

Scales of Injustice

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Sports Illustrated People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has new billboards out that claim fishing is cruel. I totally agree. The last time I went, all I caught was a sunburn, three hooks in the back of my thigh and hell from my pals for forgetting the Off.



Unfortunately, this is not what PETA means. PETA means fishing is cruel *to the fish*. Seriously. PETA plans to put up billboards across the U.S. and in Canada that show a Labrador retriever with a hook in his bloody lip. IF YOU WOULDN'T DO IT TO A DOG, the signs say, WHY DO IT TO A FISH?

And, of course, the answer is: Because fish do not bring me my slippers.

Look, I wailed for the whales. I fumed over fur. I emotionally clubbed myself over the baby seals. But I'll be damned if I'm going to weep over a walleye.

PETA says fish feel pain and that to snag one with a steel hook, drag it along for 50 yards or so and then haul it out of the water so it suffocates is sick. "Why do we throw a Frisbee to some animals and a barbed hook to others?" PETA asks on its website.

And, of course, the answer is: Because fish really suck at catching Frisbees.

PETA thinks it's evil to eat fish, too. But why should we stop eating them when *they eat each other*? Besides, they had their chance to evolve. They could've crawled out of the primordial ooze with us, but they didn't. They decided to stay behind and swim in the water they pee in and go around never blinking. When fish lift their scaly butts past us in the food chain, they can eat us. Until then, pass the tartar sauce.

PETA even says catch-and-release is cruel. They say the harm and stress caused by being caught and released is sometimes enough to kill the fish later on. As if the fish go straight into therapy after being caught.

Fish: I'm telling you, Doc, I was just minding my own business when I got hauled into the sky, examined by some weird beings and then thrown back!

Fish psychiatrist: Lemme guess. A UFO, right?

I mean, what's PETA going to do? You'll be sitting at the counter in the deli, and suddenly,

the PETA police will come running in, shouting, "All right, back away from the tuna melt and nobody gets hurt!" My God, we're talking about *fish* here. Fish have a brain the size of a corn kernel.

Professor James Rose, a University of Wyoming neuroscientist, studied fish for years and determined that they lack a neocortex (parts of which process the brain's response to pain), much like Cubs fans. Besides, if fish are so smart, why can you catch a fish, throw it back and then, two hours later, catch *the same fish*? I mean, do you really want to save something dumber than Robert Downey Jr.?

Didn't Jesus fish? He seemed like a pretty sensitive guy. When He zapped up all those fishes for 5,000 people, what do you think He did with them, throw them back?

I know, I know -- I hate hunting. But sitting in the back of a pickup, taking a rifle with an infrared scope and killing a deer from 1,000 yards away is not nearly the same thing as standing up to your spleen in icy rushing river water, trying to cast the perfectly tied fly into the perfect eddy to catch a rainbow trout. Is it our fault that the trout falls for it? Tell you what: I will get behind hunting when hunters come up with a shoot-and-release program.

Why does PETA stop at fish? Where does PETA stand on the plight of the worm? And plankton? And the 1,000,000 micro-organisms that are crushed by your boots every time you go on a nature hike? Have these PETA vegetarians ever gotten close to a broccoli to hear its screams as it's violently yanked from its birthplace and boiled to death?

Fishing is cruel? I always thought fishing was one of the most peaceful things you could do. What are fathers and sons supposed to do together, knit sweaters out of each other's navel lint? What are we supposed to read, Hemingway's *Old Man and the Parking Lot*?

I'll tell you one thing. Before I agree to this whole fish-human truce, somebody had better have a long face-to-face with the sharks about it. I say we send a bunch of PETA members down right away.

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