

Captive Elephant Contrary to Christian Ethics, say Theologians

Two theologians have filed an amici brief in defence of “Happy” the elephant who has been kept in solitary confinement for 13 years.

OXFORD, UK, May 20, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Two theologians have filed an [amici brief](#) in defence of “Happy” the elephant who has been kept in solitary confinement for 13 years.



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Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey

Their brief argues that we have a moral duty rooted in Christian theology to legally recognize “Happy”, as a “person” entitled to habeas corpus relief. This would mean that Happy would be released to a new home in an animal sanctuary.

The theologians, Professors Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey, who direct the [Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics](#),

have filed an amici brief in defence of “Happy” that was presented to the Court of Appeals of the State of New York (case number: 2020-02581). The case is being brought by the [Nonhuman Rights Project](#) and the proceedings began this week.

They argue that “As humans we often behave as though the dominion we have over nonhuman animals sanctions us to treat them as commodities with no individual rights – a notion wholly unsupportable by Christian theology. The God-given dominance conferred upon humans over nonhuman animals should instead be interpreted through Christ himself, who exercised his influence in the form of service to others.”

They continue, “Christ’s selflessness, generosity and altruism should frame our own models of behavior, especially with regard to sentient beings capable of experiencing fear, loneliness, stress and other complex emotions too often mistakenly considered uniquely human. We are the sole species created by God to represent divine love and compassion through service to others, and thus, God has tasked us with the role of caring for the world – a duty that should not be taken lightly.”

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They recall the statement of former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Robert Runcie, who argued that “He [man] must therefore exercise his ‘dominion’ in conformity with God’s will and purposes, not only in relation to himself, but to the whole area of created life. Man is not an absolute owner of the earth which he inhabits.”

Runcie argues that we too often mistakenly interpret our dominion as a license to exclusively consider our own interests with respect to nonhuman animals:

“... preoccupation with humanity will seem distinctly parochial. ... Too often our theology of creation, especially, here in the so called “developed” world, has been distorted by being too man-centered. We need to maintain the value, the preciousness of the human by affirming the preciousness of the nonhuman also – of all that is.”

The brief holds that, “Believing God created all beings yet only has an interest in the welfare of one species – our own – is the pinnacle of human hubris.”

“Yet we now are faced with a chance to redeem ourselves. The fact that Happy’s suffering could so easily be remedied by granting her the right to petition for habeas corpus relief further supports our contention that recognizing Happy’s personhood in this context is a moral necessity. We urge this Court to accept Happy’s appeal and remedy the decades of injustice she has so undeservedly endured.”

The full theological basis of the amicus brief will be published in the journal *Modern Believing* in July 2023.

For further information contact Clair Linzey on +441865201565 or depdirector@oxfordanimaethics.com.

Notes for editors

The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics is an independent centre devoted to pioneering ethical perspectives on animals through research, teaching, and publication.

The Revd Professor Andrew Linzey is Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. He has held the world’s first post in theology and animals in the University of Oxford and has been a member of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oxford for 28 years. In 2001, he was awarded a DD (Doctor of Divinity degree) by the Archbishop of Canterbury for his “unique and massive pioneering work at a scholarly level in the area of the theology of creation with particular reference to the rights and welfare of God’s sentient creatures”.

Dr Clair Linzey is the Frances Power Cobbe Professor of Animal Theology at the Graduate Theological Foundation as well as being Deputy Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics.

She is also co-editor of the Journal of Animal Ethics and the Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series, and author of Developing Animal Theology (Routledge, 2021).

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