

**SYMPOSIUM PAPER**  
**UNDERSTANDING SPECIESISM**

Nowadays, in polite society in much of U.S. and Europe outside Arab and Muslim circles, calling Zionism racist is socially unacceptable. Among Palestinians and their sympathizers that accusation is respectable, even among moderates, for plenty of data confirm the natural predilections to vilify one's opposition. All too many Zionists have been racists, overtly or covertly.<sup>1</sup> For some, their racism is integral to their Zionism. For others, their Zionism would thrive purified of racism, as it does for the many Zionists appalled and embarrassed by all the racist Zionists. Racist-free Zionists may fear and hate Arabs as political opponents, not as a race but more like a stateless nation, and more like WWII Anglo-Americans attitudes towards German and less like those towards the Japanese. For racism-free secular Zionism, re-establishing the ancient homeland is demanded by egalitarian justice and humanitarianism. The argument may be mistaken. The egalitarian brief for *extreme* Zionist goals is feeble, and the case for a moderate Zionism would be strengthened if the racialist and religious assumptions were justified. Nonetheless, enough of Zionism makes good enough sense without repugnant or risible assumptions, and enough Zionists have been free of those assumptions for it to be inaccurate and unfair to tar Zionism and all Zionists as racist. So the allegation is rightly regarded as a slur that hardens misunderstandings, inflames resentments and hatreds, and obstructs a decent resolution of the political conflict.<sup>2</sup>

In bright contrast, something called "speciesism" has been demonized for three decades as morally equivalent to egregious racism. We're told that "the charge of speciesism is founded on"<sup>3</sup> this comparison. The opprobrious "speciesist" is heaped on

everyone espousing *human* equality, *human* rights and the brotherhood of *humankind*, who means ‘human’ literally to encompass precisely all their conspecifics. It sure sounds like meat-eaters are likened to Nazis and Klansmen, and convicted of enraging, contemptible viciousness. Yet no howls or peeps of protest are heard in response. No umbrage is taken. There’s been no shortage of shock and outrage at the policy implications drawn from the critique of speciesism – the “liberation” of animals, the liberalization of infanticide, euthanasia, etc. – but that's all detached from any resentment at the imputation of being despicable to the core.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the aspersion inspires no rancor or outrage because it’s hard to take seriously, not least because only the fanatical seem to seriously mean it. In my own social circles, real racists are ostracized. My friends and I don't much shun our tax evading or adulterous fellows, but we're too repelled to be buddies with an unrepentant rapist or racist.<sup>5</sup> Real racism is an enraging, creepy arrogance and callousness. Yet anti-speciesists, for all their verbal reviling, are rarely reluctant to be chummy with their speciesist acquaintances.<sup>6</sup> The evident lack of visceral abhorrence of their speciesist associates for their haughty brutality puts everyone at their ease. In the decorous discourse of academic ethicists, accusations of quasi-racism have been politely, indeed warmly welcomed as an intellectually and morally respectable thesis rather than scurrilous invective. Scholarly journals priding themselves on upholding standards of civility and refusing to print the overheated language of political screeds haven't thought twice (and probably not once) about giving a pass to the anti-speciesists’ hot-button name-calling.

This fashionable tolerance of a galling accusation may some day be a subject for intellectual and social historians. The respectability of such invective is puzzling because

the allegation is, plainly enough, intellectually indefensible, a venomous caricature.

Whatever may explain the tolerance of these smears, it's time to call a halt to them. Even if the injustice is not as blatant as I think, even if the propriety of the accusation is just clearly questionable, that may be reason enough to be less free and easy bandying hurtful insults – especially when the audience is captive, a class of naive, defenseless students. No respectable cause is well served by this rhetoric.

At bottom, critics of *human* equality confuse two questions: (1) Is the bare fact of an individual's being human in itself reason enough for us humans to deal with it as we'd like to be dealt with? (2) Have we enough reason, apart from human well-being, to impose on each other protections of other animals? Speciesism, perspicuously specified, says 'yes' to (1) and nothing about (2).

Few precepts are as widely accepted as that being human is reason enough for full membership in our moral community. Whether this is less true -- or just less obviously true -- outside modern societies raises fundamental questions of anthropological and sociological theory. Many, perhaps most, tribalist and racialist moralities might be at root immature or misinformed forms of speciesism, motivated by what motivates speciesism.<sup>7</sup> No matter. The exact extent of speciesist belief in human history isn't crucial here.

