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**Speciesism, Prejudice, and Epistemic Peer Disagreement**

**Abstract**

Peter Singer famously argues that speciesism, like racism and sexism, is based on a prejudice. As Singer argues, since we reject racism and sexism, we must also reject speciesism. Since Singer articulated this line of reasoning, it has become a widespread argument against speciesism. Shelly Kagan has recently critiqued this argument, claiming that one can endorse speciesism without doing so on the basis of a prejudice. In this paper, I defend Kagan’s conclusion (that one can endorse speciesism without being prejudiced). However, many philosophers have found Kagan’s argument deeply unsatisfactory; so, I advance an alternative argument, different from Kagan’s, in support of his conclusion. My argument runs as follows: I argue that, if there is epistemic peer disagreement about a view, then the parties to this disagreement cannot reasonably label each other as prejudiced in their beliefs about this view. Then, I argue that there is epistemic peer disagreement about the truth of speciesism, from which it follows that the parties to this disagreement cannot reasonably label each other as prejudiced. Thus, one can affirm speciesism without being prejudiced. If I am correct that one can affirm speciesism without being prejudiced, then Singer’s argument (that if one rejects racism, one must reject speciesism) is unsound.

**Speciesism, Prejudice, and Epistemic Peer Disagreement[[1]](#footnote-1)**

 Peter Singer famously argues that speciesism, like racism and sexism, is based on a prejudice. As Singer argues, since we reject racism and sexism, we must also reject speciesism. Since Singer articulated this line of reasoning, it has become a widespread argument against speciesism.[[2]](#footnote-2) Shelly Kagan has recently critiqued this argument, claiming that one can endorse speciesism without doing so on the basis of a prejudice. In this paper, I defend Kagan’s conclusion (that one can endorse speciesism without being prejudiced). However, many philosophers have found Kagan’s argument deeply unsatisfactory; so, I advance an alternative argument, different from Kagan’s, in support of his conclusion. My argument runs as follows: I argue that, if there is epistemic peer disagreement about a view, then the parties to this disagreement cannot reasonably label each other as prejudiced in their beliefs about this view. Then, I argue that there is epistemic peer disagreement about the truth of speciesism, from which it follows that the parties to this disagreement cannot reasonably label each other as prejudiced. Thus, one can affirm speciesism without being prejudiced. If I am correct that one can affirm speciesism without being prejudiced, then Singer’s argument (that if one rejects racism, one must reject speciesism) is unsound.

 Before continuing, several clarifications are in order. First, I am not defending speciesism, nor am I claiming that speciesism is true or justified. Rather, I claim that one can affirm speciesism without being prejudicial in the manner that racists and sexists are. Second, there are many arguments to be made against speciesism; if I am correct that the argument from comparison with racism and sexism fails, there are still numerous arguments to be made against speciesism. Given this, my claim is only that this particularly common argument against speciesism fails. This is consistent with other arguments against speciesism being successful.

**1. Speciesism As A Prejudice:**

As Kagan says, speciesism is “the view…that the interests of our own species count more than the interests of other species.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Or, as Singer puts it, “speciesism…is 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.”[[4]](#footnote-4) To be specific, the version of speciesism under discussion holds that “other things being equal, human interests count more than corresponding animal interests,” meaning that “when given interests that are otherwise similar, human interests get…more weight than the corresponding animal interests.”[[5]](#footnote-5) And, as Singer adds, speciesism involves “preferring the interests of members of our own species *because* they are members of our own species.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, according to speciesism, if I am faced with a mutually exclusive set of choices to stop either a fellow human or a non-human animal from experiencing five identical units of pain, I have a moral reason to prevent the human’s pain rather than the non-human animal’s pain, *because* of the human’s species membership.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In *Animal Liberation*, Singer likens speciesism to prejudices such as racism and sexism.[[8]](#footnote-8) As Kagan puts it, “Singer argued… [that] our treatment of (nonhuman) animals reveals that our attitude toward animals is every bit as much a prejudice as racism and sexism.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Singer repeats this point in a later work: “I use the term ‘speciesism’ deliberately, to make a parallel with other ‘isms’ that we are familiar with, particularly racism and sexism.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Many philosophers have echoed Singer, arguing that speciesism is on a moral par with other forms of prejudice.[[11]](#footnote-11) For example, Jeff McMahan states that “what has been called ‘speciesism’…turns out to be remarkably like racism after all.”[[12]](#footnote-12) And, McMahan elsewhere suggests that speciesism is analogous with nationalism.[[13]](#footnote-13) In short, these philosophers claim that speciesism is based on prejudice, just as sexism, racism, nationalism, etc. are also based on prejudice.

The dialectical goal of this comparison between racism (etc.) and speciesism is to show that if one rejects racism, and if one is consistent, then one must also reject speciesism. As Michael Goldman puts it, for Singer, “if we are to continue to regard ourselves as moral beings, and to continue to resist racism, sexism, and other forms of discriminatory behavior, we are compelled by the demands of logical consistency to abjure speciesism as well.”[[14]](#footnote-14) In short, because speciesism is a form of prejudice (or is based on a prejudice), just like racism, we must reject it.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**2. Epistemic Peer Disagreement and Speciesism:**

*2. A: Prejudice Defined:*

Thus far, I have relied on an intuitive notion of prejudice. But, more precision is necessary. Suppose that S believes that P. In my view, S’s belief that P is based on a prejudice (1) if S’s belief that P is irrational, (2) S is dismissive or culpably ignorant of evidence that bears on P, and (3) S is mal-intentioned with regard to P. For my purposes, it will not matter if conditions (1) – (3) are taken to be jointly necessary and sufficient for a belief to be based on a prejudice. I only rely on the claim that these conditions are sufficient for S’s belief that P to be based on a prejudice.

