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Racism, Speciesism, and the Argument from Analogy: A Critique of the Discourse of Animal Liberation

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ABSTRACT *Peter Singer's argument against 'speciesism' has served as the theoretical foundation for the modern animal rights movement. His argument is that the wrongs we do to animals are analogous to those committed against marginalized humans; that if we are opposed to one, then we should also be opposed to the other. Despite the argument's popularity, those historically oppressed groups to whom animals are compared have been critical of it, perceiving the analogy as dehumanizing. Animal activists have struggled to understand this criticism, arguing that the analogy is only dehumanizing if one believes animals to be inferior in the first place – which is exactly what they dispute. What they fail to realize, I argue, is that the disagreement cannot be reduced to a difference in what one chooses to value. It is, instead, fundamentally conceptual. To be likened to an 'Animal' is something different for they who have never been regarded as 'fully human' in the first place. It is only after animal activists appreciate this – the singular character of human oppression, how it differs conceptually from the injustice that animals can be subject to – that the building of alliances and the work of collaboration can begin in earnest.*

1. Introduction

It has been said that what distinguishes the modern animal rights movement from other struggles for justice is that it is the only one instigated by a philosopher. In 1975, Peter Singer published *Animal Liberation*, a text so influential for those who fight for animals that it is often hailed as its 'bible'.[1] The argument that Singer popularized is simply this: that in our dealings with other species, we humans are guilty of a prejudice analogous to that of racism and sexism – what he called 'speciesism'.[2] Racists do wrong because they, in his words, 'violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Sexists violate the principle of equality by favoring the interests of their own sex. Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species'.[3] In each of these cases, the wrong that is done is nothing more than the infliction of harm on beings that are capable of suffering.

Moved by this argument, Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco in 1980 founded People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the first ever organization devoted explicitly to animal liberation. Known for their relentless pressure campaigns, controversial PR stunts, and undercover investigations, PETA more than any other advocacy group has influenced the tactics and the rhetoric of the animal rights movement on the whole (both domestically and globally). Today, their mission statement reads: 'PETA opposes speciesism, a human-supremacist worldview', thus making clear its debt and continuing allegiance to Singer's ideas.[4]

Nearly 50 years have passed since *Animal Liberation* was published and it is undeniable that many accomplishments have followed in its wake. The movement has grown in size and strength, 'speciesism' is a household term, increasingly broader audiences are being reached through social media and celebrity influence, and (perhaps most importantly) it has become more difficult for companies who exploit animals to operate in secrecy.

And yet, despite all this, it is hard to look around and not come away with a sense that in so many ways the predicament facing animals has either not changed or else become much worse. Consider that in 1975, the yearly average per-capita US meat consumption was 178 pounds per person; in 2018, that number climbed to 217 pounds, an increase of 22%.[5] And because Americans now eat more chickens than ever before, the number of land animals killed for food has increased as well: from 3.34 billion in 1975, to a whopping 9.6 billion in 2021 – a 287% increase.[6] While it is true that plant-based options are now more plentiful, this should not be taken as a sign that abstention from meat is on the rise. Several Gallup polls taken from 1999 to 2023 have in fact reported a steady *decline* in the percentage of the population that adheres to a vegetarian diet, from 6% to 4%.[7] If we look at the state of animal experimentation, the available data are similarly stark. Though it may be that every year fewer animals are being tested on in US laboratories, it is still the case that those that comprise the bulk of this testing are not covered by the already paltry protections of the 1966 Animal Welfare Act. A 2021 study estimated that 99.3% of mammals used in experiments (111.5 million) are rats and mice, neither of which are protected species.[8] It seems then that despite all its early promise, the modern animal rights movement has in many ways fallen short: the goal of total animal liberation is still nowhere in sight.

Whenever a justice movement fails to gain traction, it is warranted to look back with a critical eye to the ideology and the rhetoric that has been passed down. In the case of animal activists, it is evident that they are still in thrall to the same argument against 'speciesism' put forward by Singer in 1975. While I acknowledge and do not wish to downplay the importance of Singer's contributions to this movement, my worry is that, in spite of its many virtues, the framework he developed is now struggling to accommodate new and divergent perspectives, respond meaningfully to urgent critiques, and build alliances with other liberation movements. In what follows, I argue that at fault are certain assumptions, implicit in Singer's approach, regarding what can properly be the subject of moral disagreement about animals. I defend this claim (and explore its ramifications) through an examination of the rhetoric and the imagery employed by PETA in a series of controversial exhibits where the suffering of animals used for entertainment, experimentation, or food is equated to the evils of the African slave trade or that of the Holocaust. I focus specifically on these campaigns not only because they are perfect instantiations of Singer's argument against 'speciesism', but also because they are representative of the tactics still favored by the movement at large. Ultimately, my aim here is to open new avenues for dialogue and collaboration between animal rights activists and those who fight for human liberation.

