



FOR THE GOOD OF AMERICA -
AND FOR THE GROWTH OF -
LIBERTY AND OPPORTUNITY -

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It is a melancholy subject to those of us who journey throughout this great republic, when we see everywhere the intrusion of government into the framework of personal life, and through the exercise of its enormous powers, its interference in the expression of our personal liberties. We see this despite the guarantees within our constitution: the federal, state, and local governments inhibit our pursuit of happiness at an increasingly alarming rate.

I have been assured by a knowledgeable native of my home town of Washington, D.C., that despite current prejudices against it, the sport of dogfighting is in fact meritorious, and provides entertainment to thousands of productive men and women. It also serves a larger social good as it provides revenue and income for many of our fellow citizens. My friend, a person of refinement and the most admirable of temperament, makes a convincing argument that by their very nature, dogs were meant to fight and are only prevented from doing so by public ignorance and lawmakers who, by their actions, greatly infringe on the rights and happiness of others. Because of this, the entire sport has had to move “underground” where its devotees risk arrest, imprisonment, and public humiliation.

What should be seen as a public “good” has been forced to the margins and has been unable to develop its full potential in the marketplace.

Even the most obdurate dog lover has to concede that dogs are inherently rambunctious and contentious beasts. Left to their own devices, they are prone to mischief, gnawing out the spines of much beloved books, stealing and hiding socks, and as puppies defiantly willing to urinate on many a Persian rug. I grew up with an Irish setter named Seamus who was wonderfully and maddeningly anarchic. He would seek every chance to escape the house whereupon my mother would send me out to retrieve him. This was an impossible task as no mortal could ever hope to catch him on the run and run he did, to the point of complete exhaustion. He would return to the house and collapse on the tile of the kitchen floor, his huge tongue extended as he gulped in air. He was not able to control himself and stood as a typical representative of his kind.

But no matter how much enjoyment they get from the mayhem they cause, dogs are never happier than when they are in a good scrap with another canine: it is as natural to them as eating and sleeping. We might well speculate how denying them this activity makes them less happy but my concern here lies elsewhere in this issue. There is something fundamentally wrong here: I can see no logical reason why the government takes any interest in dog-fighting and can find only ominous implications to its regulation by the state, because, after all, dogs are pieces of private property. As Edmund Burke and others have noted, it is a central tenet of the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition that a man has the right to dispose of his property as he so chooses. If an individual meets the various local requirements for dog ownership, then he should be able to use that animal, as his private property, as he sees fit. To those who cavil at the thought of injury to the dog, one should remember that it is not the owner who hurts his animal in the pit, and no rational individual would intentionally misuse any piece of his property. The only injuries incurred in dog fighting are from the fights themselves, inflicted by other dogs: the dogs freely

choose to do so and suffer only because they have chosen to place themselves in this position. The major problem here is that laws set against this activity represent a major interference in the rights of dog owners to use their dogs as they please. It is an example of the government's overreach in the commerce of what should be a legal activity.

I believe that people should be allowed to make their own decisions and to deny them their economic rights in this way has profound consequences. Consider the degree to which those who breed these animals, and those who present them to the public, are engaged in meaningful economic activity. Small businesses such as this are the backbone of our economy. These people provide employment as they hire trainers and handlers. They build and support arenas for the sport, and provide opportunities for concessionaires, parking attendants, and veterinarians. They purchase training equipment and food and most importantly, they produce wealth. That wealth gets invested in bonds that lead to the construction of schools, highways, and public services. They spend their money in groceries, restaurants, jewelers, boutiques, tanning salons, massage parlors, etc. I have been told by an old friend of mine, a BMW salesman, that without their money, the luxury car business in Washington would decline precipitously. They are also critical to many craftsmen such as jewelers and tailors, and without them the interior design business would take a major hit. No, it is clear: interference in this industry inhibits the growth of wealth and opportunity for countless numbers of people.

