

1 Purebred dogs and canine wellbeing

2 1. Introduction

3 Conscientious breeders of purebred dogs usually have several conflicting goals that they
4 attempt to achieve.¹ They might, for instance, want to breed dogs useful for performing
5 various tasks, that can succeed in conformation shows, conform to the breed standard, make
6 their owners happy and are happy themselves. These goals might sometimes conflict,
7 meaning breeders have to prioritize. Likewise, kennel clubs will have to decide which goals
8 are most important when setting up their policies and rules, and legislating bodies will have to
9 prioritize when imposing legal restrictions on breeders of dogs. However, I will not, in this
10 article, discuss how one ought to prioritize. Rather, I will do some groundwork in order to
11 make a more rational prioritization possible. If we first determine what we ought to do *given*
12 each goal taken separately, we will be able to clearly see where the conflicts between different
13 goals lie, and move on to a discussion of how to prioritize when they conflict.

14 In this article, I will investigate what we ought to do given the goal of canine wellbeing
15 and point out where this goal might come into conflict with other goals that we have. It is
16 usually assumed, by breeders considering themselves conscientious and concerned with
17 animal welfare, that a breeder fulfils her canine wellbeing-related obligations if she tries to
18 breed as mentally and physically healthy dogs as possible within her breed of choice. I will
19 argue that this breeder common sense morality cannot be justified; canine wellbeing calls for
20 radical reforms. Many dog breeds ought not to be improved but outright abandoned. However,
21 some kind of breed system can still be justified by canine wellbeing considerations; altering
22 rather than completely abandoning the praxis of dividing dogs into breeds would be optimal
23 for preserving genetic diversity, which in turn has beneficial health effects in the long run.

24 I will assume, for the purpose of this article, that breeding animals is not always morally
25 wrong. I think this is a view that can be defended, not only from a consequentialist moral
26 view, but also from a deontological animal rights view. I think Richard Haynes' moral
27 principle of animal breeding can be incorporated into a strict animal rights view. He argues
28 that it is morally permissible to breed on companion animals for the reason that one values the
29 social bonding with them, as long as one has the knowledge and resources necessary to
30 provide the offspring with rich and flourishing lives. (Haynes also thinks that morally

¹ A lot of what is said in this article could be generalized to the breeding of other companion animals. I will, however, focus solely on dogs throughout.

31 permissible human procreation requires the same conditions. Haynes 2008 pp 144-145.)
32 However, in this article I will not argue for but simply assume that it is not always morally
33 wrong to breed dogs, and that it may further be right to have various goals for one's breeding
34 program besides producing new companions to bond with.

35 Since I do not discuss what the correct priorities between different goals are in this article,
36 I use 'ought', 'reason' and other action-guiding words in their pro tanto sense,² allowing for
37 the possibility that they might be overridden, in the final analysis, by stronger 'ought's or
38 reasons. I will also use the term wellbeing undefined; I will merely assume that being in pain
39 as well as experiencing negative emotions such as fear and frustration detracts from wellbeing.
40 It is thus possible to breed for wellbeing, since we can strive to avoid deformities, diseases
41 and mental problems. Finally, when I talk about a dog breed in this article, unless otherwise
42 specified I refer not to a *type* of dog, but to a population registered under a common breed
43 name in the kennel clubs of various countries.

44 **2. Breeder common sense morality**

45 The cynic, having watched various TV documentaries featuring purebred dogs with extreme
46 body shapes and suffering from various illnesses, might claim that breeders of purebred dogs
47 care nothing for their wellbeing. However, if we look at small-scale breeders rather than the
48 puppy mill kind, my experience is that they usually do express a concern for their dogs'
49 wellbeing. They may still end up producing lots of sickly dogs though – either because they
50 consciously prioritize some other breeding goal (such as winning conformation shows) above
51 wellbeing when various goals conflict, or because they simply deny that various deformities
52 or illnesses have a negative impact on wellbeing. Likewise, my impression is that puppy
53 buyers in general do not want a suffering dog, but may be profoundly ignorant (sometimes
54 wilfully so) – for instance, they may argue that a dog's breathing difficulties does not
55 negatively effect her wellbeing since she is such a calm dog and does not want to run around
56 anyway. People's ability to delude themselves when acting immorally is of course a big
57 problem in many contexts, not just dog-breeding, and I have no simple solution to offer. I will
58 simply note, with regret, that this is often the case, and then put this problem aside.

