

## O'dogs an' Climate Change

Neither Robert Burns (remember his “To a Mouse”?) nor Steinbeck (who took “...of mice and men” from Burn’s poem for his eponymous novel) would question the trivial truth: Never criticize someone’s dog, or baby. With people being exposed to fewer babies, the dog — a substitute of a sort — has gained an almost sacred status (like cows in Hinduism, minus the benefits associated with them).

Domesticating each other, dogs and humans made it through the hunter-gatherer phase of evolution. Owners speak to their dogs (way more than to their neighbors), finding more fault with the persons their guardians might bite (accidentally, or not) than with some victim, rushed to an emergency room (for legal reasons) to get an anti-rabies shot. If that were all to worry about, then staying away from dogs would be the end of the story.

But it’s not. In a non-scientific survey of the best-known climate change activists — it doesn’t matter which side you’re on — it turns out that 80% are dog owners. “Isn’t that a proof that the best people are embracing a good cause?” would be the dog lovers’ spontaneous reaction. I was recently asked to take to heart Greta Thunberg — the 16-year-old Swedish girl dedicated to waking us up. She famously told the world’s politicians at the UN Climate Summit: “You have stolen my dreams and childhood.” Impressive dedication, no doubt, but also a good lesson for everyone else. You want to change the world for the better? Great. Start with yourself. She sailed across the Atlantic rather than take an airplane. Great again. Except that the press, shadowing her, more than made up for the missing emissions, in more than one way.

To steal the dreams and childhood of children growing up in affluent households (her parents were able to finance the much-admired sailing trip) is different from stealing the dreams and childhood of children living under conditions below that of the dogs in our world of many privileges. The flight shaming movement Greta initiated asks her fellow Swedes to travel according to their beliefs. A Nobel Prize for good intentions? Well, it turns out that the hero owns two dogs, of the larger size, which exceed her own carbon footprint, and even that of the flight she avoided. A medically prescribed comfort pet for her condition is, by all means, justified. Everything beyond one comfort pet (or pets justified otherwise) brings us back to the fact that the vast majority of ecologically aware activists and honest supporters don’t see their own need to start changing before they set out to save us all. The *Happy Puppy* site tells us: “When you are considering adding a German Shepherd puppy to your family, there is so much to contemplate! As of publication time, the price range for a purebred GSD puppy varies from \$100 to \$20,000.” This is more than what children born in misery will eventually earn over a lifespan — if they make it past childhood. Whose childhood and dreams were stolen?

Ninety million dogs and almost 100 million cats: this translates as over 30 percent of the environmental impact of meat consumption — soon to be declared a crime of a sort — in the USA. And — hold your nose — 30 percent as much poop, as Americans (even those on a diet) let out. Europe — Greta’s Sweden included — is not far behind. Pet ownership in Asia accelerated, even in some Muslim countries, where dogs are seen as impure and injunctions of all kind warn Muslims against contacts with them.

The ecological crisis is a human crisis. Happily spending over 100 billion dollars for their pets — dogs, cats, birds, hamsters, ferrets, lizards, snakes, and even bigger (non-domestic) animals — Americans, some rich, some dirt poor, expose more than their soft spot for animals. Here, and on other continents (at a different scale), the cost of this expression of love exceeds donations to charities and even the financial assistance provided by the US government. Products and services ranging from the best (read: most expensive) to the outrageous (yes, it starts with caviar) present an image of a human condition so much in love with itself and so little concerned about those in need. Contact lenses (“I want my Persian to have blue eyes” or “I want my Rex to see better”), knee and hip replacements, chiropractic therapy, and even psychiatric sessions are on record. Online dating is no longer only for people, but also for dogs and even cats. Some owners care for their dog as much, or more, than for their own family members. (“My husband is happier to see the dog than me,” one wife joked.) Of course, dogs are easier to dominate and rarely, if ever, hold grudges against you.

“Revolutionary” politicians seeking high offices call for funding abortions abroad to help in controlling population growth. Implicit racism aside, they ignore the world’s growing pet population and the resulting carbon footprint. They call on others to abstain from damaging the Amazon rain forest, but build, for themselves and their pets, bigger and bigger McMansions from the trees of our own forests.

Rich and poor, along with their dogs, go to or participate in marches for a better world, leaving behind enough poop to account for the greenhouse gases emitted in a whole town. Demagoguery? Ignorance? Climate change, if honestly approached, should mean change from the obsession with consumption (owning a dog, the most recent fashion, the new iPhone, the newest car, sailing boat, private jet) to a sense of sharing. The engine of a prosperity — for which we pay with our future — drives an activism of selfishness and self-righteousness. Our prosperity comes at the price of others, who live below the standards of poverty, climate change or not. If there is a climate change crisis, it is a human crisis: to care for your own prosperity, pets included (and our “right” to own their destinies) more than we care for each other.

Well, never criticize someone’s child or — especially — pet.