In ordinary usage, we apply the above attributes (irrationality, disregard of evidence, and mal-intent) to prejudiced individuals. For example, we think that racists are irrational, don’t properly consider the evidence, and we attribute dubious motives to them. And, the debate between Kagan and Singer clearly operates with this definition in mind.

Kagan claims that, if one’s belief in P fails one’s own standards of rationality, then this belief is prejudiced. This suggests that there is an irrational component of prejudiced beliefs. As he says:

 You are prejudiced if you hold a view on the basis of evidence that you wouldn’t otherwise consider adequate…that is, if you retain a given belief despite its failure to meet the various evidential standards that you would normally insist upon for claims of that sort…then this is a sign that the view in question is a mere prejudice.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Kagan also suggests that disregarding evidence is a feature of prejudiced beliefs:

 Racists and sexists defend their positions by way of appeal to various empirical claims about supposed differences in intelligence, or rationality, or moral character between men and women, or whites and blacks…the crucial point is that the racist or sexist accepts these beliefs despite the fact that the evidence for them falls far short of meeting the standards that they themselves would normally insist upon when it comes to evaluating this sort of empirical claim. They stick to their beliefs despite the evidence.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Additionally, Singer suggests that prejudiced beliefs are formed with devious intentions. In his argument that speciesism is prejudicial, Singer states that “most philosophers try to reconcile their beliefs in human equality and animal inequality by arguments that can only be described as *devious*.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

*2. B: The Singer-Kagan Dispute:*

With the definition of prejudice outlined, I turn to the dispute between Kagan and Singer. Kagan claims that one can endorse speciesism without being prejudiced, because if the speciesist believes her view on the basis of an intuition, then her affirmation of her view is not prejudiced.[[19]](#footnote-19) As he says, “if one’s speciesism is based instead on a direct appeal to moral intuition…and if one is prepared to give presumptive weight to moral intuitions in other matters as well, then that…is not prejudice.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Many have found Kagan’s argument to be unsatisfactory.[[21]](#footnote-21) Given the seeming un-persuasiveness of Kagan’s argument, in this section, I offer an alternative argument to show that endorsing speciesism is not tantamount to prejudice. My purpose in this paper is not to defend or critique Kagan’s argument. However, given how controversial his argument is, and given that it seems to not have persuaded his interlocutors, there is value in advancing an alternative argument in defense of Kagan’s conclusion.

My alternative argument is as follows: I argue that, if there is epistemic peer disagreement about a view, then the parties to this disagreement cannot reasonably label each other as prejudiced in their beliefs about this view. Then, I argue that there is epistemic peer disagreement about the truth of speciesism, from which it follows that the parties to this disagreement cannot reasonably label each other as prejudiced. Thus, one can affirm speciesism without being prejudiced. If I am correct that one can affirm speciesism without being prejudiced, then Singer’s argument (that if one rejects racism, one must reject speciesism) is unsound.

*2. C: Epistemic Peer Disagreement Defined:*

In the literature on epistemic peer disagreement, epistemic peerhood is defined in the following way: two or more individuals are epistemic peers iff they are (1) cognitive peers, (2) evidential peers, and (3) equally sincere in their inquiry.[[22]](#footnote-22) According to Thomas Kelly, people are cognitive peers if “they are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Kelly adds that individuals are evidential peers if “they are equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Finally, Jonathan Kim states that people are epistemic peers only if they are equally sincere in their inquiries.[[25]](#footnote-25) James Kraft refers to this as “sincerity equivalence.”[[26]](#footnote-26) For example, if S and A are in a disagreement, and if S is motivated primarily by personal gain, rather than the goal of believing truth, then S is not A’s epistemic peer.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Additionally, peerhood is domain specific. Oppy states that, “since informedness is clearly domain specific,” we must “relativise [peerhood] to domains of inquiry.”[[28]](#footnote-28) This means that people are epistemic peers if they fulfill the above conditions “with respect to a given domain of inquiry.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Finally, it is important to note that peerhood does not require strict equality of evidence, abilities, and sincerity between individuals; rather, individuals can be peers if they are *sufficiently* *alike* in their cognitive abilities, evidential familiarity, and sincerity.[[30]](#footnote-30)

With epistemic peerhood defined, an epistemic peer disagreement (henceforth EPD) is simple: an EPD is a state of affairs in which two or more epistemic peers disagree about a proposition. For an EPD to have epistemic implications, the parties to the disagreement must believe that they are in an EPD. This is why the literature discusses “revealed peer disagreement.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Henceforth, when I discuss EPDs, I assume that the parties to the disagreement believe that they are in an EPD.

*2. D: The Argument from Peer Disagreement:*

 With the terms defined, the argument from peer disagreement against Singer can now be developed.

**1:** A and S are in an EPD with regard to P (the proposition ‘speciesism is true’), and they are both aware of this and both know the definition of an EPD.

 A represents an anti-speciesist philosopher, while S represents a philosopher who endorses speciesism. Furthermore, P stands for the claim ‘speciesism is true.’ A denies P, while S affirms P. Additionally, A and S are epistemic peers with regard to the animal ethics literature and are both experts about animal ethics. Furthermore, A and S believe that they are each other’s peer with regard to animal ethics, and both know the meaning of the term ‘epistemic peer disagreement.’ A and S do not represent any philosophers in particular but are instead meant to be representative advocates of their respective positions. But, if it is helpful, the reader is free to replace A and S with whichever philosophers she thinks are epistemic peers and who disagree about P.

