

Requiem for a Squirrel

By Bruce Bawer

Ten years ago, I [wrote](#) an article that was largely about Marius, a healthy and beloved young giraffe at the Copenhagen Zoo who was euthanized after zoo officials declared him “a ‘surplus’ giraffe because ‘his genes were well represented among the captive giraffe population in European zoos.” When the plan to kill him was announced, several other zoos offered to take Marius. But Bengt Holst, the Copenhagen Zoo’s scientific director, was undeterred. “Marius,” I wrote, “was tranquilized, killed with a shotgun, autopsied, and fed to lions – all in front of zoogoers, including both adults and children.” International outrage ensued. Holst swatted away all complaints as examples of sheer sentimentality: “A giraffe is not a pet; it’s not like a dog or cat that becomes part of the family.”

Why name him, then? Yes, said Holst, Marius could have been sent to another zoo, but his continued existence would have raised the danger of inbreeding. So why not sterilize him? Because sterilization can cause renal problems and also because “[b]reeding and parenting are especially important behaviors for a giraffe’s well-being. We didn’t want to interfere with that.” What about selling him to the millionaire who was prepared to give him a home? No, said Holst, giraffes want to be around other giraffes. Okay, but why let children watch Marius being killed and eaten? Because “zoos have an obligation ‘not to make nature into a Disney World.’” So it’s better to turn a zoo into a slaughterhouse?

In short, death was the best option. In this view, Holst was backed up by some (but not all) other animal professionals. (Jack Hanna of the Columbus Zoo, a frequent *Tonight Show* guest, “said he would have paid for Marius with his own money.”) As I commented at the time, people like Holst “are

certain that they are noble and good. They believe in the cycle of life. They believe in quality of life. They just don't happen to believe in the individual life. In fact, they view the individual life as getting in the way of things they value more – breeding programs, the ecosystem, and so on. They regard people who focus on the individual life as childlike sentimentalists who don't grasp that every individual life is only part of a larger design, a 'bigger picture,' and should be extinguished the moment it becomes burdensome or inconvenient." I added that Holst "would probably protest that he does care about the individual life. After all, he killed Marius partly because he didn't want him to live a less than ideal life. Better to die than experience renal problems or other side effects. Better to die than endure 'lesser standards of welfare.' Better to die, you see, than not experience parenthood. Better to die than be without the company of other giraffes."

As I noted at the time, Holst brought to mind a vet we had who was outraged when we asked about declawing our indoor cats – what a barbaric practice! – but who, when one of the cats needed dental work, "casually asked if we'd prefer to save the money and have him put to sleep instead." Pointing out that medically assisted suicide was now legal in the three Benelux countries, I identified this blasé attitude toward euthanasia with northern Europe. But that, as I say, was ten years ago. Since then, the Canadian government has gone all in on its "Medical Assistance in Dying" law, with physically healthy people asking for assisted dying and doctors suggesting it to patients suffering from even minor afflictions. Indeed, while many aspects of Canadian life have gone downhill under Justin Trudeau, medically assisted suicide is a boom industry in the frozen north, [responsible](#) for no fewer than 4.1% of Canadian deaths in 2022.

In an October 24 [article](#), Karandeep Sonu Gaiind, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto, wrote that some

people in Ontario, according to a new report, were “being euthanized despite untreated mental illness and addictions, unclear medical diagnoses and suffering fuelled by housing insecurity, poverty and social marginalization.” Gaiind commented: “This is what happens when you let the foxes run the henhouse, as Canada has arguably done by allowing right-to-die advocacy to shape policy and replace evidence.” He added: “I believe we’ve experienced a bait and switch: laws initially intended to compassionately help Canadians avoid suffering a painful death have metastasized into policies facilitating suicides of other Canadians seeking death to escape a painful life.”

And he pointed out that while “[w]ell-funded lobby groups like Dying With Dignity continue to claim that it is a ‘myth’ that vulnerable populations can be eligible for MAiD if they are suffering from inadequate social supports, including housing,” many Canadians “have literally said they chose MAiD precisely for those reasons – their disability made them eligible for MAiD, but it was the lack of social supports that led them to request it.” Just a week after Gaiind’s article appeared, it was [reported](#) that a judge in British Columbia had issued a “last-minute injunction” denying euthanasia to a woman whose request for it had been opposed by her partner and local physicians. Such stories are now routine in America’s hat.

