

BOOK REVIEWS

Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No-Kill Revolution in America, Winograd, Nathan J. (Almaden Books 2007)

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Every year, approximately 4 million animals are euthanized in the United States (Interlandi 1). As long as this practice has existed in animal shelters, the public has long accepted euthanasia as a necessary evil for controlling the pet population. However, in *Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No-Kill Revolution in America*, Nathan J. Winograd makes a case for an uncommon approach to reforming animal shelters called “No Kill”. The No Kill equation demands no animal to be killed for common reasons like space or adoptability. While most of the blame for euthanasia is put on the public, Winograd criticizes the very institutions and administration established to support unwanted animals. Winograd uses his lifelong dedication to rescuing animals and, among other qualifications, a conversion to “No Kill” for numerous animal shelters to suggest the norm of euthanizing animal for space is, among a list of common problems, a symptom of poor customer service, sanitary care, and a general misunderstanding of population control² (22-31, 229).

In order to make the bold statement that euthanasia of healthy, adoptable animals is unnecessary, Winograd not only criticizes the predicates of supposed necessity but the

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2 Also footnoted in *Redemption*, while cats and dogs represent the majority of animal killed in shelters, No Kill shelters under Winograd's management maintained a No Kill framework for “mice, hamsters, rabbits, goats, chickens, gerbils, and horses who made their way to our shelter” (97)

criteria by which shelter management judges as “healthy” or “adoptable.” Winograd reminds us of the foundations of lifesaving programs beginning with animal rescue and sheltering patriot Henry Bergh who in 1866 founded the first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). Bergh is described as “The Great Meddler,” an eccentric protector of animals known to directly confront strangers who mistreated their animals (9). From 19th century accounts of Bergh's work and animal shelters, we see a familiar dichotomy of sheltering formats in which one extreme a shelter is a sort of cleanup facility for the city to remove stray animals as opposed to the other extreme which may arguably be Bergh's model in which a drive for lifesaving and prevention of cruelty is central to the shelter.

Conventional wisdom would hope our city shelters are the latter. This public impression is catalyzed by the assumption that shelters are staffed by individuals with a passion for saving lives through adoptions or a general sympathy for companion animals. The assumption which tolerates euthanasia follows in thinking shelter employees do their best to find a home for each individual animal but were left with no other option than to end the animal's life out of necessity for shelter space. Yet as long as shelter management experience and not the aforementioned mindset is the criteria, shelter administration is likely to follow the traditional format of adopting some and euthanizing those believed to be unadoptable. The acceptance of pet overpopulation is strongly supported by some of the wealthiest animal welfare organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals which defends euthanasia claiming No Kill shelters “often find themselves filled to capacity....In the best case scenario, they [rescued animals] will be taken to another

facility that does euthanize animals” . PETA plainly defends the notion of pet overpopulation saying “There simply aren't enough good homes—or even enough good cages—for them all....euthanasia is often the most compassionate and dignified way for unwanted animals to leave the world” (PETA 1).

Redemption sets out to systematically disprove the myth of pet overpopulation calling statements like that of PETA's “defeatism.” Animal Welfare organization the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has long objected to the No Kill approach taking on their own “no kill” approach which states the prevention of euthanasia as a worthy goal, but defends the practice of killing healthy animals as a measure which should be reduced as much as possible. This “no kill” philosophy is confusingly different than “No Kill” in that the mission of the latter does not accept euthanasia as an option³ (Pacelle 1). Winograd defends the possibility of euthanizing no animals for reasons of space with numerous accounts of animal retention from managing shelters (Winograd 56). While these accounts are very convincing, the thesis for this rebuttal is unclear.