2. The Argument from Analogy

Beginning in 2003, PETA took to the streets with a traveling exhibit titled *The Holocaust on Your Plate*. Panels six feet high and ten feet wide juxtaposed harrowing scenes from Nazi concentration camps with images of animals suffering in modern-day factory farms. The

first panel features an emaciated Jewish prisoner on the left, and a cow whose ribs protrude on the right; the text reads: 'During the seven years between 1938 and 1945, 12 million people perished in the Holocaust. The same number of animals is killed EVERY 4 h for food in the US alone'.[9] In another panel, rows of hens bunched together in battery cages appear alongside rows of prisoners crammed in sleeping bunks; above it reads: 'to animals, all people are Nazis'.[10] Matt Prescott, the PETA campaigner who thought up the exhibit (and himself a Jew who lost family to the Holocaust), justified the analogy thus: 'The very same mindset that made the Holocaust possible – that we can do anything we want to those we decide are 'different or inferior' – is what allows us to commit atrocities against animals every single day … The fact is, all animals feel pain, fear and loneliness. We're asking people to recognize that what Jews and others went through in the Holocaust is what animals go through every day in factory farms'.[11] But the public was not having it. The exhibit was widely condemned as 'outrageous, offensive',[12] as 'a desecration of Holocaust memory',[13] 'a moral failure', a 'disgrace',[14] and as 'malicious … repulsive'.[15]

In response to the overwhelmingly negative response, PETA dropped the Holocaust exhibit from circulation in 2005 – only two years after its initial release. Nevertheless, the group held faith in the persuasive force of Singer's argument from analogy. That same year, they launched a variation on the same exhibit; only this time the comparison was not to the Holocaust but to human slavery. Audiences were presented with the question, *Are Animals the New Slaves?*[16] The panels now displayed images of captive animals reared for human consumption alongside images of the 19th-century African slave trade. Iterations of this exhibit popped up around the country until 2011. Perhaps anticipating the critiques that had been made of the Holocaust exhibit, PETA representatives now proceeded with a little more trepidation, adding qualifiers such as: 'the goal … is not to equate non-human animals with African Americans, [but] to compare the oppression of certain groups of people in the past to the continued oppression of animals today'.[17] Nevertheless, some found the motives behind the 'comparison' to be disingenuous. 'Once again, black people are being pimped', remarked Scot X. Esdaile, one-time president of the NAACP chapter of New Haven. 'You used us. You have used us enough'.[18]

Even from the vantage point of an organization like PETA, which thrives on controversy, it is hard not to see these campaigns as detrimental to the movement. Though true that negative publicity does often catapult into the spotlight issues that otherwise never would have been talked about, against this one also must weigh the costs that come with increased scrutiny and public disapproval. As we have seen, the analogy deployed to legitimize 'speciesism' as a form of discrimination on par with slavery and the Holocaust was met with anger and contempt. This was especially the case among those groups with whom PETA (ostensibly) was aiming to build solidarity: Jews, blacks, and social progressives who care about justice. The breeding of such resentment is worrisome insofar as it can result in deep and lasting rifts between the animal and racial justice movements – what Claire Jean Kim has called a 'posture of mutual disavowal'.[19] When this happens,

> each group elevates its own suffering and justice claims over the suffering and justice claims of the other group, either partly or wholly invalidating the latter as a matter of political and moral concern. Disavowal, an act of dis-association and rejection, can range from failing to recognize that one is causing harm to the other group to refusing to acknowledge that the other group suffers or has valid justice claims to actively and knowingly reproducing patterns of social injury to the other group.[20]

In the case of the Holocaust and slavery exhibits, a posture of disavowal was evident on both sides: in PETA's uncompromising use of hurtful analogies, in their unwillingness to self-reflect in the face of criticism, and in the complete dismissal of the claims made on behalf of animals by those who were offended. This troubling dynamic is by no means confined to PETA's provocative exhibits. On the contrary, it appears to be a fixture of the animal rights movement on the whole,[21] and it is the widespread usage of the argument from analogy that is largely to blame for it.[22]

If the animal rights movement is to reverse this trend and begin in earnest the work of building alliances, I argue that it must do the following. First, it must recognize that these tactics further implicate it in the disavowal of other marginalized groups. Second, a vocabulary needs to be developed that is simultaneously able to mount a compelling defense of the moral status of other species, and to speak to the differences and the connections that exist between human injustice and animal injustice. If, on the other hand, the discourse of animal liberation continues to be construed exclusively in terms of achieving an 'anti-speciesist' society, I worry that the prospect of thinking up new strategies for collaboration will only be further undermined.

