointestinal tract. The suspicious nature of the death led police to investigate. What they found was shocking, disturbing and grotesque.

Worst of all, it was not exactly illegal in the state of Washington.

The investigation found that the man had died from a perforated colon; caused by having engaged in anal intercourse with a horse. This morbid discovery provoked a more thorough investigation by the King County sheriff's office, which in turn led to the discovery of a farm in the Enumclaw area, and hundreds of hours of video footage of men engaging in sexual activities with animals, from horses to chickens, goats and sheep.

Sgt. John Urquhart, the investigation's spokesman, explained that the investigation had found that the farm was well known in Internet chat rooms as a destination for men who wanted to have sex with animals, unbeknownst to neighbors. "A significant number of people," said Urquhart "have likely visited this farm", though he refused to give either a detailed or approximate number since the investigation is still ongoing. A neighboring couple, after being shown some of the video footage, angrily recognized their horse and their own barn.

While it is disturbing that strange men are gathering in the shadier corners of the Internet and forming a growing subculture that is sadly centered around the desire to have a sexual relationship with Mr. Ed, it's not necessarily a crime either.

As Urquhart explained, engaging with sexual relations with an animal is not illegal in Washington state, which is far from alone in that; fully 17 states do not have laws banning bestiality. To actually file a criminal charge, "you'd have to prove some sort of animal cruelty...and that's why we've got more investigating to do."

In addition to being immoral, at least by Judeo-Christian standards, intercourse with animals is unhealthy for several reasons. It encourages the spread of diseases that might not otherwise be spread, discourages healthy human relationships and fosters unhealthy attitudes and perspectives.

The Enumclaw case highlights two increasingly important ideological debates. The first, and seemingly the more minor of the two (for the time being) is within the animal rights movement, and centers around whether animals should be treated as identical to humans. On the one side, stands PETA and Peter Singer, a founder of the animal rights movement. On the other stands the Humane Society and Friends for Animals.

Peter Singer, a father of the animal rights movement, is no stranger to controversy. For his support of infanticide, euthanasia and abortion as morally justifiable, he has earned the ire of individuals and groups from all cross the political spectrum from the National Council of Disability to the *Wall Street Journal*.

This is completely unsurprising given Mr. Singer's political position, preference utilitarianism; the belief, traditionally tied to hedonism, that the action that an individual must take is the one that best minimizes

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suffering and maximizes pleasure. In a 2000 review of a book, he defended bestiality, noting that while taboos against oral sex, contraception, masturbation and homosexuality have all largely been done away with, bestiality has not.

He went on to explain that its taboo was a mere pretext for distinguishing ourselves from animals, "erotically and any other way", and thus denying them fair treatment. He explained that some intra-species relationships could lead to "mutually satisfying conclusions".

While he came under heavy fire for his comments, PETA president Ingrid Newkirk not only defended Singer, but also bestiality. "If a girl gets sexual pleasure from riding a horse, does the horse suffer? If not, who cares? If you French kiss your dog and he or she thinks it's great, is it wrong? We believe all exploitation and abuse is wrong...If it isn't exploitation and abuse, it may not be wrong."

PETA, it has been suggested, defends bestiality as a backdoor to equating animals with humanity. If animal human relationships are equal to human relationships, then eating an animal would become tantamount to cannibalism. However, her statements beg the question: how do you know when an animal is being sexually exploited.

It might prove difficult to prove, as it's very hard to get a straight answer from a horse in regards to the question "Mr. Ed, did you voluntarily enter a sexual relationship with Ingrid Newkirk, or did she force you into it?" A more real example involves Phillip Buble, who claims to be married to his dog, and that his marriage is just as valid in the eyes of God as any other marriage.

Meanwhile, the Humane Society is struggling to get a law passed in Washington that outlaws bestiality.

The larger debate, for the time being, is set within the context of American, indeed Western, society as a whole. Is it ethical and/or beneficial to legislate even seemingly basic morality, and does it violate the separation of church and state? The answer to that question is going to become increasingly more bizarre, disturbing and downright unhealthy habits, sexual and otherwise, are brought to light and the West moves further and further towards moral relativism. It can only be hoped that the right answer isn't found too late.

No animals were harmed or molested in the writing of this article. The author ate a grilled chicken sandwich for lunch, but that's it.

Alexander Rubin is a freelance columnist living in Toronto

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Dear Editor:

There is almost nothing as shocking as a man forcing himself sexually upon an animal ("PETA, Perverts and Horses," 21 July). As a cruelty officer, I prosecuted cases in which men took small dogs and chickens into alleyways or elsewhere and raped them, often rupturing the animals' organs in the process. When I was working with the Washington Humane Society, there was one case that I was unable to find a way to prosecute, which will always haunt me. It involved a sex club run by men who, we had reason to believe, were sexually assaulting cats in a

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private home.

It is almost as shocking to read my comments about non-assaultive sexual contact as some endorsement by me or PETA of sexual assault on animals. Let me be clear—as the writer was shamefully not—that PETA and I are totally opposed to any exploitation and all bestiality. Philosophical musings on whether there is cruelty when a girl experiences sexual pleasure from riding a horse who is oblivious to that fact or when someone allows a dog to hump their leg are a far cry from an endorsement of bestiality. Bestiality is cruelty to animals and PETA pushes for laws to outlaw it and prosecution when it occurs.

Please correct the hideously false impression that Alexander Rubin gave in his guest column.ð

Very truly yours,

Ingrid E. Newkirk
President
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

Editor's Note:

Neither canadafreepress.com editors nor its guest columnist, student Alexander Rubin intended in any way to infer that PETA President Ingrid Newkirk approved of bestiality. PETA, whose mission is dedicated to animal welfare, abhors bestiality and cruelty of any kind to animals.
