



Take Them to the Zoo

Update from Jacob Burow - October 2013



Imagine we are at the zoo. Suddenly, a madman rushes in with a gun and starts shooting. Fortunately, Chuck Norris is there and tackles him, but not before the madman fires six shots. The first bullet goes into the bushes and hits the world's most unlucky cockroach. The second bullet also flies into the bushes and kills a possum. The third bullet goes right past you into the gorilla cage and kills Koko the gorilla. The fourth bullet kills a human infant, the fifth bullet kills a human toddler, and the sixth bullet kills a young woman.



How many murders were committed?

(Photo credits, clockwise from upper left: Gary Alpert, Cody Pope, Pierre Fidenci, stock photo, Josh Brahm, stock photo.)

Tim Brahm, a JFA colleague, shares this illustration to help people make sense of equal rights. In a newsletter a few months ago I told the story of ["Greenpeace"](#) in which I used the concept of equal rights to defend the unborn. The reasoning goes like this: Even though we are all so different, we agree that born people should be treated equally, at least regarding the basic right to life. It seems that there must be something the same about us that demands we be treated equally. What is

it that is the same about us?

Perhaps the obvious answer is that we are all human, and that is what the zoo shooting story above is designed to illustrate. Our humanity explains why we should all have the same right to life, and it means that if the fetus is human like we are, then abortion must be wrong.

Sometimes, however, people try to give an alternative answer to what we all have in common. They try to ground equal rights with some other characteristic that born people share but that the unborn do not, thereby justifying abortion. One common example of such a characteristic would be self-awareness. You and I have it, but a fetus does not.

To see the problem with basing equal rights on self-awareness, let us revisit the zoo shooting. Remember we asked how many murders were committed by the gunman? I believe the correct answer is three—the three humans. However, if self-awareness is used as an alternative explanation to decide who "counts," then I still count three, but this time it is the wrong three. I count the woman, the toddler, and the gorilla. Koko is self-aware, but the infant is not and will not be for several months.

What is the Zoo Shooting illustration teaching us? To help us understand the dynamics of this story, we have developed a method for testing any explanation of equal rights to see if it works. There are three

conditions that a good explanation of equal rights must meet. First, does the explanation entail equal rights for adults? Second, does the explanation entail equal rights for infants? Third, does it exclude animals from having the same rights as humans? Of course, I think animals have value and that we should care for them appropriately, but they do not have the same kind of value as humans—they do not have equality with humans.



Here I am explaining the Zoo Shooting illustration to my workgroup at a recent seminar.

Now, using this test, let us try a different explanation for equal rights: *the ability to think* (meaning, to have mental processes).

Condition # 1: Does *thinking* entail equal rights for adults? Well, not everyone has equal thinking ability; if you don't believe me, just go watch a YouTube video and read the comments. So thinking cannot pass the test of the first condition. Any explanation for equal rights must look for a characteristic we all have

equally. Therefore, we would need to modify this explanation for equal rights to *the ability to think at all*. This would be an all-or-nothing property that we all have or do not have equally. This explanation passes the first test: it entails equal rights for adults.

Condition # 2: Does *thinking at all* entail equal rights for infants? Yes. Infants can think at all.

Condition # 3: Does *thinking at all* exclude animals from having the same rights as humans? Here, the explanation fails, because if *thinking at all* is what determines value, then we would have to value most animals the same way we value you and me. That means it would be the same level of crime to kill a possum as to kill a toddler. Most people would agree that this is the wrong answer.

We must continue to be good ambassadors by asking questions, listening, and finding common ground. In that context, I have found that being able to present the Zoo Shooting illustration in conversation is a good way to help people think through why the unborn deserve the same rights that everyone agrees you and I deserve. Thanks for your support of my work, and thanks for your prayers!

God bless,

Upcoming Events

Abortion: From Debate To Dialogue

November 3 – ADD Seminar, Emporia, KS (Outreach on November 4)

November 9 – ADD Seminar, Wichita, KS (Outreach on November 11-12)