 One might wonder why we should believe that there is an EPD about the truth of speciesism. The evidence that such an EPD obtains can be seen by appealing to the numerous philosophers who oppose speciesism and to the numerous philosophers who defend speciesism. For example, Tom Regan (1985), Peter Vallentyne (2005), Singer (1989, 2009a, 2009b, 2016), McMahan (1996, 2002), Liao (2010, 2012), and many more are anti-speciesist. On the other side, the following philosophers either explicitly endorse speciesism or hold views which clearly entail speciesism: H. J. McCloskey (1965), Peter Miller (1983), Bonnie Steinbock (1978), Michael Goldman (2001), Michael Wreen (1997), Alan Holland (1984), Thomas Scanlon (1998),[[32]](#footnote-32) Bernard Williams (1985, 2006),[[33]](#footnote-33) Eva Kittay (2005), Leslie Pickering and Richard Norman (1978), Tibor Machan (1991, 2002), Carl Cohen (1997, 2001), Tim Chappell (1997), Lawrence Becker (1983), David Schmidtz (1998, 2011), Christopher Grau (2010, 2015, and 2016), J.A. Gray (1990), Stephen Mulhall (2009), Cora Diamond (1978, 1991, 2018), Alice Crary (2010), Raimond Gaita (2000), Elizabeth Anderson (2005), Martha Nussbaum (2005, 2013), now Shelly Kagan.[[34]](#footnote-34) The list of speciesist philosophers is intentionally long in order to show that, although less common than anti-speciesism, affirmation of speciesism is a widespread view.[[35]](#footnote-35) I see no reason to attribute any less rationality, informedness, or well-intentionedness to any of the philosophers on either side of this debate. In fact, many of the philosophers on the preceding lists (on both sides) are leading figures in contemporary philosophy, and many of them (again, on both sides) have published extensively on animal ethics. Given all of this, it seems highly plausible that there are philosophers on both sides of this debate who are epistemic peers and who still disagree about the truth of speciesism. Thus, I conclude that there is an EPD in the animal ethics literature about the truth of speciesism. I do not claim that *all* of the philosophers in this debate are epistemic peers; but, it seems likely that at least some of them are epistemic peers. That is all I need for my argument to succeed. One might object by denying that the philosophers listed above are peers with each other. If this is true, then there is not an EPD in the animal ethics literature about the truth of speciesism. If there is no such EPD, then my argument fails. In section III, I respond to this objection at great length. For now, I regard premise 1 as prima facie justified.

**2:** if A and S are in an EPD with regard to P, and if they are both aware of this and both know the definition of an EPD, then A and S must think that each other are equally adept at reasoning with regard to P, equally well-informed with regard to P, and equally sincere in their inquiry with regard to P.

2 follows from the definition of an EPD. If A and S are in an EPD with regard to P, and if they both know this and know the meaning of an EPD, then they both must think that the properties of epistemic peers apply to each other.

**3:** thus, A and S must think that each other are equally adept at reasoning with regard to P, equally well-informed with regard to P, and equally sincere in their inquiry with regard to P (2, 1).

**4:** if A thinks that S’s belief that P (‘speciesism is true’) is based on a prejudice, then A thinks that S’s belief that P is irrational with regard to P, dismissive of the evidence that bears on P, and mal-intentioned with regard to P.

4 simply states the previously mentioned definition of prejudice.

**5:** if A and S must think that each other are equally adept at reasoning with regard to P, equally well-informed with regard to P, and equally sincere in their inquiry with regard to P, then A cannot rationally think that S’s belief that P is irrational with regard to P, dismissive of the evidence that bears on P, and mal-intentioned with regard to P.

 S knows that she is rational, knows that she is an expert in animal ethics, and knows that she is well-intentioned in her views on speciesism. And, A thinks that she is in an EPD with S regarding P (‘speciesism is true’). Given this, if A must think that S is equally adept at reasoning as she is with regard to P, then A cannot rationally accuse S of being irrational with regard to P. If A must think that S is equally well-informed as she is with regard to P, then A cannot rationally accuse S of ignoring evidence that is relevant to P. Finally, if A must think that S is equally well-intentioned as she is with regard to P, then A cannot rationally think that S formed her belief regarding P with mal-intent. Simply put, A knows that she is rational, well-informed, and well-intentioned with regard to P; she knows that she is in an EPD with S regarding P; and she knows that this means that S is equally rational, well-informed, and well-intentioned with regard to P. Because of this, A cannot attribute the features of prejudice to S. Essentially, each feature of epistemic peerhood is contradictory with each feature of prejudice. To put the point differently, it is contradictory to believe that one’s interlocutor is equally intelligent, well-read, and well-intentioned with regard to P while also holding that this interlocutor is irrational, dismissive of evidence, and mal-intentioned with regard to P.

**6:** thus, if A and S are in an EPD with regard to P, and if they are both aware of this and both know the definition of an EPD, then A cannot rationally think that S’s belief that P is irrational with regard to P, dismissive of the evidence that bears on P, and mal-intentioned with regard to P (2, 5).

**7:** thus, A cannot rationally think that S’s belief that P is irrational with regard to P, dismissive of the evidence that bears on P, and mal-intentioned with regard to P (6, 1).

**8:** thus, A cannot rationally think that S’s belief that P (‘speciesism is true’) is based on a prejudice (4, 7).

With this established, we are now in a position to see why Singer’s argument (that if we reject racism, we must reject speciesism) fails; if racism and speciesism are both based on a prejudice, then we ought to adopt the same attitude toward both, meaning that we should reject both. But, if speciesism is not based on a prejudice, then the reasons that bid us to reject racism (i.e. that beliefs based on prejudices are immoral and irrational) do not apply against speciesism. Essentially, if one can endorse speciesism without being prejudiced, then one can consistently reject racism (because it is prejudiced) while also affirming speciesism. Thus, Singer’s argument fails.

**3. Objections:**

*3. A: Objection 1: Denying The EPD:*

One might deny premise 1 and claim that there are no cases of epistemic peer disagreement in the animal ethics literature with regard to the truth of speciesism. This objection could either come from speciesist philosophers or anti-speciesist philosophers, although I suspect that anti-speciesist philosophers are more likely to deny peerhood to speciesists than the other way around.[[36]](#footnote-36) And, since the goal of this article is to argue that anti-speciesists are incorrect in claiming that speciesism is a form of prejudice, I will put the anti-speciesist in the role of the objector. So, the objector argues that, if there are no epistemic peers in the animal ethics literature who disagree about the truth of speciesism, then A and S cannot be in an EPD about speciesism, because they (whoever they are) would not be peers to begin with! I have several responses to this objection.