Organizations like PETA and the HSUS commonly argue overcrowding is symptomatic of animal rescue. For instance, HSUS CEO and President Wayne Pacelle states:

If euthanasia is not occurring and intake of dogs and cats is significantly exceeding adoptions, then overcrowding and warehousing—and the

3 Winograd's material is sensitive to the rare exception wherein keeping the animal alive may be less humane than euthanasia. From the No Kill Advocacy Website, maintained by Nathan Winograd: “The decision to end an animal’s life is an extremely serious one, and should always be treated as such. No matter how many animals a shelter kills, each and every animal is an individual, and each deserves individual consideration.” (No Kill Advocacy Center 1)

attendant suffering—are the undesirable and also unacceptable outcomes (Pacelle 1).

Redemption makes the following rebuttal:

...No Kill is the opposite of hoarding, filth, and the lack of veterinary care....To imply that No Kill by definition means filth and hoarding, therefore, is a cynicism which has only one purpose: to defend those who are failing at saving lives from public criticism and public accountability by painting a picture of the alternative as even darker (Winograd 56).

Personal experiences from Winograd's shelter experience are omitted for brevity as well as to outline the lack of a plain English introductory rebuttal to immediately follow Pacelle's intuitive conclusion. Rebuttals and solutions are offered for this claim, but the reader must skip a few chapters until finding this section titled "The Myth of Pet Overpopulation." These solutions begin with questioning the claims of overcrowding and its subsequent symptoms and offering simple methods of community outreach and legislation regarding the availability of shelters to the public as a means of adopting out more animals (56, 157-159). *Redemption* also provides anecdotes of shelters with sometimes dozens of empty cages who nonetheless are caught euthanizing healthy adoptable animals. From stories like these, Winograd strengthens the case for defeatist logic being the motivating factor to lifesaving apathy. Overall, the claim that more quality homes exist for animals than the animals that enter shelters is the most succinct and efficient argument made by *Redemption* (161).

Since the publication of *Redemption*, Pacelle may have been pressured to change the wording of HSUS's stance on No Kill. Currently, Pacelle's blog describes "no kill"⁴ as a goal but not possible in the transition phase. However, the transition phase for Winograd has repeatedly shown itself to be a phasing out of policies and procedures which otherwise drive the supposed need for euthanasia. Winograd states disagreement with the assumption of PETA and HSUS that the circumstance of sheltering and adopting all incoming animals necessarily leads to unclean and crowded shelters (Pacelle 1)(Winograd 54). The general argument in *Redemption* states adoptions, funding, and volunteers but not euthanasia to be the logical response to excesses of incoming animals.

The claims for the necessity for euthanasia are too numerous to mention for the purposes of this review but the most prominent claims are that of overpopulation and crowding. *Redemption* describes pet overpopulation as accepted by the public and shelter employees alike. Winograd's clearest objection is the existence of empty cages in shelters who supposedly kill for space. The reasoning for euthanasia in this case must be defeated by the very fact space exists. As detailed early on, animals to be euthanized are not automatically selected as an excess when cages have been filled. Rather, as euthanasia has already been accepted as necessary in a kill shelter, animals are "merchandized," where animals deemed "more adoptable" are displayed to the public while animals tested to be "unadoptable" are never given the opportunity to be adopted, destined instead for death (21-22). The clearest example of this fallacy is Winograd's

4 The lowercasing of "no kill" is an intentional spelling by Pacelle to distinguish between the general policy of not killing and the specific "No Kill" movement developed by Richard Avanzino as described in *Redemption*.

account of animals who would appear difficult to adopt although not in any condition where euthanasia would be a more humane alternative:

The [Thomkins County] shelter had the same [No Kill] success with Oliver, a cat with a broken jaw and one eye. It had the same success with a cat who had neurological problems and could not use stairs. It had the same success with a blind dog. It had the same success with a three-legged dog. It had the same success with a cat who defecated with no control (131).

