

## Rights of rational beings who are not human

By PETER SINGER

MELBOURNE — On June 25, in a historic vote, the Spanish parliament's Commission for the Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries declared its support for The Great Ape Project, a proposal to grant rights to life, liberty and protection from torture to our closest nonhuman relatives: chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans.

Other countries, such as New Zealand and Britain, have taken steps to protect great apes from harmful experimentation, but no national parliament has declared that any animal could be a person with rights.

The resolution, which the full parliament is expected to adopt, directs the Spanish government to promote a similar European Union-wide declaration. It also calls on the government to adopt, within a year, legislation to prohibit potentially harmful experiments on great apes that are not in their interests.

Keeping great apes in captivity will be allowed for purposes of conservation only, and then under optimal conditions for the apes. Moreover, it recommends that Spain take steps in international forums and organizations to ensure that great apes are protected from maltreatment, slavery, torture, being killed and being made extinct.

Paola Cavalieri and I founded The Great Ape Project in 1993 to break down the barriers between human and nonhuman animals. Researchers like Jane Goodall, Diane Fossey and Birute Galdikas have shown that great apes are thinking, self-aware beings, with rich emotional lives, and thereby prepared the ground for extending basic rights to

them.

If we regard human rights as something possessed by all human beings, no matter how limited their intellectual or emotional capacities may be, how can we deny similar rights to great apes, who clearly surpass some human beings in their rationality, self-awareness and emotional bonds with others?

To do so would be to display a prejudice against other beings merely because they are not members of our species — a prejudice we call speciesism, to highlight its resemblance to racism.

The Great Ape Project seeks to change the way we think about great apes, and ultimately, about animals in general. The Spanish resolution marks the first official acceptance of that view.

The use of the term "slavery" in relation to something that it is wrong to do to animals is especially significant, for until now it has been assumed that animals are rightly our slaves, to use as we wish, whether to pull our carts, be models of human diseases for research, or produce eggs, milk or flesh for us to eat. Recognition by a government that it can be wrong to enslave animals is a significant breach in the wall of exclusive moral significance we have built around our own species.

While Spanish parliamentarians were sympathetically considering the rights of animals, 10 leaders of lawful animal-welfare organizations were beginning their fifth week in prison in Austria. At dawn on May 21, police burst into 23 separate locations, roused people from their beds, put guns to their heads and forced one leader of an animal-welfare organization to stand in a public place in his underwear for two hours. They seized computers and files, disabling the animal-rights movement as it was on the eve of launching a new initiative to enshrine the protection of animals in the Austrian Constitution.

The 10 arrested leaders are being held without charges or specific allegations made against them under a law aimed at members of criminal organizations such as the mafia. The police have

presented no evidence that any of those arrested were involved in violence. Yet a court has now remanded all 10 to be held in prison until September.

After 17 days in prison, three people were accused of threatening a press officer for a fashion store by hindering her from driving away. Another, Martin Balluch, has been given a 1,500-page police file to justify his arrest. In the file, his name is mentioned only three times, all in connection with interviews he gave to the media or articles he wrote.

Ironically, Balluch, a brilliant man with doctorates in both physics and philosophy, is one of the foremost spokespersons in the worldwide animal-rights movement for pursuing the nonviolent, democratic road to reform.

In an essay he wrote for "In Defense of Animals," a book I edited that appeared in 2006, he wrote, "No realistic level of guerrilla attacks of the kind carried out by the Animal Liberation Front could have hurt the battery farming industry as much as the new Austrian law does."

In recent years, Austrian animal-welfare organizations have been remarkably successful in persuading voters and legislators to support laws phasing out cages for egg-laying hens, cages for raising rabbits for meat, and raising animals for fur.

As Balluch writes: "A law banning a whole industry does far more economic damage to the animal abuse industry than anything else the animal movement could do."

The police persecution of the animal movement appears to be an attempt by the conservative party, which controls the Ministry of the Interior, and its animal industry supporters to strike back at a legitimate, peaceful challenge to the way we treat animals. That this can happen in a European democracy is shocking.

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