

The Reactor

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'Pass Topsy'

As Laurie Schwemberger so aptly expounded in last week's letter, dogs love to do the work they are designed to do. Sheep herding dogs like Border Collies are mightily pleased with themselves when they herd sheep and follow directions. The Kuvasz lives with the sheep as a protector, and heaven help the Coyote who interferes. Breeds of dogs and other domestic animals have been molded to excel in specialized tasks. It's no more cruel to ask a working dog (or a working horse, or a working ox) to work than it is to ask a dolphin to leap from the water.

That doesn't excuse cruelty. It doesn't excuse neglect or underfeeding. But asking a dog to do something it's designed to do, like pulling a cart, is no more unreasonable than asking a fine runner like John Moreno to run a race. John obviously enjoys running. He does it well. Those of us who appreciate the talents he displays should not be criticized for admiring and encouraging him.

It would be a lot easier to agree with those who oppose cruelty if they would not leverage our agreement on

that score into, for example, trying to completely ban the productive use of furs, or beef or laboratory animals.

The Tribune's recent article on bunny rabbits, for example, propagandized about the terrible situation where hundreds each year are euthanized because no one wants them for pets. I think it's terrible, alright. Rabbits have been raised for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years as a source of protein. Unlike dogs, which we usually don't eat in our culture, in western cultures rabbits are a source of red meat. They are delicious. The Humane Society, however, is controlled by folks who insist on pushing the concept that pets should never be eaten. Then they complain no one "adopts" the pet rabbits that are turned in. They would recoil in horror if hungry families asked to make constructive use of pets no longer wanted.

It is a wasteful luxury to "euthanize" rabbits, when they could be prepared for a meal or two. The kids in 4H learn a valuable lesson when they sell the chickens or sheep or cattle they raise for slaughter.

It's not always easy. My grandfather was an immigrant Italian struggling to feed a family of nine children on a hilly Sonoma County farm. They baked their own bread, raised their own vegetables. When a cow grew too old to give milk, the family got an uncommon treat, beef. That was usually no problem, but one day a gentle, friendly cow named Topsy, the family pet, no longer provided the needed milk. My grandfather may have regretted it, but he did what needed to be done. Everyone was aware, but there was no problem at the dinner table that night, until one of the boys said "Pass Topsy." That did it. The dogs ate beef.

We are rapidly reaching a stage when animals and children don't have a productive place in society, and are carried on the books as pets. It does a child no favor to give him no chores. It does the dog no favors when he is not assigned a useful role, whether it's pulling a cart, herding sheep or guarding property.