59 I will go as far as claiming that most small-scale dog breeders who consider themselves
60 conscientious adhere to a moral principle which we might call 'the dog breeder common
61 sense morality principle', or BCM for short.

² Or 'prima facie', as W D Ross put it. I prefer 'pro tanto', since the term 'prima facie' sometimes means 'merely apparent'.

62

63 BCM: It is morally permitted to choose any breed you want to out of the ones
64 recognized by the kennel clubs; once this choice is made, you ought to try to
65 produce dogs with as high a level of wellbeing as possible.

66

67 “Try to” is there because there are no guarantees in breeding. It is commonly recognized that
68 the best-laid plans might come to naught. (The “try to” is supposed to include that one
69 actually keeps oneself informed about relevant research, though.) The entire moral principle is
70 a pro tanto one; it allows for other considerations, not directly related to canine wellbeing, to
71 override it. Perhaps you can have a *duty* to choose a certain breed if you are in a unique
72 position to save this particular breed from extinction. Perhaps you ought to breed for certain
73 traditional traits even if they lessen the wellbeing of the dogs, since tradition is important. (I
74 am not saying these are plausible views, only that BCM is a pro tanto principle and therefore
75 allows for them. You can probably find some dog people who believe these things.) As long
76 as we focus on canine wellbeing however, it is fairly widely accepted that following BCM
77 means fulfilling your moral obligations. BCM implies that breeding on dogs who are known
78 or strongly suspected to carry genes for certain health or mental problems, when there are
79 other dogs in the same breed without these genes, at least requires justification from other
80 breeding goals; but choosing a breed with many serious health problems need not be defended.

81 Obviously I do not mean to say that breeders consciously consider this principle, or that
82 any kennel club has it written down somewhere in its policy in precisely this form. However,
83 it is often implicitly invoked both in discussions between dog breeders and in documents,
84 statements and policies made by the more ambitious kennel clubs. The Swedish Kennel Club,
85 for instance, argues that we ought to counteract trends that favour exterior or mental
86 exaggerations in dogs, for the sake of the dogs themselves, but this “counteracting” is not
87 supposed to include the actual abandonment of exaggerated breeds, only the choosing of less
88 exaggerated specimens for breeding within these breeds (The Swedish Kennel Club, SKK,
89 2012).

90 However, although BCM is a widely accepted principle, it can ultimately not be justified.
91 It is not plausible that it is, from the point of view of canine wellbeing, morally permissible to
92 choose any breed one likes.

93 **3. The non-identity problem**

94 One way of justifying the moral permissibility of choosing any breed, even a very sickly one,
95 would be to bring up the so-called non-identity problem. It is of course wrong to harm dogs.
96 However, if I choose to breed dogs of a very sickly breed, no one is harmed. The puppies I
97 produce may have various health problems, but if I had not bred on the animals I did breed on,
98 these puppies would not have existed at all. Even if we grant, for the sake of discussion, that
99 some lives are so bad for the individuals living them that it would have been better for those
100 individuals never to have been born, this will most likely not be the case with the dogs I
101 produce in my kennel. If they are not so bad off that they ought to be put down immediately
102 after birth for their own sake, if we think that their lives (at least up to a point) will be worth
103 living, it is hard to argue that it would have been better *for them* if they had never been born.

104 However, if it is morally permissible to knowingly produce sick individuals as long as they
105 have lives worth living, I have no obligation to make the best I can within my breed of choice.
106 It would be perfectly morally permissible for me to choose sicker over less sick breeding
107 animals, as long as I can be fairly certain of producing puppies with a life worth living. Only
108 the first part of BCM, the permissibility to choose any breed one likes, would be true. This is
109 simply incredibly implausible and counter-intuitive. And in the philosophical literature, a
110 large number of philosophers from various philosophical schools have argued that we *do* have
111 a pro tanto duty to produce as healthy or happy individuals as we can.