What is crucial is that, more unanimously and more obviously, human beings have *not* supposed that being human is necessary for moral equality with us.<sup>8</sup> No society I know of has lacked our current culture's inclination to imagine alter-specific personalities – like the crowd at a Star Wars cantina – whom we'd all recognize as our moral equals.<sup>9</sup> Religious myths of divine dispensations for humans are rarely if ever

understood as excluding the possibility of cherubs, elves, imps, gods, and ET's in other galaxies whom we should treat as we would wish to be treated – and perhaps better.<sup>10</sup>

World-wide, human fantasy is filled with nonhuman persons, alien morally accountable agents, who enter our world or threaten to. When they aren't homicidal monsters, when neither of us can overpower the other and ignore the other's interests, when we mutually benefit from cooperation and reciprocity and achieve coordination by shared moral reasoning, we cannot well avoid acknowledging the equal moral status each demands from the other. That thought seems in some way understood in the myths and fictions even of rudimentary societies.

The Brotherhood of Humankind is an inclusivist ideal moralizing our natural kinship. It's not an inherently comparative, exclusionary notion. Speciesism abides with extensive moral concerns for fictional and fantastical beings, and for the real nonhumans around.<sup>11</sup> I'll bet some rabid animal liberationists are equally rabidly fetal liberationists, who condemn abortion because they consider embryos human beings and condemn factory farming for the pain the animals endure. By itself speciesism neither entails nor excludes vegetarianism and rights for animals.<sup>12</sup> While most speciesists have not been principled vegetarians, many have been. Most likely, vegetarians have been speciesists at near the rate the rest of us are – whether or not they realize it or willingly admit it. Most every vegetarian rationale for solicitude toward animals applies to humans well. The converse rarely holds. Rarely does the quality and quantity of anyone's moral concern for animals match their honest concern for humans with lesser mental capacities. Rarely is anyone indifferent between eating humans and eating other animals, phagically or carnally.

Some kind of speciesism explains people's distinctive concern for their conspecifics with greater elegance and less strain than any academic contrivance like Peter Singer's utilitarianism or Tom Regan's rights theory. Such theories argue for both protection of animals and opposition to speciesism, but those are independent arguments. Perhaps reasons for rejecting speciesism might also be reasons for regard for animals, yet rejecting speciesism is no reason for regard for animals. Whatever be the polemical profit of railing against some bogey called *speciesism*, intellectually, as a contribution to the disciplines of Theoretical and Applied Ethics, the case for animal protections is advanced not an inch by assailing the notion of *human* equality. Besides, the rhetorical mileage may soon run out. It should come as no surprise if there comes to be a backlash, when the good people in power the animal libbers must persuade get resentful and resistant at being publicly maligned.

My recitation of the plain facts about the moral codes of most meat eaters may prompt a retort that the neologisms, 'speciesism'/'speciesist', are meant to model the established terms, 'racism'/'racist', whose main meanings have implied some improper favoritism of one race over another, so the odious comparison prominent in the parent concept should pass on to the progeny. Doubtless that's the intention, but the disanalogies make the sense unstable. The fact is, anti-speciesist literature specifies its target all sorts of ways without noting or noticing the differences and their import.

Take Peter Singer, long the lead basher of speciesism, who for thirty plus years has paved the way as a paragon of inconsistency, characterizing speciesism in ever-changing terms. In a recent *New York Review*, Singer articulates five distinct characterizations within fourteen paragraphs, never noting the inequivalences. Sometimes

speciesism is an *exclusivist comparative* notion accurately ascribable to few if any people: “we ignore or discount [animal] interests, simply on the grounds that they are not members of our species.” Sometimes speciesism is the *combined* comparative and noncomparative notions: “species alone is both necessary and sufficient for being a member of our moral community.” Sometimes speciesism is a broad, bare, unspecified notion of *moral relevance*, a notion seldom questioned till recently: “species is ... morally important in itself.” This minimal idea entails no interspecies comparison or exclusion. Sometimes speciesism is a narrower notion of *justifiable preference*: “it is justifiable to give preference to beings simply on the grounds that they are members of the species *Homo sapiens*”. Sometimes the puny permissible preference morphs into a muscular claim of *obligatory preference*: “we have a special obligation to other members of our species in preference to members of other species”.