But a change of the sort I am proposing is no easy task. So entrapped have animal activists now become in this framework that often they cannot think themselves out of it even for an instant – to consider a critique or to engage meaningfully with those with whom they disagree. Ingrid Newkirk, for instance, eventually did issue a kind of 'apology' for the Holocaust exhibit, writing that she was 'deeply sorry'. However, this apology was not for the analogy itself, but for having 'caused pain'. Additionally, this was expressed *only after* having lamented the failure of both 'Jews and non-Jews alike' to 'see through the pain and horror of what was done to human beings to agree [with us that] both systems are hideous and devastating'.[23] In other words, Newkirk is suggesting that those who object to the analogy simply fail to grasp the broader argument, presupposing the very point under dispute: that human suffering counts for more than the suffering of animals. Rebuttals like these are common. All of them amount to this: that 'Comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist'.[24] And though they are likely right that many of those offended are likely to hold beliefs that *are* in some way 'speciesist', this does not mean that any unwillingness to 'agree' with the analogy is therefore just a cry of wounded human pride – the clouding of one's judgement by sentimentality.

It is important for us to remember here that the argument from analogy, though rhetorically compelling, is not what is called a 'valid' form of reasoning (i.e. the truth of the conclusion is not guaranteed by the truth of the premises). So, while there could exist some resonance between the suffering of animals in factory farms and the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust, this may well be suggestive of but certainly does not *entail* that factory farms are evil just as the Holocaust is evil. To get to that conclusion, one would need first to establish that whatever makes the Holocaust evil is something present *also* in what we do to animals. And whereas proponents of the analogy will argue that 'suffering' is the relevant feature common to both, here someone could reasonably object that there is more to the Holocaust than just that. For instance, it could be said that what makes the Holocaust relevantly different is the genocidal intent with which it was carried out. And, of course, more can be said here. For instance, one may retort that the attitude of the German public at large was rather one of indifference – in this way quite similar to our attitudes now towards the billions of animals that we kill for food.[25] And so on. And so on.

But this cannot be all that the disagreement is about. If it really just amounted to the claim that the analogy is too hasty, neglecting historical differences, then one would have expected the audience to have reacted with something more like disinterest or mild annoyance rather than with the hurt anger that we did end up seeing. But then what *is* the fuss all about?

Samantha Pergadia offers a different perspective on this issue, suggesting that the 'traumatic potential' of PETA's 'slavery' exhibit arises not from the argument implicit in the analogy, but instead from the mere relating of one image to another. Analogy, she writes, 'does not merely identify sameness and difference', but instead operates 'through amplification and reduction'.[26] Because the two images are presented together in a vacuum (each one severed from its history, its proper context), the juxtaposition will inevitably act with what she calls a 'multidirectional swing'.[27] Though the intent may be to amplify the suffering of animals to the level of human tragedy, there is nothing in the analogy itself to prevent one from reading into it the exact inverse: a reduction of humans to the status of 'Animal' – that is to say, worthless and expendable.

This may ultimately explain why many who belong to historically oppressed groups have interpreted the comparison as dehumanizing – or worse, as similar to those tactics used by the Nazis and slaveholders to justify acts of violence and domination. We should therefore understand the objection as being, in the first place, not so much about which form of subjugation is worse than the other, or even about surface dissimilarities between the two, but more fundamentally about the *significance* of holding together these images of suffering humans and suffering animals.

Though (I assume) unintentional, by comparing racialized groups to animals, PETA's exhibit was in fact perpetuating a trope that has persisted for centuries in Western society. As decolonial thinkers like Frantz Fanon,[28] Sylvia Wynter,[29] and Walter Mignolo[30] have argued, the portrayal of nonwhites as less than human began with Europe's colonial expansion in response to a growing need to justify and sanction the genocide and enslavement of indigenous peoples. The strategy chosen for this purpose was to posit the white race as representative of humanity in its most developed form and as therefore entitled to the enlightened use of other races. Whiteness thus became synonymous with 'The Human', and 'The Human' became a standard against which members of our species could be measured. By contrast, those who fell short of the ideal of European whiteness were reclassified as 'Animal', a category which was just meant to signify that they lacked those value-conferring traits belonging to what was ideally 'Human'. The Human/Animal dualism in this way functions, in the words of Syl Ko, as the 'ideological bedrock underlying the framework of white supremacy'.[31] Racism ultimately 'requires this notion of animality' in order to operate.[32] Keeping this in mind, the true reason for the disagreement should now begin to come into view: given the history and the connotations of the concept of 'The Animal', it may be understandably difficult for those who continue to find themselves treated by society as less than 'Human' to read into the analogy employed by the anti-speciesists anything but the continued reification of white supremacy.

But that cannot be all. Even if one were to allow and get past the fact that the underlying intention *is not* to demean but to push for equality between humans and animals, still it could be reasonably argued that the analogy remains problematic. Because it treats these terms as if they designated *only* biological groupings, it thereby obscures (without erasing) their racial connotations. To accept the analogy on its own terms would thus be to cheapen, make common, the pain of those to whom animals are being equated. There is

nothing else like what it is to be 'animalized' as a human being, someone from an oppressed group may say. Such an injustice is singular, the suffering incomparable.