112 **4. Maximizing wellbeing**

113 In addition to a duty not to create dogs with a life not worth living, we may have a duty to
114 create dogs with as good a life as possible. If we can choose between creating a litter of dogs
115 that will probably have a low level of wellbeing, and another litter expected to have a high
116 level, is it not *obvious* that we ought to choose to bring the latter into existence? Most
117 conscientious breeders would spontaneously answer “yes” to this question, at least if we
118 remember that we are discussing pro tanto ‘ought’:s here, that could in principle be
119 overridden by reasons relating to other breeding goals. *Everything else being equal*, we ought
120 to create the litter that is expected to have a higher level of wellbeing – this much seems
121 intuitively obvious. That we ought to maximize wellbeing or minimize suffering in future
122 generations is also a view a number of philosophers in population ethics have supported. All
123 utilitarians, for instance (at least when we consider same number cases – I will, somewhat
124 simplified, assume that the number of dogs we ought to produce is set by the number of
125 potential good homes there are, and that the question of whether to produce 100 dogs with

126 wellbeing level 50 or 50 dogs with wellbeing level 100 therefore does not arise), agree that
127 this is the case, since we always ought to maximize utility. Non-utilitarians may argue that
128 respect for someone's autonomy is far more important than happiness when it comes to actual
129 individuals, but still agree that we ought to, in some sense of wellbeing, maximize the
130 wellbeing of future generations who cannot (for obvious reasons) decide for themselves. Erik
131 Malmquist, for instance, has a basically Aristotelian approach where respect for autonomy
132 plays a large part, but argues that in the case of future generations we ought to minimize the
133 kinds of diseases and disabilities that limit the quality of life for any person, regardless of her
134 particular preferences (Malmquist, 2008. p 171). There is much disagreement when it comes
135 to whether we ought to merely minimize illnesses and disabilities or whether we also ought to
136 enhance the capacities of future generations; Julian Savulescu argues alongside utilitarians
137 that we ought to produce the best possible children (Savulescu, 2001, p 415), while the
138 aforementioned Malmquist as well as Elizabeth Harman merely argues for illness and
139 disability minimization (Harman, pp 93 and 102). Buchanan et al (2000, p 249) and James
140 Woodward (1986) argue that it is wrong to create individuals that fall below a certain
141 threshold – although when all the details are spelled out they tend towards illness and
142 disability minimization as well. The debate between happiness maximizers and illness and
143 disability minimizers may be crucial to questions of genetic enhancement of human beings,
144 but in the current dog breeding discussions the two views would tend towards the same policy
145 – breeding for as physically and mentally healthy dogs as possible. However, if this is the
146 case, the first part of BCM must be false. If we ought to breed as healthy dogs as possible, this
147 is relevant for breed choice as well, not just for the breeding decisions we make within a
148 breed.

149 All the above-mentioned philosophers have, of course, discussed human procreation rather
150 than dog breeding. However, that is of no consequence here. If dogs, as many suppose, have a
151 lower moral status than human beings, this merely means that pro tanto reasons that stem
152 from canine wellbeing might be outweighed by other factors that would not suffice to
153 outweigh corresponding human wellbeing pro tanto reasons, but the difference in moral status
154 would make no difference to the pro tanto reasons themselves. The common pre-theoretical
155 intuition that we ought to produce as much wellbeing or as little illness and disability as
156 possible, which a large number of philosophers have shown can be defended from a variety of
157 moral-philosophical standpoints, is as relevant for dogs as for humans. It is the counter
158 arguments that are specifically human.

159 **5. Against maximizing wellbeing**

160 The widespread philosophical idea that we ought to minimize disabilities and diseases and/or
161 maximize wellbeing in future generations has not gone unchallenged. Firstly, it has been
162 argued that what is commonly thought of as disabilities should rather be seen as different
163 abilities, and need not make the individual any worse off (Edwards, 2001); secondly, that
164 attempting to create abled rather than disabled individuals will promote prejudices and
165 discrimination against the disabled, thus decreasing their wellbeing (Magnus Reindal, 2000).
166 Now, if there is nothing wrong with creating disabled *humans*, it seems as if there would not
167 be any canine wellbeing related moral reasons against creating disabled *dogs* either. If one
168 could only wrong the *puppy buyers* by producing disabled dogs, doing so might be all-things-
169 considered morally permitted if the puppy buyers know about the puppies' health problems
170 and still choose to purchase them.