But my concerns move far beyond the dog pit and its financial repercussions. I find it troubling that any society would use its power, through its government, to deny this activity out of the assumption that it is immoral. As dogs have no natural moral sense (I would posit that this is not seen in the feelings of shame which we teach them to have when their behavior bothers us), and were never endowed by the Creator with a sense of right and wrong, they could not and do not have any moral objection to fighting. I have never seen anything from a

dog which indicates he (and I suppose the occasional she) has any objection to fighting.

Is it not the time to ask how we ever got to the point that the state would assume a parental role of this type? I know many people find this sport objectionable but any truly impartial analysis would reveal that there is no basis to the moral objection to dog fighting. As far as I can tell, in this regard it acts as a nanny state, believing that an important moral issue is at stake here. Has there ever been anything more troubling than the opprobrium of public officials directed against Michael Vick? Is this condemnation and punishment of a respectable citizen the legitimate function of government?

From all I have studied, the practice of using animals for entertainment has long been a tradition in western society. Any examination of this issue leads to a number of sports enjoyed by the public for centuries such as bull-baiting, bear-baiting, cock-fighting, and of course, dog-fighting. Such activities were practiced since ancient times and none of it was condemned by luminaries such as the Greeks, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Catherine the Great. In the end, are not so called "blood sports" far better than the spectacle of gladiatorial combat in ancient Rome, which nevertheless drew little social opprobrium at the time? Even I would accept that human suffering of that kind, no matter how many social benefits it confers is morally repugnant to most of us; however, dogs are not people, and their purpose, insofar as they have one, is to serve man and his ends. We are stewards of the earth and its inferior beings and have to wisdom to use them for our benefit.

What gives the government the right to control this activity? Is it not troubling that something which harms no one that I can see, and yet, under a guise of superior morality, denies people pleasure and wealth? Ayn Rand, that great scion of liberty, once noted, "Why do they always teach us that it's easy and evil to do what we want and that we need discipline to restrain ourselves?" Who gave this position to the government? Why should we consider its moral evaluation binding upon our exercise of freedom? But, to quote an Irish luminary, "I have

too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance.”

For the first, allowing dog-fighting would vastly reduce the number of dogs, with whom we are overrun. There are many strays, homeless dogs who suffer without purpose, and using them in the pit will limit their numbers and the demands they place on non-dog owners at large.

Secondly, the sport will allow many of the poor to have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to a distress, and help to pay their landlord’s rent, and provide them provisions which are now provided to them at a cost to hard working men and women.

Thirdly, whereas the maintenance cannot be computed at less than a thousand dollars apiece per annum, the nation’s stock will thereby increase by my estimate some million dollars per annum, concentrated in the poorest segments of society. Add to that the total revenues produced by the sport, especially if it was to become available to the public through the media and the internet, and the total fortune for the nation would be hundreds of millions of dollars. And the money will circulate among us, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourthly, by these means many a marginalized person would be turned from criminal activity into becoming a virtuous and productive member of society.

Fifthly, this would benefit families as steady income seems essential to the success of the family unit.

Sixthly, it would serve as a tool to teach the young the benefits of hard work and self-reliance.

Seventh and lastly, as Russell Kirk pointed out, measures like this offer to liberals and conservatives alike, a common cause against the despotic power of the state and all forms of economic collectivism.

I can really think of no rational objection that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged, that the number of dogs will be thereby much lessened in this

country. This I freely own, and this was indeed one of my principal designs in offering it to the world. But, as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which, as it is wholly new, it is also something solid and real, which can be accomplished with little trouble and is fully within our power to accomplish.

I profess, in all sincerity, that I have not the least personal interest promoting this necessary work. I have no motive other than the broader good and increased liberty of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for our entertainment, providing the poor with the means of self-improvement, both moral and economical, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I do not own a dog, am plagued by cats at home, and my wife is past child-bearing age.