At this point, anti-speciesists might attempt to collapse the objection, asserting that their framework *does* adequately account for why it is wrong to rank members of our species along the Human/Animal dualism. They may argue that it is really no different from the wrong committed when we assign lesser weight to the interests of nonhuman animals. In both cases, one discriminates on the basis of differences (whether biological or socially constructed) that lack moral relevance. It does not matter then whether one is using the term 'animal' to designate those species other than *Homo sapiens* or as a racist slur; neither is a morally relevant property, and so both are inadequate as a basis on which to ascribe moral worth. What the analogy between human injustice and animal injustice is thus attempting to achieve is the following: first, it makes clear that the nature of our error is the same in both cases (arbitrary discrimination). Second, it encourages us to look past surface dissimilarities to see that both humans and sentient animals are worthy of our consideration because they can feel pleasure and pain. Far from perpetuating the dehumanization of oppressed peoples, the argument against speciesism in fact allows us to better *understand* why such discrimination is wrong.

I believe this line of reasoning is correct, as far as it goes. However, it does not work as a rebuttal to the objection that I have been advancing. What it shows is merely that arbitrary discrimination against animals is wrong just as arbitrary discrimination against humans is wrong. But what this fails to appreciate is that those who object to the analogy are not insisting on a distinction between the two in order to establish a hierarchy between humans and animals, nor are they trying to argue that one injustice is worse than the other. Instead, they resist the equivalence because they believe that the evil of dehumanization goes beyond (is not reducible to) the wrongness of arbitrary discrimination. As Frank B. Wilderson puts it, 'The violence that turns the African into a thing is without analog … This is why it makes little sense to attempt analogy'.[33]

But more than just make little sense, the analogies in question can also *undermine* the experiences of those to whom animals are being compared. The ecofeminist scholar Carol Adams writes about the way this happens specifically when we use such terms as 'animal slavery' or 'the animal holocaust'. Here, the singular experiences of blacks and Jews respectively become a metaphor to describe something that is in many ways different. Though this tactic may succeed in alerting us to the wrongs that are done to animals, those who were originally *the subject* of that injustice are rendered 'absent' in the process (what makes that experience uniquely their own is obscured when it is fashioned into a metaphor). Ultimately, it is *because* such 'terms are so powerfully specific to one group's oppression that their appropriation to others is potentially exploitative'.[34] Exploitative, that is, in that the depth of their experience of oppression is cashed in to advance some unrelated political end.

But why and in what way do human injustices possess a distinct character, making them 'without analog'? To answer this question, it is necessary first to have a sense of what it means to do something *to* a human being. As Cora Diamond writes, 'We can most naturally speak of a kind of action as morally wrong when we have some firm grasp of what kind of beings are involved',[35] as well as a grasp of the relationship that exists between the two parties.[36] Insofar as the moral relationships we may form with those of our own species differ significantly from those we have with any other class of being, the evils that may be inflicted upon them are also going to be of a special kind.

For instance, the political theorist Sharon Krause makes the case that humans are such that they require for their proper flourishing the freedom to manifest their distinctive subjectivity; this in turn depends on their being recognized and accepted for who they take themselves to be.[37] It is thus an abiding feature of human relationships that individual agency is always subject to being undermined by systematic power inequalities and pervasive stigma – impersonal forces that we may call 'oppression'. Because oppression usually operates 'unintentionally and unconsciously … through social norms and internalized habits',[38] it infringes on the individual's freedom differently than that of straightforward discrimination: the 'intentional disadvantaging of others'.[39] What is likely the most pernicious effect of this unfreedom on the individual is what W.E.B. Du Bois once famously called 'double consciousness': to simultaneously see oneself as one authentically is, while also looking 'through the eyes of others … measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'.[40] Thus, under oppression, the constraints placed on a person's agency come not from the outside in the form of physical obstacles or absent opportunities, but rather from within the very psyche of the individual. James Baldwin illustrates the implications of such internalized hatred in this harrowing passage:

> When I was little I despised myself; I did not know any better. And this meant, albeit unconsciously, or against my will, or in great pain, that I also despised my father. And my mother. And my brothers. And my sisters. Black people were killing each other every night out on Lenox Avenue, when I was growing up: and no one explained to them, or to me, that it was intended that they should; that they were penned where they were, like animals, in order that they should consider themselves no better than animals.[41]

This passage is valuable for our purposes not only because it illustrates how oppression works within the individual – denying and debasing their humanity, eating away at their self-esteem, undercutting their agency – but also because it speaks to Syl Ko's claim that at the core of human injustice is the experience of animalization: 'What condemns us [black people] to our inferior status, even before we can speak or act is not merely our racial category but that our racial category is marked … by animality'.[42] She goes on to argue that blacks share in this animality 'by virtue of our perceived and felt "less than" status. The feeling of the lack comes from the animal within … The animal is not separate from our "blackness." It is part of it'.[43]

In contrast, the injustices that literal animals face cannot be of this sort. Ko writes that 'nonhuman animals cannot subjectively experience a lack of humanity … we cannot override their subjective perspectives such that we could program them to suffer what it is like to feel less than human'.[44] This, of course, is not to imply that the injustices they face are therefore any less worthy of our concern.