Despite their substantial differences, all of these principles are strictly consistent with every stance from complete disregard for animal interests to a radical animal protectionist agenda. The combined principle is the narrowest, entailing but not entailed by the others. On the other principles, you could regard other animals much as brothers may regard other humans: viz., despite our all sharing a basic moral equality, we are justified and obliged to favor our brethren over outsiders just because of our fraternity. While the combined notion excludes nonhumans from full basic moral equality, that still permits regarding them as deserving the concern caring owners give their pets, and insisting that the pet sup as well as its steward.<sup>13</sup>

Animal protectionists have been cavalier with their terminology from its creation. Singer popularized the unruly usage, inspired by the carelessness of its creator, Richard

Ryder, for whom "[s]peciesism means hurting others because they are members of another species".<sup>14</sup> So defined, speciesism is an aberrancy more anomalous than misanthropy. We meat-eaters generally have nothing against other animals. We hurt or subsidize the hurting of some animals because (e.g.) we relish the taste of their flesh. Their being nonhuman is not what sets us going. It means only that we don't constrain our penchants as we would if their flesh were human. We may hate ants for their picnic intrusions and crows for attacking crops, but hurting cows because they aren't human is pathological, like helping Herefords because they are hooved. Accusing the Macdonald's crowd of being speciesists in Ryder's sense is demagogic bullshit, as silly as it is nasty.<sup>15</sup>

Some critics correctly specify speciesism but can't keep it straight. David Boonin first accurately enough characterizes his target as "the claim that 'If an individual is a human being then that individual has a right to life'".<sup>16</sup> Yet he next thinks he refutes this principle of sufficiency by stating that truism of non-necessity I've emphasized: We humans don't dream of monopolizing any unmatched moral magic.<sup>17</sup>

Some critics are neither accurate nor consistent. Like Ryder, Tom Regan constructs a straw man, specifying speciesism as "the attempt to draw moral boundaries *solely* on the basis of biological considerations."<sup>18</sup> Surely, none but a monomaniacal socio-biologist would venture to reduce to purely biological factors the moral boundaries discriminating friends vs. strangers, creditors vs. debtors, the innocent vs. the guilty, etc.<sup>19</sup> The context for Regan's mischaracterization is the salutary point that refusing moral rights for animals *for their incapacity to be moral agents* is not a speciesist idea. But, like Singer, his conception of speciesism shifts to suit his polemical purposes. To damn Singer's utilitarianism with the ultimate insult, Regan condemns it for potentially

sanctioning "speciesist practices", that is, "treatment, which does reflect *a* kind of speciesism"<sup>20</sup> -- by which Regan seems to mean practices and treatment consistent with speciesism. In this hyper-extended sense, refusing animals moral rights *for any reason* reflects "a kind of speciesism" and thus is speciesist.

Anti-speciesists are unified in their usage only in their all taking 'speciesist' to predicate something bad. So David DeGrazia's sole gloss is: "speciesism, unjustified discrimination against animals."<sup>21</sup> That's like defining 'theft' as 'wrongful taking', as statute books often do, which leaves legislators and judges the endless, essentially contestable task of specifying which takings are wrongful. The pejorative 'racist' is problematic enough,<sup>22</sup> but it's not so unruly since we're generally clear enough how to treat everyone so their race is irrelevant. In contrast, we can't be gender-blind as we can be race-blind. Especially in our private lives, gender cannot easily or at all be irrelevant, so discriminating the reasonable from the "sexist" gender-based discriminations is more uncertain. Meanwhile, any talk of being "species-blind" in our lives has got to be a joke, unless it's at a level of ultimate abstraction dear to theorists and open to multiple interpretations and applications.<sup>23</sup>

The terminological issue is a distraction. Make the term essentially pejorative as DeGrazia does, and you leave wide open which practices are speciesist, and whether many, let alone most, people are speciesists. Try instead any value-neutral specifications like Singer's quintet, and the question is whether there's anything wrong with speciesism. If you like, call the noncomparative notion that being human is reason enough for being our moral equal the *Standard Belief*, or *ilkism*. For now, backed by Boonin, I'll call it *speciesism* so the term refers to a strong, specific principle most people really profess.



The substantive issues stay. Whatever any self-appointed spokesman for speciesism may say, the operative rationale for mainstream practices discounting animal interests has never been that they are nonhuman interests. Rather, at bottom it's simply that we know no compelling reason obliging us to count their interests more heavily than we do. Why some people's sentiments are stimulated by animal suffering is readily fathomed. Why those who aren't so stirred are nonetheless obliged, and may legitimately be compelled, to forgo their pleasures for the sake of these creatures remains to be explained.

