



By Dan Becker —

The non-human personhood movement openly declares the Christian worldview as [abominable](#) and promotes a godless philosophy that, as [history](#) has shown, has deadly implications. I had the chance to sit down with an admired leader in this movement, and what I found was truly eye-opening.

An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked. (Proverbs 29:27)

Webster defines the word *abominable* to mean “causing moral revulsion.” Several years ago, I had an opportunity to sit down, one-on-one, with Peter Singer—the DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and a former advisor for [Obamacare](#).

Singer is someone who openly declares the Christian worldview to be “abominable.” In fact, I spent the weekend with an entire body of scholars and left-leaning world leaders in public policy who openly declare Christianity to be the single most pervasive problem they face. I was not prepared for the number of presenters at an animal rights symposium who spoke to the theological underpinnings of my own “abominable” worldview.

I was at Yale University for the Beyond Human Personhood Symposium in December of 2013. I was there to glean insight into how a leftist worldview approaches the job of convincing our culture to accept personhood for non-human actors like elephants, dolphins, great apes, artificial intelligences, and extra-terrestrials. What I found was startling.

Warring philosophies

I was a little surprised to find a modicum of common ground as I observed their intense passion to promote their worldview. I can admire their sacrifice and commitment

to what they hold as the true nature of things, but I was wholly unprepared for the moral revulsion I felt as they described their overall agenda.

They openly admitted that their goal is to “animalize” mankind as just another animal in the zoo we call Earth. Their godless evolutionary pre-suppositions demand this. “Speciesism” was mentioned quite often—(rightly) accusing the Christian worldview of elevating humankind as [created in the image of God](#) and setting humans apart from the other creatures of Earth. Countless speakers decried human exceptionalism and Christianity’s role in promoting a worldview that demoted animals to a status under man’s dominion.

I was struck by the sheer number of references to the early church fathers and various quotes from Christian theologians. This was a crowd who knew their church history and had made a conscious decision to reject the good news of Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection for the sake of our eternal souls. And yes, there was a discussion on ensoulment and the fact that Christians deny ensoulment to non-humans. Again, I want to emphasize how unprepared I was to encounter such a high level of theological content, not to mention that it was all directed at my faith.

At first I thought that, surely, there were those in the audience that might question some of the presuppositions that were being openly proclaimed. Perhaps there was a philosophy student with an inquiring mind who could connect the dots—particularly in the area of relegating man to the same level as other animals, thereby denigrating human life and dignity. Sadly, I didn’t find a single individual in a crowd of a 100 who spoke out against the obvious policy implications that these ideas proposed.

Measuring up

Singer delivered the keynote in the opening session of the symposium. In it he stated that there were a number of innate characteristics that were inherent in any being who was a candidate for attaining personhood. They were:

- Cognitive or phenomenal capacity (pain experience)
- Intentionality of action (free will)
- The capacity to plan for the future
- Self-awareness
- Self-recognition
- Self-interest

It is obvious that many humans do not meet all of these criteria; for example, those who are temporarily comatose or misdiagnosed as being in a persistent vegetative state, those who have temporary or progressive stages of dementia, Alzheimer’s patients, people with mental or developmental disabilities, the pre-born, children suffering a congenital anomaly, and yes...even perfectly normal children through 18 months post-birth. But these classes were not inferred. They were openly acknowledged! Singer declared that personhood can NOT be assigned to these classes of human life.

Singer and the other presenters in the symposium were not just post-Christian, they were anti-Christian in their formulation of a future [utilitarian philosophy](#) that would deliver “the greatest good for the greatest number” by eliminating what Germany in the 1920s labeled “useless eaters.” This view has a profound impact on public policy, particularly in the area of healthcare.

An opportunity to look inside

I have always wondered if our side wasn’t succumbing to a certain amount of hysteria in ascribing to our pro-death opponents certain extreme positions. I had the perfect opportunity to find out for myself.