3. Is There a Respectful Way of Comparing Different Kinds of Injustice?

Though the analogy has proven to be inadequate, I have little doubt that those who have advanced it are driven by a genuine desire to combat the injustice to which animals are subject. As we saw, anti-speciesists have sought to strip the concept 'human' of significance – and, by extension, deflate the special bond we share with those of our own kind – simply because they believe this to be the only way to dismantle the moral

hierarchy that sets our species on top. At the same time, those who have taken offense at the analogy *do* have a point: in equating oppressed peoples to animals, the very same maneuver that has been used in the past to divest them of their humanity is thereby repeated. More importantly, these critics may not be willing to concede the premise upon which the analogy's underlying argument depends – that properly conceived 'human' and 'animal' are just biological categories. First, to accept this would be to obscure the dynamics of oppression – the way that 'The Animal' may conceal within it a racist logic, work to undermine nonwhite agency, and thereby uphold a white supremacist social order under the guise of 'The Human'. And second, it would foreclose a liberatory role for the concept of 'the human' to play outside of a white supremacist framework – the potential that it has, in Syl Ko's words, to 'operate as a reason to treat each other according to a certain standard'.[45] Crucially, as we saw, such a concept is needed to explain animalization as the evil that it is: operating, as Cora Diamond puts it, by 'withdrawing from the person involved some of what would belong to a recognition of him as a human being'.[46]

But if not through analogy, is there any way left for animal activists to make connections between their cause and human injustice or is it the case that by holding them apart the possibility of solidarity and collaboration is thereby foreclosed? I think there is, though doing so respectfully and in a compelling way requires a good deal more nuance than how we saw them crudely equated earlier, as both mere instances of arbitrary discrimination.

First, we may point to their closely linked history. For instance, Karl Jacoby has argued that the forced domestication of animals has served as both the model and the inspiration for the later enslavement of humans,[47] writing that it is 'more than coincidental that the region that yields the first evidence of agriculture, the Middle East, is the same one that yields the first evidence of slavery'.[48] Although the farming of crops and livestock could feed more people on less land in comparison to hunting and gathering, it required significantly more labor. Human slavery thus emerged as an attractive solution, especially because it was likely perceived as 'little more than the extension of domestication'.[49] These societies not only repurposed the master/slave dynamic that had been used in their subjugation of animals, but also the instruments and techniques used to control them: whips, chains, castration, and branding.[50] The same likely holds for the various psychological coping mechanisms that developed to allow for the exploitation of animals without pity or remorse. For instance, sharp distinctions are made between our nature and theirs, cruelty is rationalized as natural and necessary, violence is covered up with euphemism – all of these may have likewise facilitated the transition to a slave society.

Of course, before this manner of treating humans (like animals) could even be available as an option, it was necessary for them to be *conceived* as animals in the first place. Consider how in Sumer, one of the earliest Mesopotamian city-states, castrated slave boys were referred to as '*amar-kud*', the same word used for young, castrated donkeys, horses, and oxen.[51] Or how, by the middle of the 18th century in all the British colonies in North America, slaves were legally considered to be their master's personal 'chattel', or property, a word etymologically related to 'cattle' and used first to refer to animals that were owned.[52] The designation of 'Animal' in this way serves not only as a retroactive means of justifying the domination of humans but also what, in the first place, opens that up as a possibility.

Though the category of 'Animal' may have first been applied to humans to replicate the exploitative relationship of master and slave, this should not be taken to mean, as Zakiyyah

Iman Jackson has written, that the human subjugation of animals is always 'the original and foundational paradigm upon which discourses of human difference, including, or even especially, racialization was erected'.[53] On the contrary, we saw with Europe's colonial expansion that the term 'Animal' is deployed in a different context to serve an altogether different purpose: that of sanctioning the institution of white supremacy. 'The Animal' now is defined in opposition to 'The Human', designating the absence of those traits that (it is claimed) are found in the purest form and highest proportion in upper-class European white males, such as rationality, self-determination, and virtue. Defined in this way, the concept of 'The Animal' depends for its meaning *not* on our relationship to actual animals, but on what is held to be 'ideally human'.

However, this is not to say that the concept of 'The Animal' therefore has no impact on how we treat other species. On the contrary, Syl Ko argues that because the Human/Animal dualism has become so pervasive in our society, by extension 'nonhuman animals are raced and we should understand their subordination as a racial phenomenon'.[54] If this is true, it implies that the subjugation of animals at least partly serves the purpose of enforcing the separation between 'The Animal' and what is properly 'Human'.

