

Why Cecil The Lion Is Easier To Fight For Than Our Fellow Humans

We've seen lots of commentary on the lopsided outrage over the inhumane death of Cecil the Lion— how the incident has inspired far higher levels of fervor and indignation than the brutal systemic barbarism of the #PPSellsBabyParts controversy or the tragically unjust murder of Samuel Dubose. At first, I was inclined to shrug off this claim, thinking, "You can feel pointed grief about one while still feeling empathy about the other." Or, "the facts of the Cecil case are perhaps clearer to more people." Or, "How can we be sure this imbalance actually exists?" But alas, the social media rants and media (non-)developments of the past few days have only continued to confirm that the reaction we are witnessing is, indeed, stemming from some kind of distorted social, moral, and spiritual imagination. This isn't just about what is or isn't bubbling up in the news cycle. It's about what's brewing, and in some cases, festering deep inside our hearts. Far from being simply an imbalance in attention, the armchair animal rights slacktivists routinely claim that the death of a lion is, in fact, *more* tragic and unjust than the rest – that "animals are different" because they can't defend themselves (as opposed to unborn humans or an unarmed man behind his steering wheel?). They claim that killing an animal via the hunt is somehow *more* cruel than killing babies for the cause of "science" and "progress" or killing a man in his car for the cause of "justice" (i.e. expired driver's licenses?). The irrationality of those arguments is glaring (see the prior parentheses), but even more troubling is the perverse immorality of the philosophy of life behind it. God loves all his creatures and we ought to be careful to care for animals and be humane and faithful stewards, but on matters such as

this, the basic ethical assumption simply can't be humans = animals, or in the disturbing case of those others, animals > humans. Perhaps the more helpful corollary to the Cecil affair is Zimbabwe itself, where Robert Mugabe rules with an oppressive hand, overseeing an authoritarian regime distinguished by greed, torture, bloodshed, and defunct economic trickery. Real human people in Cecil's own backyard are suffering tremendous pain, whether from poverty, AIDS, prostitution, or the severe government intimidation that perpetuates the cycle. And yet it's the particular death of a particular lion that stirs the masses. "Why?" we might ask? Perhaps it's more convenient to care about and confront an incident that doesn't involve our fellow brothers and sisters and the awful things we do to *each other*. Perhaps it's less intimidating to pounce in the frenzy and vent BuzzFeed-induced angst when we're joined by a foaming media mob that's united from Fox News to HuffPo to Daily Kos. Perhaps it's easier to care for a distant lion than the neighbor in our own backyard, who is far more likely to wrong and harm and hurt us, and to challenge the limits of our love and the depth of our selfishness. Any outrage can be "justified," but as our culture supposedly "evolves," our passions appear ever more narrow, ever more disordered, and ever more sourced from dirty, self-indulging, self-serving streams. For whatever reason, it's easier for us to elevate the dignity of a lion than it is to recognize, protect, and praise the dignity of a man, woman, and child, regardless of his or her country, class, race, age, criminality, or self-construed "viability." We are created and called to be image-bearers of God, and to defend the image and dignity of our neighbors – to love, affirm, and relish their beauty, worth, and transcendent destiny. We should let that be the primary driver of our care, concern, and stewardship. Who knows. If we would stop averting our eyes from the hunting of humans, the excessive pursuit of lions may just take care of itself. *Reprinted from the Acton Institute.*