In my 2014 article about Marius the giraffe I described Holst, the man at the Copenhagen Zoo, as having a “PETA mentality.” PETA is People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and a series of 2012 [articles](#) for the Huffington Post Douglas Anthony Cooper make up what is perhaps the definitive account of this evil organization. “In 2011,” wrote Cooper, “PETA killed well over 90 per cent of the animals delivered into its care.” He supplied some representative anecdotes. Here’s one: “In 2005, two PETA employees described as ‘adorable’ and ‘perfect’ some of the dogs and cats they killed in the back of

a PETA-owned van. The two were arrested after police witnessed them tossing the animals' dead bodies into a North Carolina dumpster." The employees had been given the animals by veterinarian Patrick Proctor on the understanding that PETA would find them homes. "So imagine my surprise," said Proctor, "when I learned they allegedly dumped dead animals in a trash bin later that same day." He said the animals "were in good health and were very adoptable, especially the kittens." Here's another: "Dave Shishkoff of the Friends of Animals pressure group claimed that he saw perfectly-healthy looking puppies and kittens killed at PETA when he worked there as an intern in 1991. 'Peta has a perverse definition of euthanasia – one that apparently demands that any animal with the slightest discomfort ought to be killed,' he said."

And here's a third: "A former PETA employee spoke of one particular incident that burned into her mind forever: A teary-eyed man showed up at PETA headquarters one day with his beloved pet rabbit. The man had grown old and sick and was no longer able to care properly for his friend. He supplied a cage, bed, toys, and even vet records for this pet. He was assured by PETA workers that they would take 'good care' of his rabbit and find him a home. The man left distraught but no doubt believing that his friend would be able to live out the rest of his life in a loving, compassionate home... PETA workers carried him to the 'death house' immediately and ended his life." As Cooper [put it](#), the PETA psychology "is thoroughly pathological...If your goal in this world is to prevent suffering, then one perfectly rational solution – perhaps the only rational solution – is to end life. Death makes sense. It is the termination of pain. This is very much the PETA argument: life is suffering; hence death is good."

Increasingly, people around the world who are supposed to be caregivers treat humans in much the same way that PETA treats animals. In my 2014 piece about Marius the giraffe, I mentioned a 2012 profile in the Norwegian

newspaper *Aftenposten* of “62-year-old Arne Sveen, who had cancer and had refused medical treatment because he felt it was wrong to ‘spend enormous sums prolonging fatally ill people’s lives by a few months.’” *Aftenposten* portrayed Sveen, I observed, as “a model citizen,” quoting a doctor who, as I put it, “had evidently moved beyond old-fashioned medical ethics,” arguing that it wasn’t “worth expending energy, effort, and money on treatment that will never cure, [but that will] just put off death for a brief period.”

I summed up the attitude as follows: “live a healthy, robust life while you can, but once you threaten to become a burden on society, be prepared to check out” because “fighting for your life isn’t heroic – it’s indecent and selfish.” In the decade since then, that view of life and death has gained widespread traction in Norway and elsewhere. Hence the long, splashy multimedia [piece](#) that appeared on the website of Norway’s biggest paper, *VG*, the other day, under a scare headline about “frightening numbers.” Numbers of what? Numbers, it turned out, of human lives. Norway, the article explained, is facing an “alarming” tsunami of senior citizens for whom there soon won’t be enough doctors or nurses or – and here’s the main problem – enough money for medical care.

Of course, Norway is a welfare state whose citizens don’t just pay high income taxes but also pay prices for commodities like gasoline and booze that are among the world’s highest because of the outrageous levies on those items. The principal argument for gouging the public so royally has always been that Norwegians, in return, would receive the best in cradle-to-grave benefits – child care, schooling, free university education, generous pensions, and, yes, affordable medical treatments. Alas, for decades much of the money that was initially intended to ensure the well-being of Norwegians themselves has instead been spent on foreign aid (such as the aid that helped pay for Hamas’s rockets and tunnels) and on food, housing, clothes, and other freebies for immigrants,

legal or otherwise.

Hence, the amount of stuff that Norwegians get in return for their taxes has been shriveling for years. In recent weeks, teachers and children around the country have held rallies protesting the closing of their schools. As for the elderly, *VG*, instead of acknowledging the government's systematic diversion of tax money away from the taxpayers, waxes hysterical about the ever-rising number of old folks – i.e., lifelong taxpayers – in need of care. Many politicians agree with the head of Flekkefjord municipality, Inger Marethe Egeland, who told *VG* that Norwegians must lower their expectations for senior care and “take responsibility for their own health.”