171 I think the first argument against preventing disabilities is stronger than many philosophers
172 want to admit as long as we discuss human beings, but it is actually not relevant for dogs.
173 Take, for instance, deaf people who argue that their inability to hear gives them access to a
174 unique culture of sign language and a unique way of experiencing the world, and therefore see
175 themselves as differently abled rather than disabled. I think many philosophers tend to dismiss
176 this view too quickly. I do not doubt that I would be disabled if I suddenly lost my hearing,
177 but being born deaf is a different matter. I might learn sign language and not regard this as
178 very special, but arguably having sign language as your first language is a completely
179 different thing. Since no one could first be born deaf and live her life that way, and then be
180 born hearing and compare these experiences, I think we must conclude that we cannot know
181 whether being born deaf means that you are simply differently abled or rather disabled. If
182 being deaf does not detract from one's wellbeing in any way, the previously discussed
183 procreative principles would not require of us to produce hearing individuals when we have a
184 choice in the matter. However, deaf dogs do not have an entire unique language or a culture
185 of their own (even if they might become better at reading body language as a result of their
186 deafness). Deaf dogs are therefore disabled, and worse off than hearing dogs everything else
187 being equal (although they may still have lives very well worth living). Finally, most breeding
188 programs that are motivated by a concern for canine wellbeing deals with conditions that
189 cause physical pain and/or negative emotional states such as fear and frustration; that being in
190 pain or fear is not merely being in a *different* state, but a *worse* state, is fairly uncontroversial.

191 The same thing can be said about the second argument against any attempts of preventing
192 disabled people from being born; it is too quickly dismissed by many philosophers, but it is at

193 least *less* relevant for dog breeding. Although attempting to create abled rather than disabled
194 people does not logically imply that one sees disabled people as less valuable than abled ones,
195 such an attempt might still lead disabled people to feel like failures or abled people to view
196 the disabled in this light, and it might still lead to less resources being put into adjusting the
197 environment to accommodate for disabilities. Social and psychological mechanisms are
198 different from logical implications. We can see something similar in the case of dogs; people
199 sometimes contrast breeding for fearlessness with banning fireworks, for instance, as if one
200 could not pursue both paths simultaneously in order to reduce canine suffering as much as
201 possible. Some people also speak, not just of breeders who habitually produce mentally and
202 physically ill dogs, but of the dogs themselves, with contempt. I suspect that a person with
203 this attitude, who discovered that her own dog suffered physical and/or mental problems,
204 might treat the dog badly because of this contempt. Still, the dogs themselves cannot
205 contemplate whether they are “failures” from a breeding standpoint, and I think problematic
206 human attitudes can more easily be overcome in the case of dogs. It is easier to think
207 rationally about a different species than one’s own.

208 In the following, I will assume that those dogs that still inevitably will be born with
209 physical or mental problems (no breeding program will be perfectly successful) will not be
210 worse off because we strive to breed for as much canine wellbeing as possible.

211 **6. Pure-breds and maximizing well-being**

212 If we ought to breed for as much wellbeing as possible, it follows that it is *not* morally
213 permissible to choose any breed one wants to when deciding to become a dog breeder. It is
214 simply not plausible to claim that the duty to breed for wellbeing is, so to speak, only
215 *activated* after the choice of breed has already and irrevocably been made. And it is true of
216 many breeders who already do the best they can within their breed of choice that they could
217 produce more wellbeing by switching to a different breed.

218 Dog breeders who struggle to improve very sickly breeds will probably find this line of
219 reasoning uncomfortable. One might of course argue that breed preservation is important;
220 important enough to outweigh the canine wellbeing-related reasons breeders have to switch to
221 healthier breeds. Still, many people would be uncomfortable with the implication that if they
222 do continue trying to improve an unhealthy breed rather than switching to an already healthy
223 one, they would thereby sacrifice wellbeing for the sake of breed preservation. Breeders who
224 seriously struggle to improve the health of a very sickly breed typically do not see themselves
225 as sacrificing canine wellbeing; rather the opposite.

226

227 Is there then no possible justification for BCM to be found in the philosophical literature? Are
228 there no counter arguments to the thesis that we ought to maximize wellbeing other than those
229 from disability advocates, already dismissed as being of little relevance for dogs?

230 According to David Wasserman, procreation is right when at least some of the reasons one
231 has for creating a certain individual are concerned with her own good and the prospect of
232 respectful relationships (Wasserman, 2005, conclusion). This means that it can be morally
233 right to deliberately create an individual with some kind of disability. Wasserman writes

234

235 It is not clear that this evolving understanding of the family would condemn the
236 deliberate selection of a retarded child. ... they may seek a child whom they would
237 find it especially rewarding to rear or whom they expect to have a rare capacity
238 for sustained, unalloyed joy. These reasons may be self-indulgent or misguided,
239 but to the extent that they concern the good of the future child, they are subject
240 only to a gentler, less personal reproach. (Ibid)