*3. A: Response 1:*

Earlier, I listed numerous philosophers who fall on both sides of this debate, including several highly influential contemporary philosophers (on both sides of the issue). If the anti-speciesist philosophers are to deny that there is any peer disagreement about the truth of speciesism, then they must claim that the speciesists lack one (or more) of the three features of epistemic peerhood (equal rationality, equal informedness, and equal sincerity). So, to deny peerhood to the speciesists, the anti-speciesists must claim that such highly respected philosophers as Scanlon, Kagan, Kittay, Anderson, Nussbaum, and Williams are not only mistaken in their beliefs but also less rational, informed, or sincere (than the anti-speciesists) with regard to this issue. Furthermore, in denying peerhood to their interlocutors, the anti-speciesist philosophers would also be committed to saying that several widely published animal ethicists (such as Cohen, Machan) are less rational, informed, or sincere (than they are) with regard to speciesism. This seems highly implausible. The anti-speciesists may reasonably believe that the speciesists hold false or unjustified beliefs, but it is a much stronger position to claim that they are less rational, informed, or sincere. Given the reputability and quantity of people on both sides of this debate, this position strikes me as highly implausible.

 But, suppose that this did not strike the speciesist as implausible. If this were the case, then the anti-speciesists would need to argue that the speciesists fail to fulfill one or more of the conditions of peerhood. I argue that it is implausible to deny any of these.

Start with equal rationality. To deny the rationality condition of peerhood to the speciesist, the anti-speciesist would have to claim that several highly influential figures in contemporary philosophy (as well as many figures in the history of philosophy), who have had a profound influence on ethics, and other areas of philosophy, are less rational than they (the anti-speciesists) are. That seems highly implausible.

The anti-speciesist might argue that her claim is not quite so strong; the anti-speciesist could argue that she is not denying the *general* rationality of the speciesists but is instead denying their *domain-specific* rationality (in this case about the domain of animal ethics). In other words, the anti-speciesist could claim that the speciesists may very well be highly rational in general but that they are unreliable in this particular domain. This response avoids the counter-intuitiveness of denying equal rationality to the likes of Nussbaum and Scanlon (who are clearly highly rational), while still allowing the speciesist to deny them peerhood on the basis of the denying the equal rationality condition.

Although this version of the objection is more plausible, it is still unsuccessful. Why is the anti-speciesist entitled to attribute less domain-specific rationality to the speciesist? The possible explanations are implausible. First, the anti-speciesist might attribute less domain-specific rationality to the speciesist, because they believe that the speciesist’s conclusion is false. This clearly begs the question and is not sufficient to justify attributing less rationality to the speciesist. Second, the anti-speciesist might attribute less domain-specific rationality to the speciesist, because they find the speciesist’s arguments for speciesism to be implausible and unsound. Again, this is not sufficient to justify attributing less domain-specific rationality to the speciesists. A and S can be epistemic peers with regard to a particular domain, even if A believes that S’s arguments for her view are bad. In other words, it would be absurd to say that two individuals are not peers if one of them finds the other’s argument for her view unsound. If this were true, there would be no epistemic peers. So, simply finding the speciesist’s arguments unsatisfactory does not entitle the anti-speciesist to attribute less domain-specific rationality to the speciesist. Third, the anti-speciesist might attribute less domain-specific rationality to the speciesist, because the speciesist is less familiar with the literature than the anti-speciesist is. In other words, in claiming that the speciesist is less rational in this domain, the anti-speciesist is really holding that the speciesist is less informed about the literature. This version of the objection does not entitle the anti-speciesist to label the speciesist as less domain-specifically rational, because being informed with regard to a domain and being rational with regard to this domain are different things. Also, there are independent reasons to believe that both sides of this debate are equally familiar with the literature (discussed next), which further undermines this objection. Thus, all of the possible reasons for denying domain specific rationality to the speciesist are unsatisfactory.

The anti-speciesist might deny the equality of information condition to the speciesist. This seems implausible as well, because several of the people on the list of speciesists are widely published animal ethicists, meaning that they have very likely read the same evidence as the anti-speciesists. And, even the speciesist philosophers who are not specialists in animal ethics have presumably read much of the same information as the anti-speciesists, even if they have published less on the issue. Furthermore, several of these non-animal ethicist speciesists have published defenses of speciesism in some of the profession’s top rated journals; it is exceedingly unlikely that these papers would have been published in top journals if the authors did not cite and demonstrate sufficient familiarity with the relevant literature.

Finally, the anti-speciesists might deny the equal sincerity of the speciesists. There is an asymmetry between speciesists and anti-speciesists: the former could be seen as defending speciesism out of a desire to not change their current behavior toward animals; thus, one can view speciesist philosophers as rationalizing their desire to maintain their current beliefs and behaviors. No such charge can be made against anti-speciesists; these philosophers are advocating a position which places more stringent demands on us, deviates from many people’s beliefs, etc. To put the point differently, it is likely that speciesists are biased in a way that anti-speciesists are not, given that most people would likely prefer speciesism to be true, so as to justify their current behavior toward animals. Thus, speciesism can be understood as an attempt to rationalize one’s current behavior and preferences. The same charge cannot be made against the anti-speciesist. It seems plausible to say that those people who argue for views that they want to be true are less likely to be sincere than those who argue for views that they may not want to be true. If this is true, then perhaps speciesists do not fulfill the sincerity condition and are thus not epistemic peers with anti-speciesists.

 I have several responses. First, even if it is true that those who defend views that they want to be true are more likely to be biased, this does not just impugn speciesists. Surely, there are anti-speciesists who want their position to be true, which means that this objection would apply equally to anti-speciesism as to speciesism.

