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# SVME NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics

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## IN THIS ISSUE

*President's Message, page 1*

*President-Elect's Message,  
page 2*

*Secretary's Message, page 3*

*Treasurer's Report, page 3*

*Announcements - Programs -  
Meetings, page 4*

*Critical Book Review, page 5-8*

*Editor's Notes, page 8*

*List of SVME officers, page 9*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**D**ear Colleagues,

I hope this year we have peace in our country and abroad. I have been diligently working towards generating student chapters of the SVME. Progress is slow. We have signed up two student chapters so far. I made an announcement in Intervet, the SAVMA newsletter back in November. I received no replies. Since then, I have tracked down the faculty members responsible for student clubs at every veterinary school in North America. I will contact each of them independently and obtain a response. This is important for the future of our Society. In February I will be speaking at Texas A&M Veterinary School to promote a chapter there.

If any member has a good idea about promoting the student chapters, please email me at: [catdoc323@aol.com](mailto:catdoc323@aol.com). I will continue to press for the establishment of these student chapters. I believe they will have an impact on our profession in future generations.

*Bill*

**Bill Folger**

DVM, MS, ABVP (Feline)

SVME President

## PRESIDENT-ELECT'S MESSAGE

There has been a remarkable silence on the Listserve recently. We are all diagnosticians. I thought perhaps we need thought and reflection on the process at work here. I will characterize SVME's disease as a "lack of the desire to communicate".

I think this is a series of conditions. What attracted me to the SVME is both the importance I place on the nature of an "ethical" approach to our behavior and the desire to find a sense of community within the ranks of our profession. These are intensely significant parts of my personal sense, of who I am. I am hardwired with the concept that to be the person I should be, to live up to the obligations of our profession to society, I am obliged to go through a constant reevaluation of my behavior in the light of the ethical framework that serves as the foundation of the process determining how I act. In order to go through this sort of mental dialectic, I realize that I need to reach out to people that are similarly inclined. The validity of the process is dependent on a broad base of ideas and openness to the vision of others.

SVME is an important tool in this process. It allows us to discuss issues and become exposed to new ideas from a wide base of some of the best minds in our profession. What a remarkable opportunity!

Sounds like a no-brainer. What a great idea! So what's happening out there? Why are we so quiet? I don't have the answer to those questions. But I have a few concepts that I would like to pass on to you.

Terrorism tends to force people to withdraw. We circle the wagons and wallow in confusion. The basis for our lives work is suddenly placed in some sort of limbo. Nothing makes sense. We all suffer from a sense of life force paralysis. Communication stops because a sense of trust has been violated. This sort of isolation is part of the terrorist's agenda. The Nazis used terror to keep the concentration camp victims from forming any sense of community. Victims remain victims as long as they are kept isolated.

September 11 did not make other problems go away. It distracted our attention and made us wonder what makes sense. What makes sense is getting on with our lives and attacking the myriad of problems that face this profession and our personal professional lives. To do this we need energy and a sense of hope. We need optimism, not doubt. We need each other.

I became interested in serving SVME because of the roster of very talented and dedicated people that make up this community. When I go to our meetings at the AVMA I meet the kind of people that I want to hear from. To be involved with all of you is an honor. SVME has tremendous potential, but we need to energize one another to participate.

One of the unique things about the Listserve is that it is voluntary. No one is forcing you to ask a question or seek an opinion. A certain comfort level is necessary to participate. You must have a legitimate desire to reach out to peers that you respect. That is why I characterize our "disease" as a "lack of desire to communicate". Appreciating the implication of our silence in this light is disturbing.

The longest journey begins with the first step. My hopes lie in the capacity of our group to take some small steps. I am going to reach out to the membership for some ideas. All diseases have multiple component and secondary complications. Perhaps by initiating some dialogue we can develop a better understanding of what is happening to our community.

I look forward to hearing from you.

*Brian*  
**Brian Forsgren**, DVM  
SVME President-Elect

## SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

I hope that this New Year will be fruitful for the field of veterinary ethics and SVME. I hope that the SVME will continue to raise interesting, fruitful discussions on the ethics of veterinary medicine and the well-being of animals. The Listserve is available to SVME members for that purpose. I encourage you to use it! I also invite all SVME members, especially the students, to attend the SVME meeting on July 13, 2002 in Nashville, Tennessee. The meeting is a good place to learn, exchange ideas and meet the "expert" in the field of veterinary ethics. The meeting could also be a good place to discuss what SVME can do more to promote veterinary ethics.