241

242 I do not think that Wasserman ever considered this line of reasoning to be applicable to any
243 other species than ours (he discusses the purpose of having families in connection with
244 reasons for having children), but it seems to me that the reasons Wasserman gives for
245 deliberately selecting a mentally handicapped child might be brought up by a dog breeder
246 who wants to defend her choice of a sickly and/or mentally unstable breed. She might say that
247 although this breed has its problems, she finds breeding them and living with them especially
248 rewarding – they have unique personalities or traits that one does not find in other dogs.
249 Actually, I do not think this is an unusual explanation of why one chooses to breed a very
250 sickly breed. However, I doubt that one can find a case where it is *true* that the dogs of a very
251 sickly breed really have a unique personality. It is hard to see how a breed unique personality
252 could develop unless the breeders actually select for a unique personality when choosing
253 breeding animals by, say, using a mentality assessment test on prospective breeding animals
254 and only let these animals reproduce who have particular, different from all other breeds, test
255 results. Alternatively a unique personality might develop within a breed if this and only this
256 breed is bred for performing a particular task that requires a particular personality. However,
257 one would be hard pressed to find a breed with lots of health problems where breeding
258 animals are selected for their ability to perform a particular task that no other breed is used for.
259 A breeder defending her choice of breed in this way would thus most likely be misguided.

260 It might still be the case that the breeder has a special fondness for these dogs; perhaps she
261 just loves the breed. But now this case is disanalogous to Wasserman's; being uniquely fond
262 of a certain look, or a certain breed history, is profoundly different from wanting a mentally
263 disabled child because one thinks this child might have a "rare capacity for sustained,
264 unalloyed joy".

265 It is also worth noting that Wasserman is in part concerned with how we *ought to react* to
266 people who knowingly bring disabled individuals into the world, as he suggests that *if* it was
267 wrong of the couple in his example to choose to have a mentally handicapped child, "they are
268 subject only to a gentler, less personal reproach". The same might of course be true of all
269 breeders who do the best they can within their breed of choice, although they could have
270 produced more wellbeing if they had switched breed. If they do the best they can to produce
271 dogs with a high level of wellbeing within their breed of choice they are not insensitive to
272 canine suffering, and ought not to be harshly blamed. However, they can still be misguided,
273 they can still be *wrong* in their estimation of what they ought to do.

274 So far, then, I have argued that given the goal of canine wellbeing, dog breeders ought to
275 produce dogs with as much wellbeing as possible. This means not just that they ought to do
276 the best they can within their breed of choice, but also that they ought to choose healthy over
277 unhealthy breeds.

278 **7. Genetic diversity**

279 Only of a fairly small percentage of all dog breeders would it be true that they could not
280 produce dogs with more wellbeing if they looked outside their breed of choice. A principle
281 according to which we ought to produce as much canine wellbeing as possible seems to imply
282 that lots and lots of breeds ought to be completely abandoned, from some breeds certain
283 families or individuals ought to be picked for breeding, for only a small number of breeds
284 ought more than a few dogs be allowed to reproduce, and in a tiny number of breeds most
285 individuals ought to be bred on. This might seem counter intuitive to many. Is it really the
286 case that we ought to, from a canine wellbeing perspective, abandon *most* breeds? This would
287 undoubtedly be a hard bullet to bite for dog enthusiasts.

288 Someone might wonder at this point, whether breeders ought to abandon *all breeds* and
289 stick to mutts instead – but this is probably not the optimal choice if we want to produce as
290 much wellbeing as possible, and I will explain why.

291 Sweden is unique in the dog world in several respects. Over 60% of all dogs are purebreds
292 registered in the kennel club, and nearly 80% of all dogs have a health insurance (SCB, 2012).

293 The insurance companies providing health insurance for dogs record how often dogs of each
294 breed, as well as mutts, have to use their insurance. Many breeds have to use their insurance
295 more often than mutts, indicating that they have worse health, many other breeds use it as
296 often as mutts, and some breeds use their insurance less often (confirmed in personal
297 correspondence with representatives for the insurance companies Sveland and Agria). This is
298 not surprising if we consider that although mutts rarely suffer from exaggerated looks or
299 inbreeding, they rarely reap the benefits of health examinations and selection against health
300 problems either. It seems that we ought to focus on the healthiest breeds then, rather than
301 mutts. There is, of course, no way of knowing whether the situation is similar in countries
302 where this kind of statistics do not exist, but since health testing for certain illnesses before
303 breeding is done by conscientious breeders in many countries, it is not far-fetched to suppose
304 that many countries have a small number of purebred populations that are generally healthier
305 than mutts. Furthermore, canine wellbeing depends on more than just physical health; mental
306 health is often just as important. Since mutts rarely go through mentality assessment tests, we
307 do not know how prone they are to, for instance, fear of sudden loud noises or other mental
308 problems that diminish a dog's quality of life. It is plausible that the mentally healthiest dogs
309 will be found in populations that either regularly go through mentality assessments of some
310 kind or are bred to perform certain tasks that require mental stability.

