

Confinement of the Living

by Christopher Balmer

People vs. the Animals:

When we think of confinement, automatically prison flashes in our minds: 16 x 9 foot cells, unsanitary conditions, loud noise, loneliness, depression, etc. are all a part of solitary confinement in prison. Mass incarceration strips the freedom of every human being who becomes incarcerated. But what about human behavior that strips the natural habitats of animals across the world? In my eyes, animals have the natural right to enjoy the freedom of life. To strip national forests, build in areas where a certain species of animal reproduces, pollute waterways, participate in illegally killing animals for sale of their parts, and many other unnecessary human behaviors deprive their *natural right* to engage in life. Animals have a certain way of living the same as human beings do. Once anything or anyone interferes with their specific way of living, they are affected in many ways we are cognizant of and other ways that are unknown to us.

The major difference between humans and animals is the ability of the humans to think and decide to make choices that will either result in a positive outcome or a negative outcome. With animals, they know by their instincts the ways they *need* to do things *in order to survive*.

When humans commit criminal acts, they are placed in prison as a result of whatever crimes they allegedly committed. When humans conduct themselves in ways that affect an animal's habitat, some species start to die off. A lot of the times when humans realize a certain species of animal is about to go extinct, they initiate captive breeding in order to replenish their species. They *confine* the animal out of its natural habitat in order to save the species. There are many positives associated with captive breeding. However, there still are the many downfalls of such programs that people need to take into consideration. The same considerations, the pros and cons, of mass imprisonment also need to take place as well.

Solitary Confinement and Captive Breeding:

Due to the mass imprisonment of human beings, solitary confinement has become an issue. Solitary confinement is designed to punish the inmate, restrict his movement and privileges for any infraction of institutional rules and regulations. Abuse occurs, suicide takes place. The denial of natural rights and constitutional rights are a lot of the times stripped from the prisoner. They are denied access to rehabilitation, retaliated against, denied social interaction and at times murdered. The psychological pressure associated with solitary confinement has caused a person to play with feces and urine, cut themselves, attempt suicide, develop a negative outlook on authority figures. Everyone is "the police". They label all with a gray shirt as "evil", "the oppressors", "modern day slave masters". and a lot of other counter-productive things take place.

But again, as a result of human behavior, these things take place and continue to take place and will always continue to take place if human behavior doesn't change. A lot of the times a person's behavior places him in situations that tend to harm him. Is it right for a prison guard to deny you your meals when you are standing up for your rights? NO! But is it okay for the prisoner to throw feces on the guard who denied him his food? NO! The same way the prison guard had the choice to take alternative measures of handling the situation is the same way the inmate had a choice to take alternative measures as well. But both refused to do so. Who is wrong and who is right?

There are proper ways to stand up for what is right and what you are entitled to without destroying your credibility or endangering others. Once a prisoner reacts to a negative situation with a negative action, no longer can that prisoner say he is right. Now the situation becomes a problem for the prisoner. All the credibility he had is now gone. Now the prison officials can justify why they did what they did by showing the public, "Look what the prisoner did to one of our prison guards." The odds are against a person in prison from the start. Off of your negative behaviors, the Department of Corrections can paint the picture that the guard who violated you is innocent and the public will believe it simply because of your negative behaviors.

I am not saying that a prisoner should sit there and allow someone to treat them like a barbarian and deny them their rights. What I am saying is that there are alternatives to handling situations that don't involve behaving in a negative manner.

Captive Breeding:

Due to human behavior, animals are at times forced to be confined in zoos in order to replenish a species in order to keep the species from plunging into extinction. Many captive breeding programs, in my opinion, lowers fitness by allowing the animal to rely on humans for care. As Robert Loftin made note of in *Ethics on the Ark: Zoos, Animal Welfare and Wildlife Conservation* written by Bryan G. Norton et al.

Captive rearing lowers fitness by pampering animals with easily available food and protection from predators, parasites and disease so that the process of natural selection is disrupted. Animals that are produced have a lower level of fitness compared to animals reared in the wild, thus the fitness of the species is lowered overall. Hence, the species has a better chance if it is left alone in the first place. Captive breeding may produce a higher number of animals in terms of simple numerical count, but since these individuals are less fit to survive in the wild, the net effect may be harmful on the whole.

With the above being expressed, let's take a look at the prison system in terms of lacking proper methods of rehabilitation. Without a system improving around health, reintegration methods of prisoners back into their society lowers a lot of the prisoners' ability to properly live. Those locked in solitary confinement for long terms without the availability of participating in groups and certain programs increases the risk of recidivism. Re-entry in prison is even higher.

The promotion to the public is that prisoners confined in the custody of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections will receive rehabilitative services to provide an opportunity for those in custody to become law-abiding citizens. Solitary confinement is a part of the prison system. There is no reason why the same programs in population cannot be offered to those prisoners who are locked in solitary confinement. Bed space in the Special Management Units (SMU) and the Special Needs Units (SSNU) are limited. Not every prisoner will benefit from these programs and not every prisoner in solitary confinement qualifies for specialized programs such as SMU or SSNU.

The restrictive housing units are designed to sanction prisoners for misconducts. The punishment for such misconducts is 30 to 90 days in the restrictive housing unit. Punishment should not be a deprivation of rehabilitative opportunities. Once the Department releases someone from solitary confinement directly back into society after years of isolation is not healthy for the prisoner, society, or the entire credibility of the Department of Corrections.

Therefore, when we view confining the living, no matter for what reasons, we all must look at the downfalls of such confinement. The chances of such confinement being counter-productive in the future is high. There are downfalls with everything we as humans do. When we make the right decisions that ends up benefiting others, people view us as a whole as people who think before we act in order to make our world a better place.