I hope to see many of you in Nashville next summer. In the meantime, I would like to wish all SVME members the best for the coming year.

*Sylvie*

*Sylvie Cloutier*, PhD  
SVME Secretary/Editor

## TREASURER'S REPORT

The SVME currently has \$1,316.09 in its checking account, and \$23,966.37 in savings. The most significant expenditure since the last report was \$500.00 provided as start-up stipend to the new SVME student chapter at Atlantic Veterinary College in Prince Edward's Island, Canada.

*Mary*

*Mary D. Kraeszig*, DVM  
SVME treasurer

### NOTICE:

Approximately 75% of our members have provided their email address. Any member who has email access and did not provide it when sending the membership application is encouraged to send their current email address to the treasurer, Mary D. Kraeszig, at [kittydoc@prodigy.net](mailto:kittydoc@prodigy.net)

***Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics meeting July 13, 2002***

Check out the SVME newsletter (May issue) and web site for information about the program. The meeting will be held in conjunction with the AVMA meeting in Nashville, Tennessee.

[http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/org\\_svme/](http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/org_svme/)

***American Veterinary Medical Association meeting 13-17 July 2002***

The 139th Annual Convention of the American Veterinary Medical Association will be held in the famed Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee.

All information can be found at

<http://www.avma.org/conv/cv2002/exhibitors/exhibdefault.asp>

***International Society for Applied Ethology meeting***

The 36th International Congress of the ISAE will be held from August 6-10, 2002, in Egmond aan Zee, The Netherlands.

All information can be found at <http://www.isae2002.org/>

***Assessment of Animal Welfare at Farm and Group Level 2<sup>nd</sup> International Workshop 4 - 6 September 2002 University of Bristol, U.K.***

This workshop will be of great interest to scientists and others working in animal behaviour, health and welfare, in particular those concerned with the welfare of farm livestock and laboratory animals housed and managed in groups.

**The themes** include the development of scientific and **ethical principles** to address animal welfare at group level and the application and implementation of those principles to ensure and improve animal welfare in practice.

**The programme** will include plenary lectures by internationally recognised speakers (David Fraser, Harry Blokhuis, Marian Scott, Peter Sandoe, Alan Holland, Xavier Boivin, Joy Mench, John Webster,), communication of original material by oral presentations and poster sessions, and discussion of the main themes in small-group syndicates.

***For further information and registration form contact the Conference Office:***

Langford Continuing Education Unit  
School of Veterinary Science, Langford  
House, Langford  
North Somerset BS40 5DU, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)117 9289502 Fax: +44  
(0)1934 852170  
e-mail: [Langford-CE@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Langford-CE@bristol.ac.uk)

## Note from the author:

In previous issues of the SVME Newsletter (May and September 2001), I have deliberately chosen to review the first edition of *Practical Ethics* by Peter Singer, to examine the origins of Peter Singer's philosophy. However, after noticing that the second edition, which is still available, was slightly different, I decided to also review the second edition and now focus on the differences between the two editions.

Book Title:  
*Practical Ethics (2nd Ed.)*

## BOOK REVIEW, A CRITICAL APPRAISAL:

Two additional chapters are included in the second edition published in 1993: "Insiders and Outsiders" and "The Environment," which come prior to the last two chapters of the book. In addition, there is a 23-page appendix "On Being Silenced in Germany" in which Singer complains that his right to impose his speech on others outweighs their right not to hear it. Incredibly, Singer accuses those in Germany who oppose euthanasia as having the mentality that made Nazism possible (pps. 353-354).

While Singer tries to fix some of the more obvious holes in the second edition of *Practical Ethics*, the fact that his fabrication was unseaworthy from the outset makes it questionable whether any amount of patching will ever result in a workable philosophy. Briefly, the changes follow.

In Chapter 1, Singer retreats from the absolutism of Utilitarianism that he initially espoused. He now acknowledges the value of individual rights. He recognizes the limitations of having to determine whether one's actions will increase or decrease happiness every time one tries to do something, and the drawbacks of sharing the fruits of one's labors with those who might then feel no obligation to gather their own fruit. However, he maintains a guilty-until-proven-innocent mentality regarding any theories of ethical behavior that deviate from his brand of Utilitarianism (page 14).

