

# The issue of animal euthanasia philosophy essay



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Each year between 3 and 4 million animals are euthanized each year. These animals include any domestic animal, such as cats, dogs, horses, cows, etc. The reasons for which these animals are 'put to sleep' vary between cases. When most people think of putting their animal to sleep, it is because of an incurable disease, painful illness, old age or behavioral problems. Though this is true, we must account for the animals that are euthanized because there aren't enough homes or shelter space to keep them. Animals, mostly cat and dogs that have not been caught by the Humane Society, roam around communities getting into garbage cans, causing car accidents, attacking a human, etc. Those that have been caught by pound officials or dumped on a shelter's doorstep stay in the shelter for approximately sixty days until they are rushed to be euthanized, unless they are adopted by a family. Since so many animals are caught and brought in each day, the shelters cannot find space for the animals to be kept. Each year more and more kittens and puppies are born and are sent to shelters, "but for every dog (or cat) that is submitted to a rescue center, one dog (or cat) has to leave" (Putting ¶14). And when that animal leaves it is most likely going to be euthanized. So is this ethical to euthanize an animal because they are a nuisance to society? Is it right to take on the role of God and make the choice to end a suffering animal's life? Before we can answer these perplexing questions we must first understand what exactly euthanasia is and all that goes into the process.

#### Euthanasia: Definition and Process

What does euthanasia mean? "Euthanasia is the act of putting an animal to death painlessly or allowing them to die by withholding medical services,

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usually because of a painful and incurable disease. Mercy killing is another term for euthanasia” (Euthansia ¶3). Euthanization is the process when an animal is shot with a lethal injection. There are two main solutions that are used. The first type of solution is T-61. T-61 is a type of neuro-muscular blocking agent (Putting ¶7). This type of solution causes paralysis and a lot of pain.

The second solution is sodium pentobarbital. Nancy Clemmons, an owner of a shelter in Wake County, states that an average bottle of sodium pentobarbital costs between fifty and sixty dollars, depending on the animals’ weight. “ This substance is administered intravenously and results in two things occurring” (Putting ¶6). First, the animal will experience rapid loss of consciousness followed by either cardiac or respiratory arrest which causes absolutely no pain (Putting ¶6). This type of solution is favored by most shelters and veterinarians. What most people have problems with is the unanswered question of when is it right to take an animal’s life? Most people think that it is okay to euthanize an animal that is sick and has no more joy in its life. But what happens to the animals that are not sick and are still being killed for being born? According to Nancy Clemmons, each year her shelter takes in around ten thousand animals. With these many animals coming into shelters each year puts a lot of strain and stress on the employees, because they are the ones that have to pick which cats and dogs get to live and which ones get to die via euthanization. One person stated, “ I can say even after all these years that one thing I am not proud of is how we treat our animals here. They are seen as objects rather than pets for families and that is wrong” (Troubleshooters ¶23). But is it wrong? Is it ethical?

## Theories

Five ethical principles can be identified with the ethical question of euthanasia. Each approach has its own unique stance on the issue and gives insight to the advantages and disadvantages of euthanasia. These approaches include subjectivism, Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and religious ethics.

Subjectivism is a theory based on moral judgments that concern the emotion or mental reactions of the individual or the community. Many people wonder if anyone truly knows whether a pet is suffering. Based upon the theory of subjectivism, it is possible that a family may put their animal down based on the emotion to relieve them of the pain they “ think” their pet is enduring. A family may also hold off from putting their pet to sleep, because of the emotional fear of detachment between pet and owner. Conclusion re: Subjectivism? Could it go either way?

Kantianism is a theory based upon the fact that people are rational creatures who are able to make rational decisions on the basis of reason. Based on this approach, if a pet is in pain and incurable, the family is able to make the rational decision that their pet is suffering and that keeping them alive is cruel. Is anything that Kant says about respect and use as an end (not a means) relevant? There is a lot to Kant that could be applied here.

Utilitarianism is the theory based on the end result of decisions; the greatest good for the greatest number. Individuals who support this theory Brittany, it is less about supporting the theory than it is about applying certain kinds of thinking in certain situations. would agree that catching and euthanizing  
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animals would have the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people-the community. They would believe that euthanizing these cats and dogs would get rid of the problem of trash on the streets from dumped trash cans, would reduce the risk of animal related car accidents and eliminate the hundreds of roaming animals. Another view of this theory is that if the animals are spayed and or neutered, then the greatest amount of good is reach for the greatest number of people and animals. Citizens wouldn't have to worry about the troubles that come with stray animals in the wild and the animals would live a happy, carefree life.

Virtue Ethics is a theory based on the fact that traits of character are essential to human flourishing, not the details of duties. Isn't virtue ethics about finding the mean between two extremes? In the paragraph below you are making moral judgments apparently based on their attitudes toward euthanasia. You'll have to go a bit to convince me that this is about virtue ethics. The issue of euthanasia is very controversial and the perspectives of both sides of the argument are based upon the certain values or traits a person possesses. An individual, who doesn't possess good traits or morals, may believe that the dogs and cats that are flooding into overcrowded shelters mean nothing and should be euthanized. They may believe that with them living costs money and produces the problems of roaming, accidents, spraying, etc. On the other hand, an individual with good morals, will believe that the animals have every right to live a happy life the same as humans. They will believe in living by the Golden Rule; treat any living creature the same way that you would like to be treated. This last part sounds like Kant.