Human injustice and animal injustice in this way overlap and reinforce each other in at least two significant ways. First, our massively successful and largely unquestioned enterprise of animal exploitation serves as a precursor to the many atrocities committed against our own species, providing us not only with a model to replicate, but also with a language that, when used metaphorically to talk about humans, is able to sanction violence. Second, the very same prejudices that underlie the oppression of humans – deemed 'Animal' – also contribute to our disdain (or dismissal) of literal animals. In practice, both serve as foils to 'The Human'.

In turn, these connections have significant tactical implications for both human and animal liberation movements. So long as animals remain the sort of beings that are routinely maimed, tortured, and killed without justification, pity, or remorse, animalizing humans will prove an effective strategy for their dehumanization. So long as white supremacy divides the world into what is 'Human' and what is not, other species will be subordinated along with other races – all in order to set up a contrast between those at the top of the value hierarchy and those at the bottom. More generally, we could say that there always exists the possibility that any 'techniques used to oppress one particular group can also be used to oppress another group'.[55] This means that no injustice can be done away with while others remain strong; to be effective at dismantling any, all must be addressed in tandem. It is only then that it will be possible, as Bénédicte Boisseron puts it, to 'expose a system that compulsively conjures up blackness and animality together to measure the value of existence'.[56] This is an approach that Claire Jean Kim has termed an 'ethic of mutual avowal'. It consists, in her words, in 'recognizing the connectedness of multiple forms of domination and acting against them in concert'.[57]

But here one may reasonably wonder: why do animal advocates, so keen on drawing analogies between their cause and those of oppressed humans, fail to speak to these deeper underlying connections? One may be inclined to suspect, especially given their tolerance for racist imagery in their own movement, that their relationship to human struggles for liberation is merely one of expedience. Not so much a desire to combat each form of injustice on its own terms while searching for strategies that address all of them at once, it might seem that their interest lies rather in riding on the coattails of movements that have enjoyed greater social uptake. As Kim writes:

> Analogizers claim to be connecting and avowing, but in many cases they seem to be instrumentalizing the other cause in question or treating it as a means to an end. The analogizer does not connect x and y in the sense of exploring them as independently significant and conjoined logics. Rather, concerned to validate x, which is her true focus, the analogizer seizes upon y, which already enjoys some measure of social validation, and posits x = y.[58]

Perhaps it is this suspicion that has in turn led to the widely shared belief that animal activists are in fact disingenuous when they claim to care about human struggles for liberation. Speaking of her own experience, Syl Ko confirms that those most eager to present:

> crudely drawn and elementary images or analogies of oppression … many times are the same people who tend to be dismissive of or resistant to views in which animal oppression and human oppression are thought about together and in the same spaces with the aim of taking to task racism, sexism, speciesism, ableism, and so on – or coloniality in general – in tandem.[59]

This leads her to conclude that 'most animal activists don't really believe it' when they say that animal and human injustice are inextricably linked.[60] For them, it is just a convenient rhetorical device deployed to advance a political end.

While I would grant that in practice animal activists seldom are seen advancing other causes in tandem with their own or speaking meaningfully on the deep connections between animal and human injustice, I admit that I am not entirely convinced that this is simply because they are disingenuous, that their claim to care about injustice in every form it takes is really just pretense, and that covertly they are prioritizing their own cause at the expense of all others. Even with PETA this seems to me unlikely. While it is almost certain that their tactics (PETA's in particular) have contributed to the deepening rift between animal and racial justice movements, still I am inclined to take anti-speciesists as fundamentally sincere when they state that their hope is to forge alliances with other liberation movements, practically and theoretically. But then why have they failed to achieve this? I believe it is fundamentally because their language does not let them. I mean that the concepts at their disposal – that of 'speciesism' and 'discrimination' and 'the principle of equal consideration of interests' and the rest – can neither capture what is distinctive about human oppression nor permit them to formulate the deep connections between racial and animal injustice even as a possibility. As a result, they have struggled to integrate advocacy for marginalized humans into their usual programming without thereby cheapening it, or prompting fierce backlash.

At the same time, I acknowledge that what counts is not just a movement's rhetoric, but their actions too: what they stand up for, throw their weight behind.[61] By this measure, animal activists have also been seriously lacking.[62] However, I take this predicament to be yet another symptom of a posture of mutual disavowal. Many radical vegans that I associate with routinely express dismay over the way that other justice movements systematically dismiss the plight of animals and disparage those who fight for them. The logic then goes: if they do not care for our cause then why should I for theirs? Again, the problem here is, first, that the underlying links between these two forms of oppression are going unnoticed and so the *conceptual necessity* of collaboration is not fully being felt; and second, that all the prior, fumbling attempts at articulating the common root of injustice by animal activists inadvertently served to alienate precisely those they most hoped to convince.

Thus I contend that the infrequency with which animal activists have fought under the banner of other justice movements is also at bottom a product of their impoverished vocabulary.