311 It would thus seem as if we ought to abandon almost all purebreds and all mutts and focus
312 all our breeding efforts on a tiny population of purebred dogs that have shown themselves to
313 be optimal when it comes to wellbeing. As I said, I merely discuss pro tanto 'ought's in this
314 article; it might be the case that what we all things considered ought to do is something
315 different. If we suppose that society needs herding dogs, this might justify breeding border
316 collies (the best and therefore most popular herding dog today), even if it would turn out that
317 they are not completely optimal from a wellbeing standpoint. But this does not take us very
318 far. The need for herding dogs does not justify continued breeding on all breeds with a
319 herding origin such as the other collies, corgis, pumis, Shetland sheepdog and so on. The only
320 way to justify the preservation of *many* breeds seems to be to appeal to flimsier human
321 interests (such as our interest in conformation shows). But things are not quite as they seem.

322 There is actually a dog-related reason *for* the preservation of more than a few breeds. This
323 is the fact that an abandonment of all but a few breeds would severely deplete the canine gene
324 pool. This might, in the long run, result in *more* health problems, and must therefore be
325 weighed against the more short-term wellbeing improvements we would get if all breeders
326 focused their efforts on the very best individuals in the entire species. If we only kept a few

327 breeds, dog breeders would end up facing the same problems as people attempting to rescue
328 species threatened by extinction by breeding them in zoos. Even if we start with healthy
329 individuals, and even if we eventually build up a good-sized population from the breeding
330 animals we began with, the lack of genetic diversity can lead to serious problems in the long
331 run (see, for instance, Nicholas, 1996, p 241). The optimal breeding for wellbeing would thus
332 have to balance direct selection for wellbeing-related factors such as physical and mental
333 health against the preservation of genetic diversity.

334 One way to combine these two considerations might be to first determine as well as we can
335 through empirical means at which point the negative effects of reduced genetic diversity starts
336 to outweigh the positive effects of selection against physical and mental problems. If we
337 assume that this can be done (probably unrealistically, but maybe we can find some very
338 rough estimate), we can then set a threshold for mental and physical problems based on this
339 information, cut individuals below the threshold off from breeding, but allow all individuals
340 above it to mate with each other. There are, however, reasons stemming from canine
341 wellbeing against doing this. The enormous diversity, mental as well as physical, within the
342 canine species, means that it is possible for two individuals who are perfectly fine themselves
343 to produce suffering offspring when their traits are combined in unfortunate ways. For
344 instance, imagine a non-aggressive dog with lightning speed reactions mating with a calm,
345 slow dog who has a good deal of aggressiveness inside her, although it takes a *lot* of
346 provocation for it to show. Since mental traits are affected by lots of different genes (as well
347 as environmental factors), most puppies will probably end up medium aggressive as well as
348 having medium reaction speed. However, if we do many crossings of this kind, it is probable
349 that *some* puppies end up having lightning speed reactions *and* lots of aggressiveness. (This
350 might seem like a problem for the people around the dog rather than a canine wellbeing
351 problem; but I think you cannot completely separate the two, since a dog can only thrive in a
352 good home where she is wanted.) Furthermore, there is the problem of extreme physical
353 diversity in the species. Although no actual research on this matter has been conducted to my
354 knowledge, it is plausible that two very different body types when combined could sometimes
355 result in health problems that neither parent suffered from. For instance, a longish body may
356 be more problematic for a big and heavy dog than a small dog. Unless we have reason to
357 believe that all kinds of body types can be combined with no adverse effects, we ought to
358 adhere to a principle of caution and prevent dogs with great physical differences from
359 breeding.

360 Instead we might combine a threshold with continued pure breeding. Breeds that, on
361 average, fall below a certain wellbeing threshold are abandoned, while we try to improve the
362 wellbeing of the breeds above the threshold as much as possible by pursuing health programs
363 within each breed. However, the importance of genetic diversity cannot justify anything like
364 the status quo. That there is genetic diversity in the entire species does not benefit the dogs as
365 long as said species is divided into small sub-populations that are kept strictly separated.

