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Kill Knut? The Twisted Logic of Animal Rights Extremists

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The star attraction of the Germany's Berlin Zoo is "Knut," a three-month-old polar bear cub. Knut is popular because he is undeniably cute, but he is also the focus of controversy as well. It seems that some animal rights activists want to have him killed.

From *Der Spiegel*:

Everyone loves Knut. The three-month-old polar bear born in one of Berlin's zoos has become a star in the German capital and has won hearts the world over. Indeed, the exact date of his first public appearance — likely to be made later this week — is the subject of almost as much anticipation as the details of Britney Spears Alcoholics Anonymous love affair. It's impossible not to love the little guy, right?

Well, not quite. Animal rights activists, as SPIEGEL reported Monday, aren't so enthralled with the polar bear baby. They are concerned that Knut, who is being raised by human hand after his mother rejected him, is in danger of losing touch with the bear necessities. Some would like to see him dead.

Why?

"Raising him by hand is not appropriate to the species but rather a blatant violation of animal welfare laws," animal rights activist Frank Albrecht told the mass circulation newspaper Bild, whose front page headline Monday read "Will Sweet Knut Be Killed by Injection?"

Berlin Zoo is allowing Knut to be raised in such a way that the bear will have a behavioral disorder for the rest of his life, Albrecht believes. "In actual fact, the zoo needs to kill the bear cub," he adds.

He's not alone. Wolfram Graf-Rudolf, director of the Aachen Zoo, told the newspaper, "I don't consider it appropriate for the species that the little polar bear is being raised on a bottle." The animal will be fixated on his keeper and not be a "real" polar bear, he says. However he feels it is now too late to put Knut out of his supposed misery. "The mistake has been made. One should have had the courage to put him to sleep much earlier."

Zoo keepers started feeding Knut with a bottle after his mother rejected him. The keepers did not do this in order to tame the bear, but to save his life. Knut is the first polar bear born at the zoo in over thirty years.

Animal rights activists have added an important voice to our moral conversation. In some cases, cruel and abusive practices have been brought to light. In other cases, however, animal rights extremists deny any special status to human beings and thus deny that we should treat animals any differently than we would treat a fellow human.

As stewards of God's creation, we are charged to delight in the animals, and to rule over them. We rightly eat their flesh and use their skins and hides. We enjoy their companionship and find pleasure in the wonders of the animal kingdom. We enjoy a good zoo, where we are all children at heart.

This is the real problem with Knut and the controversy surrounding him. The decision to have a zoo — a perfectly justifiable decision in my view — is a decision to house and care for animals in a way that is surely different from their

natural habitat. Zoos do not allow tigers to hunt and kill zebras, for example. The decision to have a zoo is a decision to face the realities of caring for the animals that are housed and born there.

Furthermore, one clear purpose of zoos is to attract and delight crowds of humans who are drawn by the excitement and pleasure of looking at cute, dangerous, exotic, and famous animals. Zoos dress up their mission statements with passages about scientific study, defending biodiversity, and other purposes — no doubt legitimate — but those do not explain why people are buying tickets to get in.

Animal rights extremists undercut their own message when they call for killing little Knut. The German public is nuts about him. Knut is cute — no doubt about that. This controversy should remind Christians of our responsibility to the animal kingdom.

In addition, we should remember that human beings are alone created in God's image. Knut reflects the glory of God in his beauty, but the bear has no consciousness of this fact.

For Christians, a trip to the zoo is an exercise in observing the wonder of God's creation — and in imagining the Creator's delight in each animal. As for this little polar bear, let's hope the animal rights activists don't have their way. Don't kill the bear.

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