Author: Peter Singer  
Cambridge University Press  
Cambridge, England, 1993  
395 pages  
ISBN 0-521-43971-X  
(Paperback \$19.95)

In 3 pages of new material at the end of Chapter 2, Singer tries to position himself as the champion of the rights of the disabled, a group that would not exist were his philosophy to be applied in practice! He offers no apologies for his advocacy of their euthanasia as infants and sets up a straw man in which the debate is limited solely to the desire of handicapped individuals not to be handicapped. We should not allow Singer to extricate himself from the trap he has created for himself. The pathology of Singer's philosophy is revealed every day by the courage of handicapped individuals such as physicist/astronomer Stephen Hawking (*A Brief History of Time*) and the young poet Mattie Stepanek (*Heartsongs*) whose zest for life dwarf that of most non-handicapped individuals. The sinister contradiction between Singer's claims of concern for the handicapped and the real impact of his philosophy are best appreciated by considering this fact: The greatest hope for cures for disabilities lies in the biomedical research that Singer savages with cold-blooded misrepre-

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## CRITICAL REVIEW (CONTINUED)

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sentations and his hierarchical placement of non-human animals above humans who fail his version of the IQ test.

In Chapter 4 an additional 2 pages are inserted in which Singer reiterates the hedge against Utilitarian thought that he made in the first chapter of the second edition. In this case he is backing away from the Utilitarian mandate to secretly murder someone facing imminent misery (pp 92-94). He also adds several pages in this chapter to provide more of an opening for the concept of replaceability of non-human animals so as to be more consistent with his ideas regarding the replaceability of humans.

The title of Chapter 6 is modified and it is considerably updated to take into account advances in reproductive techniques and some of their implications. But there is no significant change in Singer's argument for infanticide and other forms of euthanasia.

Chapter 7 also has a minor title change and is updated to applaud the activities of Jack Kevorkian and other practitioners of euthanasia. Of note, Kevorkian chose to enact Singer's principles of active euthanasia and was convicted of murder, for which he is presently incarcerated.

In Chapter 8 there are 3 additional pages at the end in which Singer elaborates on his appeal for more aid to third-world countries. Interestingly, on page 243 he concedes that "...we would be foolish to expect widespread conformity to a standard that demands impartial concern..." It is as if he has forgotten that the title of his book is *Practical Ethics*. Later in the paragraph he makes a reluctant concession to the reality of human nature, but leaves no doubt that his goal is the imposition of

absolute altruism and the elimination of all luxuries.

Chapter 9, a new chapter entitled "Insiders and Outsiders," is an extension of the previous chapter in which he extends his arguments for aid to third world countries to an opening of borders to massive influxes of refugees from these countries. In his now trademark shortsightedness, Singer uses an analogy of global nuclear war and a tennis court to argue for admitting impoverished refugees into affluent countries. Tennis becomes an

exorbitant luxury that is causing the preventable deaths of thousands of people, mandating the elimination of tennis and admission of refugees who will live on the tennis court. Singer's obliviousness to the risks of opening borders to those who may seek to destroy the society that accepts them might be tolerated as a pre-September 11<sup>th</sup> naivety. But the

similarity of his plan to eliminate tennis, with the elimination of frivolous entertainment such as music, television and soccer by the Taliban government of Afghanistan is unmistakable and frightful. For those who consider this an extreme comparison, in Chapter 10, motor car racing and water skiing are considered no more acceptable for entertainment than bear-baiting (page 285).

Chapter 10, also new, entitled "The Environment," attempts to do for radical environmentalists what *Animal Liberation* does for the extremist animal rightists. One could ask if the subsequent appearance of the terrorist group, the Environmental Liberation Front (ELF) is an outgrowth of Singer's advocacy of property crimes against those he condemns as enemies of the environment. In this chapter Singer's approach is to attack Judeo-Christian

*"...we would be foolish to expect widespread conformity to a standard that demands impartial concern..."*  
—Singer, page 243

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## CRITICAL REVIEW (CONTINUED)

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religion, which he sees as the enemy of the environment as well as the interests of animals. For example, he views Western tradition (the same tradition that he hopes to instill in impoverished third-world countries that will make them self-sufficient) as “God gave human beings dominion over the natural world, and God does not care how we treat it.” (page 268).

Natural is the supreme ideal and Singer condemns virtually all human activities that alter the environment. To amplify this negativity, environmental changes are also described as crimes against animals. For example, to argue against the building of dams he says: Thus most of the animals living in the flooded area will die: either they will be drowned, or they will starve. Neither drowning nor starvation are easy ways to die and the suffering involved in these deaths should, as *we* have seen, be given no less weight than *we* would give to an equivalent amount of suffering experienced by human beings.” (page 275).

