

Dare we reshape creation?

David E. Fritsche

Come with me for a few minutes on a journey through the past to a dog show; let's say some 500 years ago. We arrive in our motorhome, oops, covered wagon, still oops, - OK we walk to the site or ride the horse pulling our dog crates, securely fastened to the cart, and start setting up our canopy at ring side.

Yes, your right, AKC is not that old and dog shows as we know them are a rather recent invention in the history of human sporting events. Basketball predates us, going back at least to the Mayan culture, but their practice of cutting off the heads of the losers seemed to limit willing competition and may have ultimately eliminated the entire culture.

Yes, the dog show is rather recent to human history, although it certainly goes back longer than my personal history or my parents or grand parents. It is a time honored tradition of enjoyment of our dogs and friends and the dogs seem to equally enjoy it.

The breeding of pure bred dogs goes back in history further than our current system of dog shows however. The ancient Pharaoh Hound and other ancient breeds trace their ancestry well before modern record keeping and breed registries. Dogs have existed probably for as long as we have been on the planet, or longer. What has changed is our relationship to them and our building of activities around them.

Somewhere along the line, people decided that dogs were useful in the hunting-gathering pursuits, so they bred dogs to accommodate that need. Rather ingenious, this leap of intellectual understanding, for it required astute observations about similarities in genetic offspring and the identification of desirable traits and the leap of logic to conclude that breeding certain dogs together would in fact have a beneficial outcome. Yes, this was a landmark understanding and launched human kind into a new world of control of our destiny and the shape of the dogs we partnered with.

Somewhere, way back in history we decided to act Godlike and make creative decisions. From that, we have taken a position in the natural world as being the point of control and being above the created creatures we breed. This simple act of breeding, establishes not only a practice and a sport, but a philosophical position that is not pleasing to everyone on our planet. We are not alone of course. Farmers, ranchers and animal husbandry in general follow the same basic philosophy. We have the right, even the responsibility to play God in our breeding practices and to produce the very best animals that we can. We are, in essence, taking a position that humanity, by virtue of understanding the genetic rewards of selective breeding, should take advantage of that knowledge to improve nature.

The pure bred dog is a result of this philosophy. It is more than a back yard hobby and its accompanying sport of dog trails, conformation shows, agility trials, obedience shows, herding events and the other related activities. It betrays a belief. It speaks of a world view of how we humans view ourselves and the animals we breed. And, it is in contrast to other philosophies that are outraged that we should think of ourselves in this godlike role. It is a contrast that has not been a problem for us for generations, but in the modern resurgence of our pantheistic critics, it is quite a problem now.

Pantheism has always existed, at least since Babel, but it has taken on a modern form and modern causes. Pantheism is, in its simplest form the belief that humanity is from the earth or a product of the vast evolutionary process that has also produced the rest of the earth's species, and that we are not superior to any of them. If there is a God concept in this philosophy, it seems to be that the universal consciousness of all things is governing the process and that to take the stance of effecting anything or breeding anything is, in and of itself, a violation of the sovereignty of the whole. Thus breeding is not just a moral-neutral pursuit of fun with our dogs, it is, by its very nature, evil. The development and perpetuation of a dog breed is taking an evil role and subjugating animals to a subservient position that is dangerous to the planet.

Noted animal rights advocate, Dr. Michael Fox writes:

Reason alone does not make us human. René Descartes said, "I think therefore I am." But it is what we feel and for whom we feel that defines our humanity, because it is our feeling, our passion, that influences both reason and action, and what we value and wish for others.

The major spiritual element of passion is enthusiasm, a word derived from en-theos, the god within, meaning divine or spiritual inspiration. Passion for human and animal liberation is spiritually inspired for many, whose life and work have become one. Such oneness is a source of joy, inspiration, and renewal. But for those whose lives and work do not enjoy the same degree of ethical consistency and unified sensibility, the kingdom of universal compassion may be an alien realm that appears to be imbued only with piety, suffering, and inconceivable self-sacrifice: Or else they see it as some utopian dream of anarchists, like those who fly the flags of the Animal Liberation Front and Earth First!.

Starting with his disagreement with Descartes, he seems to disregard the role of objective reason in the animal rights movement, preferring to rely on the truthfulness and accuracy of pure passion. Ethics is thus determined by no objective measure but by the degree of passion one has for the utopian dream. And it is this utopian dream that empowers those who follow it to scream at us for quantifying nature and breeding for a specific end result, as though to not do so yields a better end result.

Some have wondered why their arguments and appeals to such a mindset have gone without understanding or comprehension. Why don't they understand us? Why do they pick at us and characterize us as unfeeling manipulators and ego maniacs? Why do they feel that we do not care about our animals and are only breeding for our own egomaniacal ends?

The answer can be complex, but in part it follows the basic philosophical foundation out of which they think and feel. To do anything to affect the course of the earth taking care of itself is intrinsically wrong and the passion from which that belief springs cannot accept that we are human in any real sense when we take a position as guiding and controlling nature.

The Judeo-Christian influence on western thought includes the concept of humankind being responsible for the earth, not just being from it. It conveys by its very nature the concept that we are to take charge of the earth and see that it 'brings forth' the result that we want and to not just passively set and watch. In this philosophical base, we are in fact charged with being instruments of God in the ongoing work of creation. We are charged to create, to dream and to produce.

So, the animal rights activists decry our efforts and cannot hear of our justification nor can they understand that we also love our animals at least as much as they do. We are on totally different wave lengths and cannot hear or understand the message of the other.

Our breed is only a little over 100 years old. As time goes, it is yet in its infancy. There is a lot left to do. We have bred to affect the problems that we have found, and yet, as in all things of nature, there are problems that we did not foresee in our noble adventure, and problems that we know

but have not yet solved. We have more work to do. And yet, it is difficult to see ourselves as the Dr. Frankenstein of German Shepherds, creating a monster of genetic manipulations that is destined to become the terror movie of our near future. Instead, we have produced a dog that serves mankind in all sorts of ways; as service dog, police officer, soldier, search and rescue expert, herding specialist, eyes for the blind, hearing for the deaf, and we could go on.

Frankly, I am proud of our breed. It has distinguished itself in so many ways in service to humanity and has also distinguished itself as the loyal companion and loving friend to all who embrace it. Critics? Yes, we have our critics. They stand on the sideline of life and throw their verbal stones at us and offer no alternatives but turn them loose to nature and hug a tree. The problem is, mother nature is not nice. She is a mixture of calm breezes and gentle rain and death dealing drought, floods and damage. Mother nature smiles nicely from time to time, but underneath it all, she is a serial killer.

Welcome to my world of creation. Welcome to my world of the German Shepherd Dog. And welcome to the world of the breed specific breeder, who dare to play God with the animals we love and who unabashedly contend that it is not just a human right to do so, but a responsibility give to man by the Creator Himself.