

What are the Arguments For and Against Keeping Pets?

Updated December 10, 2014.

Because of pet overpopulation, just about all animal activists would probably agree that we should spay and neuter our cats and dogs. But there would be some disagreement if you were to ask whether we should breed cats and dogs if all the shelters were empty and there were good, loving homes available.

Animal industries such as the fur industry and factory farms try to discredit animal protection groups by claiming that activists want to take people's pets away.

While some animal rights activists do not believe in keeping pets, I can assure you that no one wants to take your dog away from you.

What are the arguments for keeping pets?

Many people consider their pets to be members of the family, and treat them with love and respect. The feeling often appears to be mutual, as our dogs and cats seek us out to play, to be petted, or to just simply sit in our laps. They provide unconditional love and devotion. To deny them and us this relationship seems unthinkable to some.

Also, keeping pets does not "use" the animals in the same way that [factory farms](#), animal testing labs or circuses use and abuse the animals.

The Humane Society of the US [argues that we should keep pets](#):

So, should we have pets? Of course. Pets are creatures with whom we share a world, and we rejoice in their companionship. You don't have to anthropomorphize to recognize that the feelings are returned. If we are wise enough to see, they teach us about humility and empathy and loyalty. Their eyes hold the spark of life, the same as ours. Let us be close and cherish each other always.

The vast majority of animal activists advocate spaying and neutering. However, most will say that the reason is the millions of cats and dogs who are killed in shelters every year, as opposed to any basic opposition to the keeping of pets.

What are the arguments against keeping pets?

Some [animal activists](#) argue that we should not keep or breed pets regardless of whether we have an overpopulation problem. There are two basic arguments against keeping and breeding pets.

One argument is that cats, dogs and other pets suffer too much at our hands. Theoretically, we may be able to provide good homes for our pets, and many of us do.

However, in the real world, animals suffer abandonment, cruelty, and neglect.

Another argument is that even on a theoretical level, the relationship is inherently flawed and we are unable to provide the full lives that these animals deserve. Because they are bred to be dependent on us, the basic relationship between humans and companion animals is flawed because of the difference in power. [PETA opposes keeping pets](#), partially for this reason:

Their lives are restricted to human homes where they must obey commands and can only eat, drink, and even urinate when humans allow them to. Because domesticated animals retain many of their basic instincts and drives but are not able to survive on their own in the wild, dogs, cats, or birds, whose strongest desire is to be free, must be confined to a house, yard, or cage for their own safety . . . Even in "good" homes, cats must relieve themselves in dirty litterboxes and often have their digits removed by "declawing," and dogs often have to drink water that has sat around for days, are hurried along on their walks, and are yelled at to get off the furniture or be quiet.

How does this issue play out in the real world?

The opposition to keeping pets must be distinguished from a call to release domesticated animals. They are dependent on us for their survival and it would be cruel to turn them loose on the streets or in the wilderness.

The position must also be distinguished from any desire to take anyone's dogs and cats away. We have a duty to take care of the animals who are already here, and the best place for them is with their loving and caring human guardians. This is why animal rights activists who oppose [keeping pets](#) might have rescued pets themselves.

Activists who oppose keeping pets believe that domestic animals should not be allowed to breed. The animals who are already here should live long, healthy lives, cared for with love and respect by their human guardians.

[Doris Lin, Esq.](#) is an [animal rights attorney](#) and Director of Legal Affairs for the Animal Protection League of NJ.