Second, this objection over-generalizes in a problematic way. There are numerous debates in philosophy in which philosophers defend views that they want to be true and which support their current behavior. If anti-speciesists can deny the sincerity of speciesists for having defended a position which they want to be true and which condones their current behavior, then it seems that other philosophers can make this same move in other debates. For example, theists clearly want God to exist, and many theists view God’s existence as condoning certain behaviors (which may be behaviors that they want to continue). However, on the basis of this alone, we cannot question the sincerity of theists. Similar situations exist in many other debates in philosophy. If the move made by the anti-speciesist were acceptable in other areas of philosophy, we would find ourselves constantly questioning the sincerity of our interlocutors, because we are often in debates with people who want their positions to be true so as to condone their current behavior.

Third, there are empirical examples against the claim that speciesists are simply rationalizing their existing beliefs. Kagan agreed with Singer’s view for nearly forty years until he eventually changed his position.[[37]](#footnote-37) This suggests that his affirmation of speciesism is not the result of rationalizing a deep desire to regard humans more highly than other species; to the contrary, if one changes one’s mind about a view after many years of holding this view, this suggests that one was persuaded to change one’s stance by counter-evidence. So, although he is only one person, Kagan’s example shows that one can endorse speciesism without trying to rationalize one’s already held beliefs.

To conclude this response to the first objection, I have argued that, denying the existence of an EPD about speciesism is prima facie implausible, and I have further argued that denying that the speciesists satisfy any of the three conditions of peerhood is implausible.

*3. A. Response 2:*

 If the preceding discussion was unconvincing, I have a further response to objection 1. I question why one would think that it is implausible for there to be an EPD specifically about the truth of speciesism. There are far more controversial issues on which there is epistemic peer disagreement. For example, I take it to be uncontroversial that there are EPDs in normative theory between consequentialists and deontologists, in philosophy of religion between theists and atheists, and in applied ethics on a number of highly controversial issues. Surely, the objector will grant that there are numerous EPDs in other areas of philosophy, such as those just mentioned. If the objector is willing to grant that, in general, EPDs do obtain in these other domains of philosophy, then there is no reason to deny the same for the animal ethics literature. There is no reason to think that EPDs obtain in other areas of philosophy but not in the debate about speciesism. Thus, unless the objector is willing to deny the existence of EPDs in many other areas of philosophy (which strikes me as implausible), then she must permit that EPDs obtain with regard to the truth of speciesism.

*3. A: Response 3:*

 I have one final response to objection 1. Suppose that the preceding discussion was not sufficient and that the anti-speciesist is firmly convinced that there is no EPD about the truth of speciesism. If the objector is convinced that, currently, there are no EPDs in the animal ethics literature about the truth of speciesism, she will surely grant that such a disagreement is possible. Given this, I can simply conditionalize my argument to conclude that if A and S are epistemic peers with regard to the truth of speciesism, then S can maintain her belief in speciesism without doing so on the basis of a prejudice. Even this weaker formulation of the argument would still show, non-trivially, that it is possible for speciesism to not be prejudiced.

*3. B. Objection 2: The Arguments for Speciesism Are Bad:*

Here, the anti-speciesist argues that we can deny peerhood to the speciesist, because the arguments so far advanced for speciesism are implausible, unsound, bad, etc. In short, the anti-speciesist can deny that the speciesist is her peer by looking at the quality of her arguments for speciesism, seeing that the arguments are bad, and inferring that the speciesist must not be her peer in virtue of advancing a bad argument.

 This objection fails for several reasons. First, it is possible for A and S to be peers with regard to P and for A to advance an argument in favor of P that S finds wildly implausible. In other words, two people can be epistemic peers even if one of them advances an argument that the other finds highly implausible. So, in making the above objection, the anti-speciesist must be relying on the following principle, which I take to be clearly false:

**Peers Cannot Make Bad Arguments**: if A makes an argument that S finds highly implausible, then S can infer, only on the basis of A making this argument, that A is not her epistemic peer.

This principle is false. If this principle were true, it would entail that there can be very little disagreement between epistemic peers. After all, any time one person makes an argument that the other finds highly implausible, this person could use this as a reason to deny peerhood to her interlocutor. If this were permissible, then philosophers would be entitled to frequently deny peerhood to their interlocutors, as many philosophical arguments strike many philosophers as being wildly implausible. For example, many philosophers of mind regard eliminative materialism, and the arguments for it, to be wildly implausible. But, this does not entitle these philosophers to claim that Daniel Dennett and Patricia and Paul Churchland are not their epistemic peers.

 Second, this objection ignores a key feature of assessing peer disagreements, namely the importance of higher order evidence. In assessing peer disagreements, both first order and higher order evidence are relevant. In brief, first order-evidence is the “evidence that is directly relevant to the target proposition [i.e. arguments for and against speciesism],” and higher-order evidence is my “awareness of [being in a] peer disagreement.”[[38]](#footnote-38) The objection essentially says that all of the first order evidence and arguments are bad and that we can thus make a conclusion about the status of our interlocutor. In other words, the objector holds that we can infer from facts about first order evidence (the arguments for P) to facts about higher order evidence (that our interlocutor must not be our peer). This is not how one should assess peer disagreements. We ought to look at both the first order evidence and the higher order evidence.[[39]](#footnote-39) In determining whether my interlocutor is my peer, I cannot only look at her arguments that bear on the disputed belief; I must also assess if I think, in general, my interlocutor is reliable, informed, and sincere. Given this, the anti-speciesist’s objection is problematic, because it only looks at the first order evidence and uses this to determine if the speciesist is her peer. However, when we look at the higher order evidence in conjunction with the first order evidence, we can see that, even if we grant that the speciesist’s arguments are implausible, she seems to be equally rational, informed, and sincere with regard to the question at hand; from this, we should conclude that we have no reason to deny peerhood to the speciesist.