4. Being Limited in One's Vocabulary

The concept of 'speciesism', we have seen, serves as a moral framework within which an agent's relationship to nonhuman animals may be assessed. Specifically, in Singer's words, it allows us to identify in certain patterns of behavior a 'prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species'.[63] If we then move from speciesism to consider the wrongs done to marginalized humans, these may well appear to us cast in the same mold: that is, consisting of discrimination against individuals on the basis of differences that do not actually matter.

Against the objection that there is something morally significant about the bare fact of being human, anti-speciesists will declare that whatever difference may exist, we are all nevertheless the same in the only way that matters: we are sentient. Insofar as animals share with us this capacity to suffer, we have just as good a reason to take their interests into consideration as we do the interests of other humans. And if humans and animals can be seen in this way as morally equivalent, now we are permitted the satisfaction of turning to other so-called 'progressives' to accuse them of hypocrisy. The argument, writes Diamond, will amount only to this: 'knee-jerk liberals on racism and sexism ought to go knee-jerk about cows and guinea-pigs'.[64]

Implicitly, what is being said is that whenever one opposes any injustice, what one is doing is merely endorsing the principle of equal consideration of interests. As a result, it does not matter who the victims of the injustice happen to be. Because all injustice is an instantiation of the same logic, to take a stand against one is to take a stand against all. In this way, anti-speciesists take themselves to be advancing the causes of marginalized humans when they fight for animals. And this is why, though one may accuse them of instrumentalizing the suffering of oppressed groups for the sake of animal liberation, they will be unable to see it as such.

The problem then is not that anti-speciesists do not care about human injustice, but rather that they unknowingly trivialize it.[65] Yes, it is true that the fact of our sentience works as a reason for why I ought not to cause another human being physical injury; however, there are other kinds of wrongs that can be inflicted on our kind that cannot be fully explained in terms of the suffering experienced as a result. For instance, it cannot account for the wrongness of depriving a newborn of a name (instead giving them a number), a child of a birthday party, the deceased of a funeral, or (to use the example from before) withholding from another a recognition of who they truly are (take themselves to be). Arguments like Singer's that establish equivalency by erasing the significance of the human bond will be unable to account for obligations like these that are only plausibly held between members of our own kind. Inevitably, those to whom the argument is addressed will be left feeling, as Diamond puts it, 'that beyond all the natter about "speciesism" and equality and the rest, there is a difference between human beings and animals which is being ignored'.[66]

Ultimately, what the doctrine of anti-speciesism makes it difficult to see is that acknowledging there to be a morally significant difference between humans and animals is not

necessarily the same thing as establishing a hierarchy wherein the interests of one group are placed above the interests of another. We have seen that this difference is worth holding onto partly because it allows us to distinguish the conceptual mechanism that sanctions the subjugation of animals from that which sanctions the subjugation of humans. To understand either injustice one must first consider the imaginative process whereby each comes to appear to us as unworthy of the sort of response that would typically be considered appropriate.

Moreover, it is only in view of this distinction that the deep connections that exist between the two can then emerge. We have seen, for instance, that when humans are not treated as human, it is often because they are imagined instead as 'Animals' (a strategy that makes their subjugation more palatable). Similarly, when one refrains from extending to actual animals the moral concern that otherwise would seem appropriate, it is possible that this is done to keep separate the domain of 'The Human' from that of 'The Animal' (thereby upholding the imagined supremacy of whiteness). What these examples help demonstrate is that one's prejudices are often a product of the concepts that one draws on, implicitly, to make sense of the world. And, to the extent that this is so, a prejudice is not like an attitude that is consciously chosen, but more like an invisible background against which one thinks and acts.

Anti-speciesists, by contrast, adhere to a much simpler account of what prejudice consists in. For them, it is merely a matter of ascribing greater value to what is at bottom a biological category of no moral relevance. According to this view, determining whether someone holds a species bias requires only that one compare how their choices impact animals versus humans. If humans are systematically favored over animals, we may then infer from their actions that they believe in the moral superiority of the species *Homo sapiens*. The appeal of this technique has to do with the relatively straightforward way that it portrays the task of convincing others with whom one disagrees. In order to be understood (and to make a persuasive moral case) one need not imagine oneself into the perspective of another, working with the concepts internal to their thought. Instead, one can just infer from patterns of behavior what another person's principles are, look there for contradictions, and (if some are found) leverage this against them. But now we must ask ourselves: what is lost in the process?

What anti-speciesists lose, first of all, is an ability to understand and engage meaningfully with those who do not share their concepts and are therefore not moved by their arguments. We saw this happen when the anti-speciesists misconstrued the opposition to the use of analogies between human oppression and animal exploitation. They believed it was because those who objected to the analogy assumed the very thing that was being called into question (that humans are superior to animals), whereas it was in fact a difference in how the analogy was interpreted (as dehumanizing historically 'animalized' groups). Similarly, one may be tempted to reduce 'animalization' to being, at bottom, an instance of arbitrary discrimination equivalent to discrimination against animals. But, as we saw, categorizing a person as 'Animal' involves more than just pointing to some irrelevant fact like skin color and declaring, 'They count for less!'; it is to imagine a racialized other as devoid of what is assumed to be properly 'Human'.