366 A radical suggestion for genetic diversity is to combine a wellbeing threshold with a
367 loosening up of the nowadays mostly watertight genetic barriers between different breeds.
368 Suppose that breed A and breed B are similar enough to be bred; the resulting offspring will
369 be well balanced physically as well as mentally. The same holds for breed B and breed C, C
370 and D and D and E. Now, suppose that breeders were allowed to mate dogs from each of
371 these pairs of breeds. Breed A and breed E might be fairly different, and breeding an A-dog to
372 an E-dog might therefore be a bad idea, but that would not be allowed either. Genetic material
373 would still slowly drift from A to E and the other way around; with this kind of policy, the
374 canine species would really make use of its genetic diversity. In short, for every breed, a small
375 number of breeds considered to be close enough mentally and physically would be eligible for
376 cross breeding at the breeders' discretion, and there would be overlap between the groups.
377 (Allowing crossing in a manner that allows for genetic material to slowly drift from one end
378 of the species to the other may or may not be combined with a complete fusion of very similar
379 breeds.)

380 With such a loosening of the breed barriers, health programs could be made stricter than
381 they are today. In some national kennel clubs certain breed clubs have health programs stating
382 that, for instance, puppies cannot be registered in the national kennel club unless the parents
383 are proven free from hip and elbow dysplasia. In breeds where deformed joints are common,
384 however, the rules will be more lax, since strict rules would mean that too few animals could
385 reproduce and inbreeding would ensue. The same goes for health problems that are not part of
386 an enforced health program, as well as mental problems; in breeds where the problems are
387 widespread, breeders will be more tolerant of breeding animals with problems. Looser
388 barriers between breeds will thus not only increase genetic diversity but also make possible
389 stricter health programs and health policies regarding physical as well as mental health.³ More
390 genetic diversity and stricter health programs will result in more wellbeing.

³ Obviously, there is a limit to how strict a health program realistically can be. Extremely strict programs would require vast amounts of expensive testing of breeding animals and their

391 **8. Conflicts between wellbeing and breed preservation, conformation**
392 **shows and the production of working dogs**

393 Now that we have seen what we ought to do given the goal of canine wellbeing, what are the
394 conflicts between this and other goals that breeders want to accomplish? Firstly, and most
395 obviously, there is a conflict between pursuing canine wellbeing and the preservation of all
396 dog breeds. From a wellbeing standpoint, we ought to abandon dog breeds. How many breeds
397 we ought to abandon depends on where the optimal balance between selection for wellbeing
398 and genetic diversity lies, but my guess is that we ought to abandon more than just a handful
399 of the very sickest breeds there are – perhaps a fairly large percentage of all breeds ought to
400 go extinct.

401 However, it is important to note that I am now talking about a ‘breed’ as a population of
402 dogs registered under the same breed name in the kennel clubs. In breeds, in this sense of the
403 word, where the vast majority of dogs suffer one or several problems that we know diminish
404 the dog’s quality of life, and where the remainder of the dogs have close family suffering
405 from these problems (and thus almost certainly carry many genes for several serious
406 problems), the individuals of this breed ought to stop reproducing. But sometimes breed talk
407 refers more to a type of dog, recognizable by its looks and/or used for performing a certain
408 task. This is often how one uses the word ‘breed’ when one argues that it is important to
409 preserve various dog breeds since they are part of an ancient and important cultural heritage.
410 When someone says of a certain breed that it is several hundreds or even thousands of years
411 old, she must refer to a type of dog, since kennel clubs and therefore populations registered
412 under a common breed name in kennel clubs have existed for less than two hundred years.
413 Even if the dogs of a certain breed, in the sense of population of dogs registered under the
414 same breed name, ought not to reproduce, we might still be able to find healthy dogs of a
415 similar type and “reboot” that breed from new genetic material. If we understand ‘breed’ as a
416 type of dog then, the conflict between breed preservation and canine wellbeing is diminished.

417 There might still be *something* of a conflict here, if certain breeds-as-types are inherently
418 unhealthy. It is clear that the beauty ideals propagated at conformation shows for certain
419 breeds are unhealthy, but this is often explained away as conformation judges making bad

relatives, and the result might be that almost no dog is considered good enough. But it is, for instance, not unrealistic to breed only on dogs who are free from hip and elbow dysplasia; not if the breed barriers are loosened up.