The indiscriminate assault on speciesism is supposed to remedy that lacuna, but cannot. Trashing the comparative exclusivist notion is bootless since that straw man is friendless. Attacking the narrow noncomparative notion isn't enough. Animal advocates go after even the minimal idea that species relations are morally relevant. Why? As the signatories to "A Declaration on Great Apes" declare, denying species membership any moral relevance is supposed to make defenders of the status quo "bear the burden of proof".<sup>24</sup> Current practices now get invidiously described as "discriminating against animals", and justification for this discrimination is demanded.

For any moral reformer to shift the *onus probandi* onto the moral orthodoxy is a neat trick, especially when reformers accept the orthodox presumption favoring freedom that demands that reason be given for keeping accountable agents from doing what they please. In this instance the burden-shifting is predicated on our having real, weighty reasons to restrict one another for the sake of fellow humans. The trouble is, after rejecting speciesism, the Singerian rationale for our being obliged to restrain ourselves gets compellingly refuted by Reganites. Singerians return the favor by no less thoroughly

refuting Reganism. So too for alternative anti-speciesist theories. Each theorist convincingly discredits the competing rationales of their shared practical proposals, but beyond their unanimous rejection of speciesism, they have no well or widely accepted justification of their protectionist agenda or of any moral obligation regarding any creature. Thanks to all the exposure of the unpalatable implications of the respected theories, the alienation of those abstruse academic constructions from humankind's moral sentiments and motivations is disturbingly vivid.

The shambles of theory doesn't matter much politically as long as decent folks stay committed to concern for other humans while they're being gulled or bullied into thinking that all moral obligation must be species-neutral. Meanwhile, honest scholars worth their subsidies must see that if we abandon the justifications we thought we had and find no adequate surrogate, if our sacrifices for human benefit are gratuitous, lacking any legitimating reason, then we bear no burden and need no reason to be less considerate of animals' interests. To repeat, no refutation of speciesism could relieve animal protectionists of the burden of presenting compelling reasons for their agenda.

The other motive for the broad-brushed name-calling is equally polemical, understandable and illicit. If speciesism is really just like racism, it's readily explained away and dismissed as "a prejudice that survives because it is convenient for the dominant group."<sup>25</sup> *Ad hominem* attacks attributing prejudicial basis are a valid (if not sound) method of discrediting testimony, deflating its evidentiary weight without touching its truth. That forensic tactic is attractive when there's little evidence available that doesn't rely on testimony, and most of the testimony goes against you. Resort to that tactic is nigh irresistible when speciesism is on trial, for non-testimonial evidence of

speciesism being or doing something wrong is, perforce, conspicuously scanty.

Meanwhile, the competent witnesses are ordinary folks with some perception of right and wrong and they overwhelmingly support speciesism.

Initially, the imputation that speciesism is a self-serving rationalization may seem so obvious that no evidence or argument is needed – which may be why none gets presented. On reflection, the whole idea unravels. Real speciesism, the noncomparative notion, is logically no more fit for condoning rapacious use of animals than for condemning it. In this, speciesism is notably less self-serving than academically credentialed conceptions of moral equality like Kant’s or Rawls’. Meanwhile, the distinctive mandate of speciesism burdens normal healthy adult humans with massive, heart-rending sacrifices for the care of the rest of our human race whose mental capacities are undeveloped, deformed or defunct, temporarily or permanently.<sup>26</sup> No plausible substitute principle so unequivocally demands such unrewarded beneficence. Speciesism would be a stupendously stupid choice for any band of human contractors (medical professionals excepted) seeking self-serving membership rules.<sup>27</sup>

Astute anti-speciesists must know that the slur of selfish prejudice is all canard, for a key cog in their critique is the claim that speciesism is not derivable from any familiar contractarian theory that justifies moral principles by their acceptability to rational, self-interested contractors – otherwise, speciesism could hardly be dismissed as an “arbitrary” principle.

Like Arabs and Israelis, animal protectionists resist acknowledging their opponents’ honorable motives meriting respect and calling for compromise. Political activists aren’t expected to earnestly try to empathically understand their opposition and

make good sense of the complex, and often uncertain, ambiguous or conflicting data about their opponents' behavior, beliefs and attitudes. Propagandists can't but be tempted to indulge in ill-founded *ad hominem* abuse to attain their allegedly noble goals. Among honest scholars and truth seekers, such antics are derided as the desperate resort of polemicists with an axe to grind and an empty quiver.

Real speciesism may not be impregnable but it's no easy mark, and after decades of furious criticism, critics have said little to persuade a thoughtful observer. They seem oblivious to their pet criticisms being patently question-begging assertions of the incompatibility of speciesism with unquestioned dogmas of their hallowed ethical theories.

