

Chapter 13. No good dogs go to heaven.

*If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went.*¹ Will Rogers

*The poor dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still the master's own,
Who labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone,
Unhonour'd falls, unnoticed all his worth,
Denied in heaven the soul he held on earth,
While man, vain insect hopes to be forgiven,
And claims himself a sole exclusive heaven.*² Lord Byron

Atheists have no problem with what happens after a pet dies. The pet ceases to be, just as the atheist will cease to be. I have a dog that I love irrationally. He will likely die first and I will cremate him. I will likely die later, and if my instructions are followed, I will be cremated. What happens to the ashes is unimportant, we will both cease to be. This makes the time we spend together more loving and poignant.

But religionists have a problem. Their scriptures are written by men and fixed in time. The role of pets has evolved enormously over the past 1,500 years. Five hundred years ago, a dog might have made a tasty snack in lean times. A farmer from 200 years ago would likely be appalled at the privileges we give our animals. Fifty years ago, dog parks were virtually nonexistent, now they are found in almost every community in the United States. Today, owners (or guardians) spend substantial amounts of time and money to assure the quality of life of their pets.

When the scriptures were written, men claimed complete dominance over animals. The Muslim tradition is the most direct, dogs are forbidden. Although the Koran does not specifically

mention dogs, the Hadiths have multiple prohibitions.³ Basically, Muslims cannot or will not own dogs. In Ohio, a Muslim taxi driver refused to serve a blind woman who used a guide dog because the dog was “impure” according to his religious beliefs.⁴ I have been amazed at the reaction of Muslims whom I encounter walking my very friendly dog. They march away with a look of horror. What a shame that their man-made myth prevents them from appreciating the companionship so many of us cherish.

The Jewish and Christian scriptures contain no direct prohibitions against pet ownership, but written as they were thousands of years ago, they did not anticipate the love modern people feel for their pets. The Bible claims to give men complete dominance over all the creatures of the earth, including our pets. The Bible does say there will be no sea in heaven, so if your pet is a fish, it is explicitly excluded.⁵ And further, the Bible provides that only those who believe in Jesus and say magic words will get into heaven,⁶ something pets would have a hard time doing. Catholics, in particular, seem to have fixed on the idea that pets do not have souls, and therefore cannot pass through the imaginary pearly gates. In an article posted on the Website of the Catholic Global Network, Richard Geraghty, Ph.D. says:

Now when any living thing dies, its soul is separated from its body. In the case of plants and animals the soul goes out of existence. But in the case of man, the soul remains in existence because it is a spiritual or immaterial thing.

* * *

In the light of this essential difference between human beings and animals, it would seem that we would not see the souls of our pets in heaven for the

simple reason that they do not have immortal souls and are not responsible for their actions. They do not have the intelligence which allows them to choose either God's will or their own will. There is, then, an incomparable distance, say, between the soul of the sorriest human being who ever lived and the most noble brute animal that ever walked the earth.⁷

Religionists, well, Christians and Jews at least, are scrambling to find ways to include their believers' pets in heaven. But the reality exists that the books written thousands of years ago make no accommodation for pets in that mythical heaven.

The Will Rogers quote that opens this brief chapter works fine for atheists. When we die, we cease to be, the same as our pets. Religionists are stuck with their ancient scriptures that exclude pets, or with dishonest readings of their texts to try to conform to modern sensibilities.

BORN ATHEIST

1. "Quotes by Will Rogers," Good Reads, undated,
http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/132444.Will_Rogers
2. "Inscription on The Monument of a Newfoundland Dog, A Memorial to Boatswain by Lord Byron," November 30, 1808,
<http://readytogoebbooks.com/LB-dog63.htm>
3. "Muhammad and the Dogs," Answering Islam, January 25, 2007,
<http://www.answering-islam.org/Silas/dogs.htm>
4. "Cabbie refuses ride to guide dog," The Cincinnati Enquirer, April 3, 1999,
http://www.enquirer.com/editions/1999/04/03/loc_cabbie.html
5. The Bible, Revelation 21:1.
6. The Bible, Romans 10:9.
7. "Pets in Heaven?" Global Catholic Network, undated,
http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/pets_in_heaven.htm