and-Goliath theme is less dominant here, as Schrag presents a rather complacent David (social science professional organizations) capitulating to an overweening Goliath (IRBs and IRB professional administration).

In chapter 8 the tone of the book changes to one of unhappy resignation to the IRB system. While Schrag recounts some ongoing efforts to resist further IRB encroachment, and gives an entertaining account of recent IRB horror stories, he also presents covert strategies of individual resistance under the appearance of accommodation—strategies for conducting research without review, granting promises in protocols and then breaking them in practice, and—when one’s position is senior enough—resisting IRBs outright. He thus effectively presents a “how to” manual for scholars who want to conduct social science research without capitulating fully to an administrative bureaucracy that is ill-suited to its role and unconcerned with its ignorance but bent upon strident review of research. This change of tone foreshadows Schrag’s message in the short conclusion.

The conclusion neatly summarizes the four phases of review and regulation and recapitulates selected themes—David versus Goliath, heroes versus villains, universal biomedical versus nuanced social scientific review. Schrag proposes that if we know the history of the IRB, we may discover new ways to challenge and change the system to serve better the needs of social scientists and humanities scholars. The reader is left with the sense that Schrag truly hopes that his work will be another rallying cry to social scientists and others, urging them out of comfortable capitulation to a system that is not hardwired to work as it does today.

The book is well worth reading. Take it with you to the airport, the doctor’s office, or the beach. It is easy enough to read in a casual setting. Scholars of the humanities and theology should read it because, while the focus is confined to the fight of the social sciences for recognition in the IRB system, the history it presents is part of the history that all contemporary scholars share. Regardless of our disciplines, we can all learn something about the regulation of our universities and research from this short and fascinating book.

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1Humphrey’s research for Tearoom Trade involved methods considered problematic then and now, such as subject deception (without de-briefing) and misrepresentation of the researcher and research project. Schrag discusses this case thoroughly in chapter 1 of this book.

A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy:
The Human Cost of the Animal Rights Movement
by Wesley J. Smith

Encounter Books, 2010, hardcover, $25.95

What motivates one of the world’s top bioethical thinkers, a lawyer by trade and an accomplished author of works on euthanasia, assisted suicide, and medical ethics, to write a book about animal rights? Pardon the pun, but aren’t there bigger fish to fry? Isn’t investing the time to address the rights of animals robbing him of precious time and work he could devote to the service of man?

As it turns out, defending man is exactly what author Wesley J. Smith is doing in A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy. Human life with its inherent dignity faces assault not only from the medical field but also in new and innovative ways, including in this case a powerful animal rights movement. The
movement seeks to degrade the human person by raising the animal to a human status or lowering the human being to an animal status, thus placing them on co-equal moral footing.

Like the tide that slowly but surely vacuums the sand out from under your feet, Smith sees human dignity eroding daily about us. In fact, a burgeoning animal rights movement potentially poses an even greater danger than the assaults launched in the medical field. The average person who fears himself not scientifically savvy enough to enter the medical or biological debate faces no such hesitation when the debate manifests itself in something the majority of people understand—or believe they understand—the family pet or, perhaps even more poignantly, the food that ends up on their plate.

America has a love affair with its animals. We coddle our cats and dogs. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, three-quarters of dog owners and more than half of cat owners consider their pet like a child or family member. Every state now has a pet cemetery. Pet hotels, doggie day-cares, frequent flier programs for pets, and pet insurance all contribute to the elevation of animal needs to the status of human needs. We anthropomorphize the animal world through movies like Babe, Bambi, Barnyard Animals, and Finding Nemo.

Animal rights activists use this emotional force to advance their core beliefs. But what exactly are those core beliefs? Why are those beliefs harmful to the human person? Is the harm to human dignity simply accidental to the cause of animal rights or, as Smith convincingly argues, is it necessary to it?

To understand the progress such an anti-human movement has made, Smith advises that we start by distinguishing between animal welfare and animal rights.

Animal welfarists are concerned with humane care and treatment of animals, accepting that although they warrant care, animals are not entitled to human-type “rights.”

While true animal welfarists constantly seek better animal husbandry practices, they acknowledge that animals can be used for the betterment of man, in biomedical research, as food, and even for entertainment.

In contrast, animal rightists believe humans should not use animals in any way, regardless of the benefit to mankind. Rightists see animals and humans on co-equal footing. To disregard this co-equal status is to subscribe to ugly “species-ism,” a prejudice akin to racism, by which we unjustly vaunt the human person over his fellow “nonhuman” animals.