I have long welcomed Singer & Co.'s assistance in awakening ethical theorists to the glaring discrepancies between our honored theories and most people's deepest convictions. Our philosophical heritage has fudged this for centuries, fobbing off one or another ersatz principle and attributing our moral status to some psychological property of normally developed humans, like rationality, self-consciousness, or sentience.<sup>28</sup> Since humans possess no such property necessarily, universally or exclusively, the theorists' surrogate rules depart from common belief both in their sense, and in sanctioning significantly different practices and attitudes. While such psychological properties have obvious linkages with moral concepts, our theories have noted no internal relation of biological properties with rational moral principles. The mismatch is scandalous, and, unlike some of his allies, Singer and I reject any resolution of these problems requiring attribution of nonempirical properties like inherent worth, dignity, natural rights and their religious translations in terms of sanctity, sacredness, being besouled, the image of God,

His children. Ultimately, all that talk can at best only express and not explain our moral status.

It's the fate of our trade that one philosopher's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*. While Singer and his sort enjoy serene confidence in their *a priori* intuitions, I remain mired in Socratic humility, too diffident to suppose myself so clever that if I cannot concoct a compelling account of the reasonableness of speciesism, then that's evidence enough that it can't be done. I'm hampered by a prior doubt about how I could know that I cannot conceive of some such account. Short of proof of its falsehood, how could anyone rule out the possibility of a philosophical discovery? Mathematicians don't think their cluelessness how to demonstrate the Reimann Hypothesis qualifies as an impossibility proof. How can scholars knowing the history of philosophical thought allow themselves any certainty that there cannot be another way of thinking about species and moral status?<sup>29</sup>

Speciesism's detractors declare themselves incapable of imagining any plausible justification of it, but they don't describe any earnest attempts or how long they lasted. It all smacks of snap introspection. They see they don't now see how to do it. Like myself, they may see in a glance that no familiar patterns of justification work here, and those who've tried them were doomed to fail. But how does their pessimism get from there to some predictive certainty that an original thought won't strike them out of the blue? Conceptual gestalt switches are notoriously unpredictable, quite unlike perceptual switches.

Obvious truths could suddenly and forcefully dawn on you, perhaps, for example, that, whatever you and I may be in some noumenal reality, in the natural world, as

objects and agents in nature, what we essentially are is human beings, and what we share is our brute nature, our brute membership in a basic category of biological order. There may be nothing especially estimable in that, but in this natural world it's the most consequent, life-structuring fact about us. And it sure would be mighty peculiar if all that were "irrelevant" to our highest valuations and principles in the ordering of our natural lives.

Of course that flash of thought isn't enough. You've got to dwell on it, and the devil is in the details. Making sense of the apparent categorical normativity of natural facts has been the defining task of modern ethical theory. Virtually every aspect of the problem has been disputed. Yet, amidst all this intense dissension, some authors impatiently dismiss the very possibility that one key to the problem may be to understand how the *natural significance* of the facts of our lives has intrinsic *moral import*.<sup>30</sup>

Only a philosophical naïf could expect an adequate analysis and resolution of these subtle conceptual issues to be encompassed within this paper. I tried sketching some steps of a rationale of speciesism decades ago,<sup>31</sup> and recently sketched some better ones.<sup>32</sup> I'd be (and have been) the first to acknowledge their inadequacy. Perhaps neither is any better than the alleged justifications of alternative principles: they could hardly be worse. To now say more of either than I've already said would only distract from my main message: viz., the truth and proof of speciesism are no threat to the animal protectionist agenda. For those political concerns, the issue is academic.

Still, academic issues have their importance, and given the current state of play in the discipline it's worth warning against the widespread, unwarranted anti-speciesist confidence that species membership cannot be intrinsically morally significant. The

impossibility anti-speciesists envision is an artifact of a specious dilemma with two delusory horns. We're told that either one justifies speciesism by associating species membership with some other property, which makes this other property the real qualification for moral equality, so speciesism fails as a bedrock principle of moral equality, or else the reasonableness of speciesism is unexplained by any of a species' features, so the speciesist criterion is "morally arbitrary". The alleged dilemma applies to any property. One horn confusedly states the truism that ("by definition") *basic* moral principles cannot be justified like derived principles by deduction from some more general principle asserting the significance of some other property. The problem, familiar for a few millennia, is that we remain in the dark how to justify any first principle, moral, logical, epistemological or otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

The other horn, the accusation of arbitrariness, is tricked-out question-begging, apparently a corollary of a broader, more radical rejection of *biologism*. *Anti-biologists*<sup>34</sup> say species membership is not "intrinsically" morally relevant because no biological property or relation is.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, anti-biologism is deducible from the axioms of consequentialism or voluntarism or *a prioristic* Kantianism. Such theories affirm what speciesism and biologism deny. Such theories have obvious attractions and well known deficiencies. To think incompatibility with such theories objectionable is question-begging.