I began this article with Marius the giraffe. I end it with [Peanut the Squirrel](#), who for several years now has been a popular figure on social media. Although I spend an inordinate amount of my

time looking at YouTube animal videos – you know, kittens being saved from the middle of a highway or baby ducks being pulled out of a sewer drain or animals of different species becoming best friends – until the other day I had never heard of Peanut the Squirrel. But it turns out that Peanut, who was rescued by a man named Mark Longo after he saw its mother being fatally hit by a car on a Manhattan street, has for

years been a [beloved Internet star](#), rollicking playfully around Longo's home in Pine City, New York (pop. 5,000) and becoming the face of the animal-rescue organization that Longo founded after taking Peanut home seven years ago.

People around the world followed Peanut's adventures. But somebody didn't like him – or didn't like Longo – and reported Longo to New York's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) on the grounds that it's illegal in New York State to keep a wild animal in a private home. So the DEC, in collaboration with the Chenung County Department of Health, sent a convoy of ten armed agents to Longo's home, detained him and his wife for five hours (all the while treating them, Longo said, as if they were terrorists or drug dealers), seized Peanut as well as a raccoon named Fred, and, in an action that has aroused fury online, euthanized both animals, supposedly in order to check them for rabies – even though squirrels don't get rabies. Thousands of Peanut's outraged fans from around the world posted angry messages as the DEC's pages on social media; Longo, after learning that the squirrel had been put to death, posted a video in which he said that he'd lost his best friend, who had given him “the best 7 years of my life.”

Longo said that he plans to take legal action. I hope he wins. I hope people get fired and publicly shamed. The DEC, from what I can see, is yet another out-of-control government bureaucracy in love with its own power. Some of its employees may well consider themselves animal-rights activists, but they're plainly the kind of activists who, like the folks at PETA, despise the notion of their fellow humans keeping pets, especially pets that are legally designated as “wild animals,” and who think that killing such animal amounts to a blessed deliverance from cruel confinement. One of the hundreds of people who posted comments at the DEC's Facebook website referred to the agency as the “Wildlife Gestapo,” which sounds right to me. In any case, New York State's aggressive

treatment of this peaceable family living in a small hamlet near the Pennsylvania border – Elon Musk, writing on X, aptly [described](#) it as “government overreach” – seems especially outrageous at a time when illegal aliens have flooded New York City and committed innumerable felonies to which public officials have responded by showering the perpetrators with freebies.

It seems to me no coincidence that this brutal act took place in a deep-blue state – a state that’s owned, part and parcel, by the Democratic Party. When Kamala Harris began her race for president, her campaign announced that it was all about “joy.” But joy is the exact opposite of what today’s Democratic Party stands for. What *does* it stand for? It stands for the policing of speech and the punishment of dissent. It stands for the sowing of needless division among Americans on the basis of group identity. It stands for the weaponization of courts and the defunding of police; for the unjust prosecution and imprisonment of its political enemies and total impunity for itself and its allies; for a refusal to arrest or try violent felons and a policy of welcoming illegal aliens (many of them killers and rapists, all of them potential Democratic voters) and putting them up in luxury hotels at taxpayer expense; for the placement of restrictions on travel by taxpayers in the name of fighting climate change, and for economic policies that are gradually turning middle-class citizens into feudal serfs.

It stands – with its eagerness to support deadly and pointless foreign wars, its approval (in eleven states) of medically assisted suicide, its refusal (in six states) to ban third-trimester abortions, its enthusiasm for the butchering of children’s sex organs, and (during the COVID pandemic) for medically unfounded restrictions on schools, worship services, and social events – for a breathtakingly cavalier attitude toward life, human or otherwise. And it stands, not least, for the invasion of the homes of law-abiding Americans – whether

Roger Stone or Steve Bannon or, yes, Mark Longo – by packs of armed men from gray Orwellian bureaucracies for no reason other than to demonstrate their power.

All of this, needless to say, is designed not to bring joy to ordinary Americans but, rather, to spread fear and despair, to accustom Americans to being deprived of their fundamental constitutional liberties, and, not least, to crush anything remotely resembling joy – even if that joy takes the form of a series of short, wholesome videos, viewed by hundreds of thousands of people around the world, of a small animal and a human family that love each other. How fascinating that this story of a squirrel – a little story, perhaps, but a story with immense significance – should come along just days before the presidential election, in which (barring massive fraud) American voters will decide whether we want to live under a government that respects our unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or under one that is determined to destroy them.

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