What these examples help demonstrate is that when we disagree it is not because we choose to value the same objects differently, but because we make use of an altogether different set of concepts and, as a result, we do not have access to the same objects to begin with. Anti-speciesists are not able to account for this dimension of disagreement insofar as

they limit themselves to concepts defined only in accordance with their pre-established public use, serving no function other than that of grouping together the facts given to us by science. What they then become unable to appreciate is the role that concepts may also play in structuring our thought, in configuring the world that we inhabit, and ultimately in deciding what things we find of value in it.

Because of the restriction on the concepts that are to be admitted into the study of morality, the argument against speciesism also renders one incapable of forging deep imaginative connections between human and animal liberation. If terms like 'human' and 'animal' are understood exclusively as biological categories given to us by science, then the search for patterns in their use must confine itself to the way they are employed to justify or condemn a course of action. And while similarities may then suggest themselves – for instance, that all discriminations consist in a tendency to prioritize the biological group that one happens to belong to – this comes at the expense of an investigation into the origins particular to each. As the preceding analysis has shown us, it is only *after* accounting for the conceptual differences that exist between diverse forms of injustice that we can begin to identify the ways they overlap and reinforce each other. And *that* is precisely what cannot be done when working within the framework of 'speciesism'.

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NOTES

1 Villanueva, "Bible."
2 Ryder, "Specisimsism Again."
3 Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 9.
4 PETA, "About PETA."
5 Our World in Data, "Meat Consumption."
6 Ibid.
7 Gallup Inc., "In US."
8 Carbone, "Estimating."
9 Kim, "Moral Extensionism," 311.
10 This is a quotation from Isaac Bashevis Singer's "The Letter Writer."
11 Teather, "'Holocaust on a Plate'."
12 Wall, "ADL."
13 Guidos, "PETA Display."
14 *Boston Globe*, "PETA's Latest."
15 *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, "Latest PETA Uproar."
16 Wright, "Another PETA Exhibit."

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*.
20 Ibid., 118.
21 Ibid., for more examples.
22 Zoledziowski, "Vegan Influencers."
23 Newkirk, "PETA Apologizes."
24 Spiegel, *Dreaded Comparison*, 25.
25 Here I am paraphrasing Alex Herschaft, co-founder and president of Farmed Animal Rights Movement (FARM), who writes, 'I don't think hatred is the relevant thing here. I think indifference is the key factor. Because the people who were gassing the Jews were not doing it out of hatred. It was their job. They didn't hate the Jews any more than the slaughterhouse workers hate the pigs' (Isaacs, "Q&A").
26 Pergadia, "Like an Animal," 289.
27 Ibid.
28 Fanon, *Black Skin*.
29 Wynter, "Unsettling."
30 Mignolo, "Sylvia Wynter."
31 Ko and Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 45.
32 Ibid., 46.
33 Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 38.
34 Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat*, 22.
35 Diamond, "Eating Meat," 323.
36 Ibid., 325.
37 Krause, *Freedom*.
38 Ibid., 149.
39 Ibid., 145.
40 Du Bois, *Souls*, 3.
41 Baldwin, "Open Letter," 20–21.
42 Ko and Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 67.
43 Ibid., 68.
44 Ko, "Interview," 11.
45 Ko and Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 114.
46 Diamond, "Eating Meat," 331.
47 Of course, the interconnected history of animal domestication and human slavery is often far more complex than the relationship I describe here (where the former serves as the model for the latter). For instance, as Boisseron makes clear in *Afro-Dog*, it is not always the case that domesticated animals have occupied a status similar to that of racialized humans. Dogs, for instance, were shipped across the Atlantic from Europe into plantations in order to control the slave population and to pursue those that escaped (ibid., 48–58). And whereas slaves were clearly 'property', whether dogs were to be considered such was not as clear (ibid., 50). Nevertheless, even in cases like this, the situation of blacks and animals is similar in that they have both been victimized by the same 'hierarchical measuring system' (ibid., xv) and have all the while fought to 'assert their dignity' in the face of it (ibid., xx).
48 Jacoby, "Slaves by Nature?," 94.
49 Ibid., 92.
50 See also Spiegel and Walker, *Dreaded Comparison*.
51 Mason, *Unnatural Order*, 46.
52 Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, 49.
53 Jackson, *Becoming Human*, 12.
54 Ko, "Interview," 10.
55 Rodriguez, "White Normativity," 92.
56 Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, xx.
57 Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, 201.
58 Ibid., 285.
59 Ko and Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 84.
60 Ibid.
61 I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.

62 With a few notable exceptions, like Lauren Ornelas of Food Empowerment Project.
63 Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 6.
64 Diamond, "Eating Meat," 325.
65 Armstrong, "Postcolonial Animal."
66 Ibid., 322.

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