*3. C: Objection 3: There Are Far Fewer Speciesists than Anti-Speciesists:*

The anti-speciesist might also object that the speciesists are not epistemic peers, because there are far more anti-speciesists than speciesists in the animal ethics literature. Because of this disparity in number, it seems that it is unlikely that the speciesist will turn out to be peers with the anti-speciesist.

 This objection fails. First, it is possible for two individuals to be epistemic peers even if one of those individuals endorses a position that no other peers in that domain endorse. Again, eliminative materialism is a minority position in philosophy of mind, but this fact alone does not entitle a philosopher of mind to say that an eliminativist is not her peer. Infinitism about epistemic justification has fewer than five defenders in the world; and, at one point, it had only one defender. Yet, this fact alone does not entitle other epistemologists to say that Peter Klein is not their epistemic peer. Second, if this objection were successful, it would entail that we should always regard those who defend a minority position in a debate as not meriting peerhood. This entails that atheists in the philosophy of religion literature are not peers with theists, etc. These strike me as implausible implications.

*3. D: Objection 4: Does This Condone Contemporary Racism?*

 One might hold that my argument would vindicate contemporary racists and sexists from being prejudiced in their beliefs. Suppose that a contemporary racist argues that he is in an EPD with an anti-racist; would this entail that this racist can maintain his belief in racism in a non-prejudiced manner? If so, this would be a damning implication of my view.

 However, I am not committed to this implication. Given the evidence available today, one simply cannot hold overtly racist or sexist beliefs while also fulfilling one’s obligation to carefully form one’s belief in light of the relevant evidence. With the availability of information in the contemporary world, a racist can only form racist beliefs by being woefully ignorant of easily accessible evidence, by intentionally ignoring this evidence, by failing to see the conclusions that follow from this evidence, or by being motivated by something other than the truth. Thus, one simply cannot affirm overtly racist beliefs while fulfilling the conditions of epistemic peerhood. However, this is not the case with speciesism. There are living philosophers who have carefully considered the evidence and have reached the conclusion that speciesism is justified. These philosophers have done their epistemic due diligence and still maintain their belief that speciesism is justified. Thus, it is possible to fulfill one’s epistemic duties to examine the evidence while remaining a speciesist. However, there are no living philosophers who have carefully considered the evidence and have formed the belief that racism is justified. Thus, there can be an EPD about speciesism without there being an EPD about racism and sexism.

 The anti-speciesist might argue that there are, in fact, contemporary academics who endorse racism and sexism. And, the anti-speciesist might further argue that some of these individuals appear to be experts in their respective fields. This suggests that it is possible for there to be an EPD about the truth of both racism and sexism in contemporary academia, which, on my account, entails that these racists and sexists are not prejudiced. For example, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, who are trained social scientists, argue that there are genetically based differences in intelligence between races. David Stove argues that women are less intelligent than men. And, Michael Levin argues that certain races are genetically less intelligent than other races. It would be a damning implication if my theory entails that these individuals are not prejudiced, despite being openly racist and sexist.

 I am not committed to such an implication. First, it is not at all clear that the individuals listed above possess the requisite expertise to be considered peers in the domains in question. For example, Stove and Levin are philosophers who do not have training in genetics or the social sciences, yet they make claims about both genetics and the social sciences. If we were to compare their work with geneticists and social scientists working on race and sex, it would be implausible to say that Stove and Levin are peers with these interlocutors. Herrnstein and Murray present a larger obstacle, as they seem to be trained experts in the fields about which they write. However, even Herrnstein and Murray base their arguments on claims that are outside of their expertise. The argument developed in *The* *Bell Curve* relies heavily on claims about genetics, and Herrnstein and Murray draw inferences from empirical studies to claims about genetics. Neither author is a biologist. As such, when compared with scholars who do specialize in biological issues related to race, Herrnstein and Murray should not be considered evidential equals and are thus not peers with those individuals. Thus, my account does not entail that Herrnstein and Murray are not prejudiced, because they are not in an EPD with biologists who write on race.

 The anti-speciesist might say that the same accusation can be made against the speciesists. After all, many of the scholars who defend speciesism make claims about animal ethics, even though many of them do not specialize in animal ethics. Thus, given my response above, I must deny peerhood to the speciesists. This is not the case. Although some of the speciesist philosophers are not animal ethicists, many of them are. Furthermore, nearly all of the defenders of speciesism are philosophers; this means that they, like the anti-speciesist philosophers, possess roughly similar analytical toolkits, even if they have different sub-specialties. The same is not true of Herrnstein and Murray, who make claims about biology without any training in biology. In short, it is very different to write about *an issue within one’s discipline but about which one does not specialize* than it is to write about *an issue that is entirely outside of one’s discipline*. The former seems perfectly fine, while the latter constitutes grounds to deny expertise to the individuals in question. Many speciesists are guilty of the former, while Herrnstein and Murray are guilty of the latter. Thus, I can deny peerhood to Herrnstein and Murray while attributing it to the speciesist philosophers.

 If the preceding discussion was not convincing, I have a further response. Distinguish between racism and sexism as descriptive claims and as normative claims. *Descriptive racism/sexism* says that, in fact, individuals of certain races/sexes have on average lower innate abilities than those of other races/sexes. *Normative racism/sexism* says that individuals of certain races/sexes have a lower moral status than do individuals of other races/sexes. Herrnstein and Murray endorse descriptive racism, not normative racism.[[40]](#footnote-40) However, the debate about speciesism concerns speciesism as a normative claim about the comparative ranking of human and non-human interests. As such, the fact that Herrnstein and Murray endorse descriptive racism without endorsing normative racism means that their views simply do not count as an analogy to speciesism. In short, the objector worries that my account entails that racists such as Herrnstein and Murray are not prejudiced, but my account has no such implication, because Herrnstein and Murray are simply talking about a different kind of racism than is relevant to the debate about speciesism.