Smith’s thoughtful work argues that the distinction is crucial. Animal rights proponents often disguise their work under the banner of animal welfare, enabling them to make astonishing progress in swaying the court of public opinion, gaining illimitable funding and setting legal precedents. Animal activists achieve this by hoisting the banner of welfare and becoming masters of the emotional plea.

Take for example the recently aired television commercials showing animals in distressed situations, principally at the hand of man, which ask the viewer to become a “voice for the voiceless” and contribute to the animals’ healing through monthly donations. The result: animal organizations accumulate hundreds of millions of dollars in net assets, in one case rewarding the CEO with an annual salary of over $500,000!

Such artful solicitation dupes the public into believing it’s performing an honorable work, when in fact contributors may be unwittingly subsidizing the diminishment of their own human status, a status Christians believe is God-given. Supporting the individual rights of animals undermines not only humans’ rights to use animals for food, clothing, medical research, even service to the handicapped, but also the foundational right to claim that man’s dignity is inherently superior to that of beasts.

We arrived at such a philosophically illogical state along a long and twisted road, according to Smith. In the first third of the book, “For the Animals,” he sets the groundwork of animal rights philosophy, describing how adherents make the mighty leap to claim that animals are people too, their baneful tactics, their successes, and their growing efforts to proselytize children.
Next, in part 2, “By Any Means Necessary,” Smith details the illegal activity, thuggish intimidation, and bullying tactics of animal rights organizations. If you envision animal rights activists as peaceful and restrained, perhaps posing nude to boycott fur or meat or at their extreme fringe throwing red paint on a runway model, chapters 9 through 12 of A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy will both enlighten and alarm. Chapter 11 is particularly important for understanding the state of today’s animal-rights-based attacks on human dignity. In it, Smith succeeds in illustrating that the supposed bright line of separation between peaceful animal rights activists and the terrorist wing is actually pale gray. Smith became convinced during his research for the book that although not all animal rights activities devolve into illegal activity, they are all nonetheless part of the same mutually supportive social movement. Supporters of an inherent human dignity cannot afford to compartmentalize them between the tolerably nice and the intolerable not-so-nice.

In part 3 “For the People,” Smith discusses the many ways humans benefit from the use of animals—from medical research to food, fur, hunting, even animal zoos and parks. Then Smith, like a masterful poker player, pulls out his final ace—chapter 18, “The Importance of Being Human.”

This is not only the culminating chapter but the spirit that gives this body of work breath. Without it, the book is simply an emotional response to an emotional plea.

Smith hints at this spirit throughout the book, explaining for instance that only humans are moral agents able to comprehend right from wrong, something an animal is incapable of. In chapter 18 he expounds that, flowing from our moral agency are concomitant duties. These duties beckon us to ponder how well we treat animals. Ironically it is in this very act of analyzing our care for animals that we show our human exceptionalism:

As the only truly moral species known to exist, we alone have the ability to comprehend the grandeur and beauty of the natural world. The elephant is incapable of looking at a cheetah or a zebra with awe. Nor can the cat appreciate the beauty of the blue jay or the butterfly. Yet even small children can appreciate the value and beauty of animals. . . . Perhaps the most important distinction between us and the beasts of the field—as animals were once called—is our moral agency. Only we have duties. . . . Thus, the sow that permits the runt of her litter to be excluded from suckling to the point of starvation is not a negligent parent, while a mother who did the same thing would be branded a monster. The cat that plays with the baby bird that falls out of the nest before consuming it is not sadistic. In contrast, any human who tortured an animal would be rightly seen as pathological. (239)

Chapter 18 is a piercing reminder of the uniqueness of man. In particular, it is a call to rediscover the beauty of the human person, the summit of God’s creative work. It is only man who is made in the image and likeness of God. This truth doesn’t play well in today’s culture, where so many attack the human person under the auspices of “rights.”

As an ethical community, readers of this journal may wrestle with the amount of time and energy it takes to read a book about animal rights. Even simply crafted books such as this—eighteen chapters averaging eleven pages per chapter—can be seen as an incursion upon your time, one readily dismissed if the threat is not perceived as imminent. But animal rightists with their distorted view of man are progressing in profound ways that many people refuse to see. Even as I was reviewing this book an acquaintance of our family died. Her obituary read, “She was preceded in death by her parents as well as her greyhound”! Only later did the obituary mention her deceased husband and lone surviving child.

A Rat Is a Pig Is a Dog Is a Boy might have been a fair work, but with chapter 18 it becomes like the human person it seeks to serve—exceptional!

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