I approached Singer after the very large crowd of his admirers had left with signed copies of his books. Singer is well-loved and acknowledged as the “father” of the animal rights movement. He is a noted world leader in bioethics. I introduced myself as part of the largest Christian “Speciest” pro-personhood group in the nation. I had his immediate attention.

I asked if we could sit down at some point in the conference so I could ask him a few questions. He was very gracious and said he would like to. He understood that I did not intend to debate his position, but rather, I wanted to verify his policy objectives first-hand. He suggested we meet the following day during the lunch break, somewhere private, so that we could discuss our positions freely.

Due to another conversation with the head of the [transhumanist movement](#) in America, I came into the lunch area a little late. Singer was already seated at a table with a large number of admirers who were seeking his wisdom and encouragement. I ate my lunch alone. He saw me standing over against the wall, and good to his word, he excused himself from the group and made his way over to where I was standing. He said, “Daniel let’s go find somewhere where we can talk.”

As we were seated, I thanked him for granting me this opportunity to get beyond the myth to the man himself. I began by restating his criteria for personhood from the previous evening’s talk and asked him if he was intentional in excluding certain classes of human life. He said he was. He reemphasized that mankind is not exceptional.

I stated that the ultimate goal of the personhood movement was the legal recognition of human personhood and asked, “Is not the legal recognition of non-human personhood ultimately the goal of your movement?” He agreed that it was. “Ideas have consequences,” I stated, and he replied, “They certainly do.” I continued, “Would you [agree](#) that your definition of personhood diminishes and devalues human life and dignity and could have profound implications on healthcare [policy](#)? That it might lead to rationing and denial of service for those classes you have identified as non-persons?” His response was that it is already occurring, that reform is needed all across the healthcare system, and that his definition of personhood would provide a consistent universal ethic for all of Earth’s animals.

My final question was that, given human nature, even if I granted him his definition of personhood with its immediate healthcare policy implications, what would prevent his class system from extending to other classes—the traditional slippery slope argument. He said, “Our open society would self-police the issue, and I am fine with the process.” He thought that our democratic process would prevent abuse. I then invoked history.

I said, “A decade before the Nazis came to power, Germany’s open society advocated for some of the same ends that you have advocated. Within a decade the litany of killing useless eaters had expanded to the mentally ill, blind and deaf children, gypsies, Christian leaders, and Jews.” At that point, Godwin’s law kicked in. Godwin’s law states that whoever brings Nazism into a discussion is automatically conceding their point in desperation, no matter how appropriate the analogy is. He strenuously objected and replied that the society in Germany was not a free society and couldn’t be responsible for Nazism’s extremes. I replied that it was free enough; that the parents of blind children who were exterminated under the guise “of the best medical care Germany could offer” rose in public outrage against Hitler and put enough public pressure on him to end the T4 Action program in 1941. I stated that this was my greatest fear with his position—that once the sanctity of life was demolished as a cultural anchor, the legal protections of personhood, being redefined and lowered to include animals, would deliver a new

human holocaust. He didn't disagree. He merely restated his position with all of its implications.

A dead giveaway

My goal at the symposium was to stay under the radar and observe where these non-human personhood proponents were coming from. I wanted to discern their underlying presuppositions and to see them as persons and not the enemy. I was not there to argue, as scripture indicates that you "answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself" (Proverbs 26:4). Alas, I failed. For probably the first time in my life it was not my mouth that got me in trouble... it was my feet! I had noticed a large number of tennis shoes among this otherwise very well-dressed crowd, but had just assumed that it was the standard uniform for academic liberals. But my feet were shod in black cow's skin! It was a dead give away.

I and my footwear were an abomination in their midst.

Dan Becker is the founder and president emeritus of the Personhood Alliance. He has been a social entrepreneur for several decades and involved in the right-to-life movement since 1979. Dan has been a steadfast proponent of human personhood across the world, including in Israel, the Netherlands, and Uganda.