

Wesley J. Smith on the Antihumanism of the Animal Rights Movement

By Paul Marrone

The American Freedom Alliance launched their Fall “Literary Café” Series on Wednesday evening, September 15 at a private home in Brentwood. The speaker, Wesley J. Smith, discussed his latest book on what has become for many a troubling and disturbing ideology. Titled *A Rat Is A Pig Is A Dog Is A Boy*, the book explores the antihumanistic aspects of the contemporary animal rights movement. Moderating the event was AFA Executive Director Avi Davis.

Mr. Smith, early in his presentation, said that “everybody agrees animals should be treated kindly.” He distinguished between animal welfare, which he feels is instinctual to most of us, and the new animal rights ideology. The latter, he believes, is a pernicious quasi-religion that has, as its ultimate goal, the undermining of Judeo-Christian and Western values. Citing numerous examples such as the Great Ape Project in Spain, in which apes have been given legal rights shared by humans, Mr. Smith argued that the tenets of the animal rights movement are inherently antihumanistic, declaring no difference between human life and animal life.

“Species distinctions are regarded as racism,” he said in referring to the animal rights concept of “speciesism,” a term popularized by Peter Singer, the renowned Australian professor and bioethicist. Mr. Smith briefly discussed Singer’s philosophy to illustrate certain precepts that are central to animal rights ideology. “Singer is a strong proponent of animal rights, believing that animals must be given equal consideration to humans,” he said. Of Singer’s view on sentience and human worth, he noted that the famed professor classifies certain humans that are believed to lack sentience as “non-persons” holding less intrinsic value than others. In this non-person category would include one-year old infants and those that have lost certain mental capabilities, as in the case of Terry Schiavo. (At present, Singer holds the most prestigious bioethicist post in the world at Columbia University.)

Other examples of antihumanistic assaults by leaders in the animal rights movement, according to Mr. Smith, include recent developments in Ecuador, Brazil, Switzerland, and the United States. In Ecuador, the constitution now equates the rights of nature with those of human beings. A chimpanzee was recently given a writ of habeas corpus in Brazil. Switzerland recently declared the intrinsic value of plants in its constitution, the reason being that plants share the same molecules as humans. And in the United States, many lawsuits have been filed by

animals, i.e., animals are said to have “animal standing,” giving them the right to sue. There are numerous court decisions already on the books pertaining to the issue of “animal standing.”

The speaker offered recent examples of terrorist activity by radical animal rights activists, including the case of Arthur Rosenbaum, a prominent eye surgeon at UCLA. Rosenbaum was targeted by animal rights activists in 2007 for what they believed to be his wrongful and unethical involvement in animal research. To that end, they planted a bomb underneath his car, which fortunately failed to explode. A terrorist organization known as the “Animal Liberation Front” claimed responsibility for the attempted attack. The ALF publishes information online on how to commit arson, and includes numerous autonomous sleeper cells. Along with certain environmental terror organizations, animal rights terror groups are listed as the largest domestic terrorist organizations by the FBI. Mr. Smith also presented the concept of “ancillary targeting,” whereby activists target businesses associated with animal research organizations. A prime example cited was the case of Huntingdon Life Sciences, a British medical research company harassed by an ongoing campaign of threats, intimidation, and blackmail.

Turning to the activities of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Mr. Smith denounced the “Holocaust on Your Plate” project, in which PETA compares the slaughter of six million Jews with dead animals. He presented a pamphlet, published by PETA, which depicts graphic photos of Jewish victims at Auschwitz next to photos of farm animals. Also mentioned were the bizarre comic books created by PETA, whereby mothers dressed in traditional “June Cleaver” attire are portrayed stabbing various types of animals.

Asked where the activists come from, Mr. Smith answered that England is where the most radical animal rights activity is currently occurring. “The activists are young, coming from urban areas and recruited from colleges and universities,” he said.

Mr. Smith presented cinematic references in order to draw upon, in his view, an environmentalist ideology that is similar to animal rights ideology in its antihumanistic elements. He contrasted the original Robert Wise film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* with the new 2008 Keanu Reeves version. In the original film, he explained, the alien lands on earth and tells the people that they must live in harmony together and keep peace or risk being destroyed. In the new version, however, “the alien comes to kill every human in order to save the earth.” Similarly, he continued, in M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Happening*, plants and trees take revenge upon the human race and attack them because of their irresponsible behavior toward the environment.

In wrapping up his appearance for the evening, Mr. Smith summarized what he believes to be the ultimate underlying goal of the animal rights movement. In his view, that goal is intended to break the fabric of Judeo-Christian tradition. He spoke of the movement as “pure emotionalism” that decries any notion of universal truths. For him, it is an avoidance of suffering, rather than the elevation of human dignity, that propels the movement. Ultimately, he sees the fundamental animal rights philosophy as one that vehemently proclaims the wrongfulness of human exceptionalism. As such, he regards the movement as an aspect of modern culture that devalues human dignity and therefore should be of grave concern to everyone.