The objector can advance the objection in a slightly different way. Suppose that S grew up in a highly isolated community, has never met an individual of a different race, and has been taught since he was young that people of other races are morally inferior to him. Now, suppose that A (a person of similar intelligence, informedness, and sincerity) grew up in a highly isolated community, in which he has never met an individual of a different race and has been taught since he was young that all races are morally equal; however, the reasoning that was used to teach him that all races are morally equal, despite teaching him the true view about racial equality, was highly suspect and would not stand up to scrutiny if challenged. Finally, suppose that A and S meet one day and become aware of the fact that they are roughly equally intelligent, informed, and sincere and that they disagree with each other about the truth of racism. This seems to constitute a case of peer disagreement, albeit a very low-level one. In this case, it seems that my view entails that S, because he is in an EPD with A, is not prejudiced in holding his racist beliefs.

I am inclined to agree with the objector that my account entails that such a person is racist without being prejudiced. While some might think of this as a bullet to bite, I do not. It seems plausible to say that individuals who are highly isolated and cut off from relevant evidence and experience are significantly less blameworthy or prejudicial in holding racist or sexist beliefs. Consider Cartesian evil demon scenarios; in these cases, an epistemic agent is led to believe that she is in the real world when in fact she is a brain in a vat, in the matrix, etc. The typical analysis of such a case is that the deceived person holds a false but justified belief. The reason that this agent holds a false but justified belief is that she based her belief on the evidence that she possessed, even though her evidence was faulty. In other words, provided that she correctly bases her belief on the evidence available to her, an epistemic agent can make a mistake and not be blameworthy for doing so. This entails that an individual cannot be blamed for believing something for which she did not have any evidence. Much like the agent in the evil demon case, S holds a false belief (that racism is true), because she is highly isolated and ignorant, was never shown the relevant evidence, and was essentially deceived by her community. Given the intuition pumped by the evil demon case, it seems that S holds a justified but false belief. If S is justified in holding her racist beliefs, then this entails that S is not prejudiced in holding these beliefs. On my account, to be prejudiced with regard to P is to be irrational, dismissive or culpably ignorant of evidence, and insincere with regard to P. But, if S is justified in believing P, then S must have been rational with regard to P, S must have done her evidence seeking due diligence with regard to P, and S must have been sincere with regard to P. In short, because S, although racist, is basing her belief on the evidence that she has, she has a justified (although false) belief, which entails that her belief is not based on a prejudice. As such, the purported objection is not an objection.

*3. E: Objection 5: Does This Condone Past Racism?*

The objector might now argue that my account implies that it is possible that racists and sexists in the past were not prejudiced. At one point in the past, there was considerable disagreement between intellectuals about the truth or falsity of racism and sexism. For example, in 1907, philosopher Hastings Rashdall stated that “individuals, or races, with higher capacities…have a right to more than merely equal consideration as compared to those of lowered capacities.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In 1907, Rashdall would have had interlocutors who disagreed with him on this view and who were equally as informed, rational, and sincere as he was. A similar point can be made about lay beliefs from the past. There may have been cases of abolitionists and defenders of slavery during the American antebellum period who were equally rational, informed, and sincere but who still disagreed. If this is true, then my account entails that some racists and sexists from history were not prejudiced.

Just as with supposed cases of contemporary peer disagreement about racism and sexism, I question whether there were any genuine cases of peer disagreement in the past about racism and sexism. For example, those who espoused openly racist and sexist beliefs stood a great deal to gain both socially and financially in doing so, so much so that it calls into question the sincerity of their belief. The burden of proof is on the objector to show that there really could have been equally informed, rational, and sincere people who still disagreed about the truth of racism and sexism.

But, suppose that there really were genuine cases of epistemic peer disagreement in the past about the truth of racism and sexism. If cases like this obtained, which I doubt, it is not counter-intuitive to say that the parties to these disagreements were not prejudiced. Suppose that, in America in 1800, S and A disagree about the truth of racism, with S endorsing racism and A rejecting it. If S and A are in an EPD, then they have roughly the same rational abilities, evidence, and sincerity. By definition, in a case such as this, S is not basing her belief in racism on a prejudice. Again, as I have argued, the conditions of peerhood and the conditions of prejudice are mutually exclusive. This might lead the objector to say that my account of prejudice yields a counter-intuitive result. I disagree. In the case just described, it seems clear that S, although she holds a false belief, is not blameworthy for doing so. But, to judge her belief as being prejudiced is to judge it as being blameworthy or bad in some way. So, in this case, my account of prejudice captures the intuition that there is something blameworthy about prejudiced beliefs.

Furthermore, one can argue that past racist and sexist beliefs are analogous to belief in the external world in the evil demon scenario. Just as I argued with the case of contemporary EPDs about racism and sexism, it can be argued that the individuals in question are so isolated from the relevant evidence and are deceived by their communities to such a strong degree that they are in a case much like that of the agent in the evil demon scenario. If this is true, then these past racists and sexists were, sadly, justified in holding their false beliefs about racism and sexism. And, as I argued previously, if their beliefs were justified, then their beliefs were, by definition, not prejudiced.

Again, it is important to reiterate that I doubt that EPDs did obtain in the past about racism and sexism. But, supposing that an EPD did obtain about racism and sexism, my account of prejudice entails that the racists and sexists in this EPD were not prejudiced. But this implication is not a bullet to bite. In fact, the view that past bad beliefs should not be blameworthy is alive and well in the contemporary debate and moral responsibility. For example, Gideon Rosen claims that “given the intellectual and cultural resources available to a second millennium Hittite lord, it would have taken a moral genius to see through the wrongness of chattel slavery.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Michael Slote holds that “if we today can see the wrongness of slavery, that is in part because we have the benefit of knowledge that makes slavery seem less natural and inevitable.”[[43]](#footnote-43) A similar view has been defended by Nicholas Rescher. Of course, there is a rich and complex literature that bears on this question. I do not see myself as having settled this issue; rather, I merely intend to say that my view (that under certain conditions, past racists and sexists may not be prejudiced in their beliefs) is plausible and is defended by several prominent philosophers.