The format of *Redemption* begins with an introduction or, more appropriately, a reminder of the special treatment we give to our animal companions and gradually becomes a “bible” for No Kill as evidenced by its preamble and blueprint for the No Kill movement in the appendices. As such, conditions and steps should be clearly detailed and stated specifically. Though most of the outline is in concordance with the preceding chapters, several inconsistencies remain between the appendices and the text as to what the initial “steps” to starting up a No Kill shelter are:

The first step in No Kill is taking responsibility (103)

The first part of the model involves responsibly reducing impounds so that more resources can be used to provide care for individual animals (197)

...we did it with a simple yet highly effective three-step process: 1) Stop the killing; 2) Stop the killing; 3) Stop the killing (97)

The guidelines of the blueprint are likely very useful for individuals in charge of reforming shelters, though little is mentioned about how reform can proceed at an individual (rather than a shelter employee or group) level. While *Redemption* effectively challenges the misnomers of pet population, disease spreading, aggression, and feral

animals, readers who are not involved in the administration of shelters will not get much specific advice other than “organizing the community” for encouraging their local shelter to achieve No Kill status. *Redemption* criticizes the legislation which penalizes feeding feral cats showing pet legislation is not always on the side of lifesaving. This could have been an opportunity to mention outlets for independent work such as the availability of traps individuals can use in their own neighborhood. By providing simple methods of trapping, neutering, and returning feral cats, perhaps individuals could educate their communities to the simplicity of lifesaving.

Amongst a wealth of anecdotal evidence from Winograd's experience in shelters, a critical examination of what we call “overpopulation” was missing from the important “The Myth of Pet Overpopulation” chapter. While Winograd defends No Kill because plenty of homes exist for animals needing adoption, deconstructing what is a loose definition of the word would yield human paradigms and conditions of inconvenience rather than conditions of adoption availability. Asking the question, “What determines a species or community is 'overpopulated'?” would demand accepted biological definitions considering predator/prey relationships, environmental conditions and, most importantly, availability of resources.

Redemption is likely to be a playbook for the No Kill movement if one argues it is not already. Virtually any scenario in which a shelter would excuse euthanasia for controlling the pet population is examined critically with powerful solutions. However, the reality of establishing No Kill status requires attention to detail and individual shelters.

Appropriately, most of the scenarios mentioned are that of generic shelter situations so Winograd's creation of the No Kill Advocacy Center⁵ is an appropriate move for addressing these unique needs. *Redemption* could be made a stronger resource for the No Kill movement by appealing to individuals whose access to the administration of shelters is limited but whose involvement is relevant in his/her potential to organize the community to reform the staff and focus of the local shelter.

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5 <http://www.nokilladvocacycenter.org/>

AUTHOR GUIDELINES

Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established for the purpose of fostering academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies are increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker take a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy.

JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. This journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists to address the important topic of animal liberation. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal for the purpose of facilitating communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal rights movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed on any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Because a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytic thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminist, activism and academia, Continental philosophy or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

The reviewing process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication. All submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript requirements

The manuscript should be in MS WORD format, in 1.5 line spacing and 12 point Times New Roman. Good electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should be run through an American English spell check prior to submission.

As a guide, we ask that articles and reviews be between 2000-6000 words, have limited endnotes. Authors should supply a brief **abstract** of the paper (of no more than 250 words).

A brief **autobiographical** note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, e-mail address, and full contact details.

References to other publications must be in Harvard style and carefully checked for completeness, accuracy and consistency.

You should cite publications in the text: (Best, 2006) using the first named author's name or (Best and Nocella, 2006) citing both names of two, or (Best et al., 2006), when there are three or more authors. At the end of the paper a reference list in alphabetical order should be supplied:

For books: Surname, Initials (year), Title of Book, Publisher, Place of publication. e.g. Gray, J. (2002), *Straw Dogs*, Granta Books: London

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For journals: Surname, Initials (year), "Title of article", Journal Name, volume, number, pages. e.g. Cudworth, E. (2008), "Most Farmers Prefer Blondes": The dynamics of anthroparchy in Animas' becoming meat", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 32-45.

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