Singer also challenges logging and mining as well, but is curiously silent regarding the adverse impact of the farming of crops on the animals native to those fields. Is this another example of Singer’s myopia, or is it a calculated omission to prevent one from recognizing that the agricultural bounties that Singer demands to be shared with poor countries, come at the expense of animals that he would otherwise be trying to save?

Singer goes on to present a laundry list of activities he condemns as ecologically extravagant such as using disposable paper

products, going for a drive in the country, eating meat, even wind-surfing if one continually updates one’s board to keep up with technological advances. He ends the chapter claiming not to be an enemy of pleasure, provided that your pleasure meets his specifications!

There is little substantive change in the last 2 chapters, “Ends and Means” and “Why act Morally?” Specific examples replace generalizations from the first

edition. A blatantly inflammatory and inaccurate characterization of the laws governing biomedical research in England has been removed.

Interestingly, he dissects apart two of his specific examples, claiming that the illegal activities of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue are misguided, while those of the Animal Liberation Front are justified.

### *Conclusions/Epilogue*

During a presentation of my critical appraisal of the work of Peter Singer to the Washington State University Ethics Interest Group, one of the audience asked: “So why are we wasting our time talking about this person’s work?” This reminded me of the moment of dysepiphany in the movie *Forrest Gump*, when Forrest abruptly decides that he has run far enough, and his followers are left wondering what it was they were following, and who will lead them next. There were only a few score who followed Forrest Gump, unfortunately there are many thousands who have followed the teachings of Peter Singer!

One cannot summarize Singer’s work without emphasizing the shortsightedness that characterizes his work. Peter Singer promises a wealth of rights for humans and animals alike. But the cold, hard reality is that Singer’s

*It has been said that even those who condemn Peter Singer’s work, suggest that their students read his writings to gain perspective.*

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## CRITICAL REVIEW (CONTINUED)

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promises are as empty as those of the most duplicitous politician. Singer's philosophy cannot fulfill its promises, and the wise reader will recognize Singer's impotence and not fall prey to his irrationality. Often, Singer writes off adverse long-term consequences as being too complex for discussion in the context of his book. Or, he discards challenges to his arguments as "technical difficulties" or "far-fetched" (page 143) At other times he is either completely oblivious to, or may deliberately avoid, scenarios that contradict his philosophy. For example, he asserts that someone in extreme pain or who is facing certain death to be preceded by a period of hopeless incapacitation should be allowed to voluntarily choose to end that life. However, relief of pain may be possible and the medical diagnosis may be inaccurate.

It has been said that even those who condemn Peter Singer's work, suggest that their students read his writings to gain perspective. This may indeed be a correct approach, for to censor Singer would be to acknowledge that his views are a compelling force. However, in this

reviewer's opinion, the views of Singer are of marginal intellectual significance. And, if we find Singer's views to be providing an important perspective, how long will it be before the likes of G. Gordon Liddy, Duane Gish, or John Rucker gain similar academic inroads.

Singer's ultimate failure, like that of the Marxism he lauds is the inability to appreciate and understand the practical realities of human life and human behavior. Singer is not a sociologist, nor is he a psychologist, yet his pronouncements would severely impact societal and individual behavior.

—Robert C. Speth

**NOTE:** For a like-minded review of the work of Peter Singer, readers are invited to access an on-line review in *The New Republic* by Peter Berkowitz entitled: "The Utilitarian Horrors of Peter Singer: Other People's Mothers." <http://www.thenewrepublic.com/011000/coverstory011000.html>

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

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### SVME WEB SITE AND NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Once again, I urge all SVME members to consider contributing to the Newsletter whether it is a book review, an opinion piece or simply information about professional activities. The next Newsletter will be out in May 2002. If you consider contributing to the Newsletter, please send your text before April 15, 2002. All members who are considering contributing to the Newsletter can contact me at <[scloutie@vetmed.wsu.edu](mailto:scloutie@vetmed.wsu.edu)> or c/o department of VCAPP, College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University, PO Box 646520, Pullman, WA, 99164-6520.

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## **OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY**

*President:* William R. Folger, DVM, MS, ABVP (Feline)  
*President Elect:* Brian Forsgren, DVM  
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*Secretary:* Sylvie Cloutier, PhD  
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