

APES AND ABORTION

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For many decades, Steven Wise has been promoting the rights of apes. To be specific, he would like to see chimpanzees awarded “legal personhood.” He is most known for championing the Great Ape Legal Project, seeking to represent little King Kongs in court. Last month, on December 2, he got a little closer to his dream: he filed a writ of *habeas corpus* in New York State Supreme Court for Tommy, saying the ape is being held unlawfully by his owners.

Wise credits Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, with inspiring him. Singer also champions the Great Ape Legal Project, and he contends that gorillas should have the same rights as humans. But this is where it gets tricky: he also thinks it should be perfectly legal for parents to kill their children up until 28 days after birth (I’m sure that if he were pressed, he would round it off to a month).

Wise teaches at Harvard and Singer teaches at Princeton. Moreover, they have been awarded titles that tell us a great deal about these Ivy League institutions: Steven Wise is the founder of Harvard’s Center for the Expansion of Fundamental Rights, and Peter Singer teaches at Princeton’s Center for Human Values. Ironically, the Harvard institute dedicated to expanding fundamental rights doesn’t include the rights of the unborn—unborn humans, I should specify. Nor does Princeton’s established interest in human values extend to boys and girls *in utero*. But both Centers are very sensitive to orangutans.

How did we get to this state of affairs? The anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* is upon us, and while more Americans are pro-life than ever before, in many quarters—not just in elite universities—the rights of animals trump the rights of kids.

A decent society will protect animals from abuse, but it makes

no sense to award them rights. Animal welfare is a noble cause, one that St. Francis pioneered, but animals at every stage of life are incapable of exercising responsibilities, and cannot therefore be held morally culpable for destructive behaviors. A decent society will award infants with human rights, a cause first pioneered in history by the Catholic Church; it will also grant rights to human life from its beginning, namely at fertilization.

There is nothing new about animal welfare in the U.S. In 1900, the Lacey Act was passed, protecting bald eagles by making it a federal offense to take, possess, transport, sell, import, or export their nests, eggs and parts that are taken in violation of any state, tribal or U.S. law. No one has ever found this to be controversial; if the goal is to protect a species, it makes sense to do so from the beginning of life. Well, humans have nests and eggs—we call them wombs and zygotes. At least back then they didn't say the birds possessed rights; they simply took preventative measures to safeguard their welfare.

We got to this perverse stage where human life is devalued, and animal life is overvalued, when rights mania gripped the nation in the 1960s. It started with good intentions: the civil rights movement, led by Rev. Martin Luther King, was long overdue. But in its wake came a never-ending series of demands, including rights for prisoners, delinquents, miscreant students, and illegal aliens. Abortion was illegal, but feminist stirrings to legalize it had begun; in 1973, they won. Two years later, Singer's *Animal Liberation* was published. The timing was not coincidental.

Unborn kids lost not because they cannot represent themselves; neither can chimps. No, they lost because rights mania was tied to the cultural celebration of narcissism: self-centered women, and especially single men, want sex without consequences, and that means a preference for abortion-on-demand. It also suits their self-absorption to comfort themselves with pets. That is why women with kids in strollers

are an uncommon sight in cities, but men and women walking their dogs—or those paid to walk them—is so common.

In 2001, Wayne Pacelle, senior vice president of the Humane Society, stood up for the rights of pigs. It was one thing for him to say that pigs deserve more space to move around, but it was quite another to learn that he invoked human values. “Emotionally,” he said, “they experience severe boredom and emotional trauma.” That’s exactly how I feel when watching MSNBC, but I’m able to get over it. So can Porky.

Forgive me for sounding cynical, but just a few years ago I debated an official from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) on CNN. I asked her how she could pretend to be interested in animals when it is an indisputable fact (see the report by the Center for Consumer Freedom) that PETA kills 95 percent of the adoptable pets in its care. She refused to answer, even though I pressed her a second time.

Don’t get me wrong. Personally, I love dogs. But I also love children. We should be able to attend to the needs of dogs while at the same time protecting the rights of the unborn. It’s not a zero-sum game. But if Tommy gets human rights, I hope the big ape takes my place the next time I’m called for jury duty.