Religious ethics is a theory based on a person's religious beliefs and values. Individuals support the idea that euthanasia is unethical based their judgment or decision based on their religious belief about the action of "playing God". Should a person be able to take on the role of God by taking a living creature's life? Many people believe that only God should have the power to give or take life. To do or attempt to do so, as an individual, is a sin. Another part of religiosity is the attitude of dominion over creation which includes stray animals. So "religious ethics" may not give a clear-cut perspective either. Individuals supporting this theory may also believe that it is their religious duty to be charitable and help the animals in any way possible, whether that is finding them a home, feeding them, or saving them from being euthanized in a shelter.

### Alternatives

Many people believe that euthanization is the only option when it comes to ending an animal's life due to painful suffering or because they are a disturbance. They also think that it is the best way to take care of business because the task is extremely quick and easy. What so many people don't realize are the few other alternatives that are even more humane and cost about the same as euthanasia. These alternatives include pet hospice for the terminally ill animals and spaying and neutering for those that are without homes.

Veterinary hospitals and volunteer organizations all over the nation are now providing home-based hospice care to the families with pets who are terminally ill or dying of old age. "The concept behind pet hospice is ...

helpful when the family members of a pet need more time to adjust to the imminent death of their pet, helpful in providing children time to understand that the family pet is dying, or giving time for a geographically distant family member to come home to say good-bye and provide mutual support to the other family members” (Veterinary ¶6).

“ Spaying and neutering are frighteningly under-valued practices” all over North Carolina (Putting ¶14). A typical procedure is very easy. To spay a female dog or cat, the veterinarian must remove the uterus and the ovaries, which is called ovariohysterectomy. Basically, the female gets her tubes tied. To neuter a male dog or cat the veterinarian must remove the testis. After surgery the animal receives an antibiotic for it takes about three to four weeks to heal. According to Operation Catnip, an organization, one unaltered cat and her offspring can produce four hundred and twenty thousand cats in only 7 years (Operation ¶14). Having the spay/neuter procedure done helps the communities and the animals as well. The communities do not have to worry about the cats and dogs wandering the streets and having babies and making the issue of overcrowded shelters grow anymore.

Spaying and neutering helps the animals also because the animal can live a happy life in the wild and live out the rest of its days. As for the young cats (kittens) and dogs (puppies), they can easily be adopted into decent homes and live carefree lives. “ Spaying and neutering can also provide the animal with protection from breast cancer, male genital problems, uterine disease, and other health risks such as mastitis and ovarian cysts” (Why ¶6-7).

Spaying and neutering also eliminates the heat cycle, reduces crying, reduces the urge to roam, reduces mounting, and stops spraying. Having all

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of these benefits either reduces or “ removes discomfort, distress, and distraction” from the animals mind so they can live happier lives. These advantages also benefit the community, because it eliminates the problem of roaming and accidents, because the animals don’t have to urge anymore to do so.

North Carolina has organizations all over the state that are strongly against euthanasia and use a program called trap-neuter-return. A couple of these organizations are Operation Catnip and Feral Cat Friends Incorporated. The trap-neuter-return program is a “ humane, non-lethal method of population control that is more effective than trap-and-kill, and is more reflective of a caring society” (Do ¶9). Trap-neuter-return (TNR) was founded in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1994 and expanded to Gainesville, Florida in 1998 (Operation ¶6). Trap-neuter-return basically means that a team of volunteers from the organizations help catch feral cats, spay or neuter them and then return them to their colonies. The volunteers then look over them and feed them (Operation ¶7). As a result the “ solution, using trap-neuter-return, successfully decreases the population, reduces birth rates and improves the overall health of the cat colony” (Operation ¶7). This takes away the everyday decision that so many have to make when deciding which animal should be next to leave the shelter by euthanization.

“ Operation Catnip holds monthly spay and neuter clinics where a team of veterinarians and a support staff of dozens of other volunteers can sterilize up to fifty thousand cats in a few hours” (Operation ¶7). They can also give the cats vaccinations against rabies, feline leukemia, and feline distemper while spaying or neutering them.



Feral Cat Friend Incorporated is very much like Operation Catnip. It is also a non-profit organization that is made up of volunteers who catch feral cats and give them to vets to be spayed and neutered and vaccinated. Most of the volunteers also become a foster parent for a certain amount of cats. The foster parents keep them until the cats or kittens are ready to be placed into good homes.

## Conclusion

Euthanasia is a painless injection that is given to animals who are suffering or who are in shelters waiting to find homes. Euthanasia is a highly controversial issue that raises the ethical question of whether it is ethical to euthanize an animal because they are a nuisance to society, or if it is right to take on the role of God and make the choice to end a suffering animal's life. There are five ethical approaches that identify with this ethical issue and provide substantial evidence to whether euthanasia is right or wrong. Along with the advantages and disadvantages of the argument, there are sufficient alternatives that give a chance for animals to live the rest of their lives happy and carefree. Whether or not a decision can be made deciphering if euthanasia is ethical, it should still be remembered that " every life is precious, whether it is rare or not" (Do ¶11).