

How far should society go to protect animals from abuse and exploitation? Are they also endowed by their creator with "certain unalienable rights"—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? **According to CNN reporters Yan and Cuevas (2013), attorneys for the Nonhuman Rights Foundation** argue that captive animals that are “cognitively complex, autonomous beings,” such as chimps, whales, and dolphins, should have the protections of “legal personhood.” Foundation attorneys have filed suit against the owners of six chimps they believe are being held captive in exploitive or abusive environments. The animal rights group relates the way animals are owned and used against their will to the way a class of human beings were once held in slavery—who, slave-owners argued, were something less than human and therefore should not be granted human rights. While not going so far as to define chimps and other higher-thinking animals as human beings, the group does argue that nonhuman beings that have the intellectual capacity to be "self-aware and autonomous" and can choose how to live and should be granted personhood status under the law. **As the foundation attorneys pointed out**, if an entity as nonhuman as a corporation can file for legal personhood, it would seem that a living being also should be able to claim legal protection from harm. *The foundation makes sense. To be more sensitive to the interests of a business than those of a thinking, feeling being would show that we place our values in things, not life.*

References

Yan, H., & Cuevas, M. (2013, December 3). “Chimps should be recognized as ‘legal persons,’ lawsuits claim.” *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/03/us/chimpanzee-legal-person-lawsuits/index.html?iref=allsearch>