**4. Conclusion**:

 I conclude that it is possible for one to endorse speciesism without doing so in a prejudiced manner, indicating that there is a difference between racism/sexism and speciesism. Given this, Singer’s argument (that if we reject racism, we must reject speciesism) fails.

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2. For example, Jeff McMahan (1996, 2002), Singer (1989, 2009a, 2009b), Hugh LaFollette and Niall Shanks (1996), and many more have advanced this argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kagan 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Singer, 2009a, 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kagan 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Singer. 1989, 162. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Numerous distinctions can be added to speciesism, but Kagan says that “the crucial thought- however we work it out-is that, other things being equal, humans count more than animals” (3). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Singer, 2009a, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kagan 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Singer, 2009b, 572. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The reader is free to substitute any particular form of prejudice; I henceforth discuss mainly racism. But, these arguments apply to any form of prejudice. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. McMahan, 1996, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. McMahan, 2002, 221-222. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Goldman 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Throughout this paper, I will use the claims ‘speciesism is based on a prejudice’ and ‘speciesism is a prejudice’ interchangeably. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kagan 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Kagan 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Singer, 1989, 7. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Kagan 6-8 for a more detailed description of this reasoning. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Kagan 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Singer (2016), McMahan (2015), Timmerman (2017), DeGrazia (2016), Roberts (forthcoming), and Smolkin (forthcoming) have also responded to Kagan’s argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kim 22-23. This general definition was first explicitly put forth in Kelly (2005). Most formulations of this definition do not include the sincerity condition, but it will be especially relevant to my argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Kelly 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kelly 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Kim 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Kraft 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. One might wonder about a case in which both A and S fail to satisfy this sincerity condition. Would A and S be epistemic peers in such a case? The answer is that, as neither is motivated by the goal of believing truth or avoiding error, they are not epistemic peers, because their goals are not epistemic to begin with. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Oppy 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Oppy 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kelly makes this point (2005, 10-11). Conee echoes this: “we seek a notion of epistemic peers that is less restrictive than that of having exactly the same total rational bases” (70). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ballantyne and Coffman 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. In *What We Owe Each Other* (1998), Scanlon claims that “the mere fact that a being is ‘of human born’ provides a strong reason for according it the same status as other humans. This has sometimes been characterized as prejudice, called speciesism. But it is not prejudice to hold that our own relation to these beings gives us reason to accept the requirement that our actions be justifiable to them” (185). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. William’s well known defense of speciesism came in his posthumously published paper, “The Human Prejudice” (2006), in which he claims that “the idea of there being an ethical concept that appeals to our species membership is entirely coherent” (150). Additionally, Williams seems to also endorse speciesism in *Ethics and the* *Limits of Philosophy* (1985, 118). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. One might object that each of these authors endorses a slightly different definition of speciesism. This is certainly true. It is rarely the case that philosophers use the same term with precisely the same meaning. However, there is clearly a unified concept involved with each definition of speciesism, namely that the interests of individuals of a particular species (typically humans) are given priority when in conflict with the like interests of individuals of other species (typically non-human animals). As long as this core idea is in mind, the specific nuances of each account of speciesism will not be relevant. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there are numerous other issues in philosophy where it is perfectly acceptable to refer to the advocates of a particular theory under the same umbrella, even if there are differences among the proponents of this view. For example, one can coherently refer to utilitarians, egalitarians, libertarians, etc. as a group, despite the fact that there are numerous versions of each of these views. Given this, referring to these thinkers under the broad label of ‘speciesism’ is perfectly acceptable. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Timmerman (2017) has recently argued that several of the self-described speciesist philosophers on this list are not, genuinely, speciesist. I lack space to engage fully with Timmerman’s interesting and novel arguments in this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For example, Singer openly denies the sincerity of speciesist philosophers. As he says, “contemporary philosophers…freely invoke the dignity of mankind without needing to justify the idea at all,” and he adds that “most philosophers try to reconcile their beliefs in human equality and animal inequality by arguments that can only be described as devious” (1989, 7-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. As Kagan says, “When I first read these claims almost forty years ago I immediately found them persuasive. And that remained true for decades. It seemed clear to me, as it seemed clear to Singer, that most of us are speciesists, and that speciesism was unjustifiable. But now, I have to say, the issue no longer seems to me nearly so transparent. I now find myself thinking — much to my surprise — that Singer doesn’t actually offer much by way of a philosophical argument against speciesism. That is to say, it isn’t clear to me any longer that speciesism is indeed a mere prejudice” (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. King 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The literature on peer disagreement deals with higher order evidence in different ways. At one end of the spectrum, David Christensen says that we should only rely on higher order evidence when assessing a disagreement and that we should put the first order evidence aside. As he says, In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another’s expressed belief about P, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about P, I should do so in a way that doesn’t rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about P” (1-2). On the other end of the spectrum, some views hold that we should only, or mainly, rely on first order evidence in addressing peer disagreements. My account here falls in line with Kelly’s (2010) view, on which “both the first order evidence and the higher order evidence count for something” (33). Kelly calls his view the Total Evidence View (33). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. As Murray says, “even if the differences between races were entirely genetic (which they surely are not), it should make no practical difference in how individuals deal with each other,” and as he adds, “good things are available now to those who are smart enough or rich enough—if they can exploit the complex rules to their advantage, buy their way out of the social institutions that no longer function, and have access to the rich human interconnections that are growing, not diminishing, for the cognitively fortunate. We are calling upon our readers, so heavily concentrated among those who fit that description, to recognize the ways in which public policy has come to deny those good things to those who are not smart enough and rich enough.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Rashdall 237-238. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Rosen, 2004a, 66. Rosen defends a similar view in his 2004b paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Slote, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)