

Human Ethics and Animal Rights

Rev. Richard C. Eyer, D.Min.
Concordia University Wisconsin

September 2000

Years ago a psychologist friend of mine commented that some pacifists he had met were among the most violent people he had counseled. I suppose anyone who becomes zealous about any cause is in danger of becoming intolerant and potentially violent in defense of the cause. Most recently, it seems that animal rights activists have joined the ranks of the over zealous. I should be quick to add that I absolutely love animals of nearly every kind. I am the product of an upbringing that has enjoyed a succession of forty-five years of dogs, innumerable hamsters and rabbits, a variety of reptiles, tropic fish, etc. I can hardly pass a dog on the street without stopping to pet it. And yet, as fraternal as I may behave with these creatures of God, I do not believe in animal rights. The biblical worldview I live by makes a distinction between humans and animals. In Genesis the revelation from God is that man alone was and is created in the "image of God." Martin Luther speculated a few millennia after Genesis that animals are the "footprints of God" since animals bear witness, by their very existence, to the Creator's presence of earth. In Genesis chapter 2, it is written that Adam attempted to make animals his companions, but found they could not compete with what God had made for him, the human woman, Eve. Sometime later in the history of God's people, the Bible records the command of God to ritually sacrifice animals. Anathema to animal rights activists today, and accordingly, brutal treatment of animals, this action of God intended to redeem mankind through the payment for sins. In time, God himself would take on human form in the person of Jesus the Christ and make the ultimate sacrifice for us all.

The reason for this brief excursion on Animal Rights is that it seems incongruous that even as we freely kill unborn humans made in the image of God in demonstration of "a woman's right to choose," we find ourselves defending the helpless non-human creature whom we apparently value more than an unborn human child. I once had the audacity to approach a woman protesting animal rights in front of a furrier's establishment and asked her, "Does all this mean that you are also against the killing of weak and helpless unborn humans?" If a zealous protestor ever came close to reacting violently to a question, she did. In angry response she made it clear that that was a woman's right, etc.. Christians, as compassionately as they may care about humane treatment of animals (and I do care), must never confuse the status of animals with the status of human beings. There is a holiness God assigns to men and women that God does not assign to any other creature. The psalm says, "You have made him (mankind) little less than God and crown him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Let us be good stewards of God's

creatures, but let us not raise them to the status of mankind, those for whom Christ overcame death.