420 interpretations of the breed standards. However, it seems to me that some breed standards
421 actually do describe unhealthy looks, and in some cases also mentalities that could be
422 detrimental to wellbeing. Still, one might argue that we do not even have pro tanto reasons to
423 preserve dogs according to the breed standards; our pro tanto breed preservation reasons
424 merely concern the preservation of old dog types (since only these can be considered a
425 valuable cultural heritage), and old dog types are never particularly extreme. I will not delve
426 deeper into how much of a conflict there might be between wellbeing and breed preservation
427 when breeds are considered to be types of dogs rather than particular canine populations in
428 this article.

429 Is there a conflict between the goals of producing good working dogs and/or conformation
430 show winners and wellbeing? In general, I do not think breeding for wellbeing will conflict
431 with breeding for good working dogs, since working dogs generally work better if they are
432 physically healthy, not excessively easily-scared and so on. It happens today that breeders
433 prefer to breed a dog with, for instance, moderate hip dysplasia and a good working mentality
434 over a physically healthy dog with worse personality traits, reasoning that it is better to have a
435 dog that works hard for some years and then might have to be euthanized than a dog that
436 never works hard since she lacks the right motivation or talent. However, such a breeder
437 would still prefer a dog with *both* physical health and working capacity, and with loosened up
438 barriers between breeds, such dogs will almost always be available. I therefore think there is
439 not much of a conflict between the goal of producing good working dogs and wellbeing.⁴

440 When it comes to conformation shows, one might think that there is obviously a big
441 problem here. Firstly, there are unhealthy beauty ideals at conformation shows, and secondly,
442 there is research showing a correlation between breeding for conformation and mental
443 problems in dogs (Svartberg, 2003, p 23). However, there are also breeds with sound beauty
444 ideals as well as breeds bred mainly for conformation shows with a generally healthy
445 mentality, as can be seen in the statistics for the Swedish Working Dog Association's
446 mentality assessment test. These facts show that breeding for conformation shows is not
447 *inevitably* detrimental to the wellbeing of the dogs. *Why* some breeds get more and more
448 exaggerated looks while others have stayed the same during the years, and some even have

⁴ Remember that I am only talking about breeding here; when it comes to training methods there might still be a conflict, since it might be the case that benevolent training methods require more resources, better trainers and/or take more time than crueller methods.

449 moved from exaggerated to healthier looks during the last decades or century while the
450 breeders have continuously bred for conformation shows, would certainly be interesting to
451 investigate, as would be the question of why some breeds but not other equally conformation-
452 bred ones have widespread mental problems. Such investigation is probably necessary if we
453 are going to combine conformation shows with breeding for wellbeing in the future, but lies
454 outside the scope of this article.

455

456 After all these arguments pertaining to what dog breeders *ought* to do, we may ask ourselves
457 if my suggestions have any hope of being adopted by dog breeders in the real world. I will
458 leave puppy mills outside of the discussion, since I think such breeders have little to no
459 interest in canine wellbeing, and the only way to change their praxis is probably through
460 legislation. However, many obstacles stand in the way of truly breeding for canine wellbeing
461 even if we restrict our attention to small-scale breeders. As I wrote in the beginning of the
462 article, many small-scale breeders refuse to believe that, for instance, deformed joints,
463 extremely short muzzles or an excessively easily-scared personality cause any suffering in
464 their dogs. And even breeders who do acknowledge these problems often regard the genetic
465 barriers between different breeds as more or less sacred. However, small-scale breeders from
466 Sweden as well as the USA and the UK have often (not always, but often) accepted my
467 arguments as valid when I have laid them out the way I have in this article. Kennel clubs are
468 big and conservative organisations, and some level of pessimism is warranted, but one ought
469 not to conclude that turning my suggestions into praxis is down-right impossible.

470 **9. Conclusion**

471 Most breeders today think that they have pro tanto reasons to strive for wellbeing within their
472 chosen breed, but they also think that it is morally permissible to choose any breed they like. I
473 have argued that this belief cannot be justified. We do indeed have reason to strive for
474 wellbeing, but this implies that we have reason to switch to another breed when doing so will
475 produce more wellbeing in future canine generations. However, this does not imply that we
476 ought to abandon almost all dog breeds and focus all our breeding efforts on a very small
477 number of breeds, namely those that are optimal wellbeing-wise. Doing so would severely
478 deplete the canine gene pool. Instead, the short-term wellbeing improvements that can be
479 made by selecting for physical and mental health must be weighed against the long-term value
480 of genetic diversity. For maximum wellbeing in future generations, we ought to abandon the

481 worst breeds while loosening the genetic barriers between remaining breeds, and tighten up
482 the physical and mental health programs within them.

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