Critics of speciesism seem to suppose they get beyond this impasse by invoking a quasi-inductive argument that says: We know that discrimination based on race is wrong, and discrimination based on sex is wrong, *ergo* discrimination based on biological

properties is wrong, and thus so is discrimination based on species membership.<sup>36</sup> This seems a fair reading of, for example, Dale Jamieson's enthymeme:

... it might be suggested that membership in the moral community is determined by species membership. ... To restrict membership in the moral community to those who belong to the "right" species is analogous to the racist's attempt to restrict membership to those who belong to the "right" race, and to the sexist's effort to exclude those of the "wrong" gender. Rationally, we recognize that we cannot mark moral boundaries on the basis of such biological differences. Yet this is precisely what those who attempt to restrict membership in the moral community to all and only *Homo sapiens* are guilty of. They assume that membership in a particular species is the only basis for deciding who does and who does not belong to the moral community. To avoid this prejudice of "speciesism", we must reject this way of setting the boundaries of the moral community, and recognize that when needless pain and suffering are inflicted on infants and enfeebled humans, it is wrong, not because they are members of our species, but because they experience needless pain and suffering.<sup>37</sup>

If this is an induction from our judgments about race and sex to the moral irrelevance of biological properties, it's a classic of hasty generalization. Note also the unnoted and unexplained assumption that if a biological property like species membership is not necessary for moral membership, it cannot be sufficient or at all relevant.

Along with these logical lapses, what's missing is the manifest empirical datum that the historically influential rhetoric expanding the egalitarian circle hasn't questioned the moral relevance of biological relations *per se* or in general. The motor of moral



progress hasn't been an insistence on the sentience or self-consciousness of the oppressed individuals, or on any other attribute ethical theorists favor. What has moved humankind is a steady drumming that these oppressed individuals are fellow human beings.<sup>38</sup>

Instances of frank anti-biologism prior to the last quarter century of anti-speciesist diatribes are rare.<sup>39</sup> Egalitarian movements have stayed clear of its tainting entailment that even one's closest biological relations – mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother – have only a derivative, if any, moral significance. Hinting of that notion is politically suicidal for those are the prime model of moral relations in nearly all moral codes worldwide. Ethical theorists think they know better, and routinely “reduce” the morality of these relations to those between friends, benefactors and beneficiaries, and the like – and then rail at the “irrationality” of our legal code's clear recognition of the import of purely biological relatedness unaccompanied by the factors philosophers sanction. Little wonder Jamieson's induction doesn't state as a datum: “Rationally, we recognize that we cannot mark moral boundaries on the basis of such biological differences” as motherhood, brotherhood, etc.

A more recent tactic aimed specifically at speciesism takes the parlous condition of the species concept in current taxonomical theory to render any speciesist moral principle untenable.<sup>40</sup> Yet, the hot taxonomical controversies make reliance on the current state of play there a dicey tactic for ethical theorists. Besides, whatever scientific consensus emerges in the Piercian by-and-by, what is its import for ethics? It's hardly automatic for speciesist conceptions developed independent of taxonomical conceptions. The scientific assumption here is articulated in the prevalent philosophers' analysis of the abortion debate, which assumes that biological science is the proper arbiter of the

criteria for being human as well as the empirical determination of the fulfillment of those criteria. This all ignores the reasonable principle anti-speciesists often endorse in this context: categorizations are properly evaluated relative to their purposes. There's no presumption that categories fit for science's explanatory and predictive purposes are suitable for the normative and regulative purposes of morality and law. It's human nature that the nature and extent of our kind are, and always have been, throbbing issues of morality and law.<sup>41</sup>

Besides, while this anti-speciesist argument may be rhetorically effective in furthering the Great Ape Project, it smacks of disingenuousness. Really, would anyone in that project recant were it discovered that *homo sapiens* is a sharply distinct natural kind like neon? After all, the anti-biologism pervading most contributions to that volume entails the moral irrelevance of the precise nature of any biological category such as *homo sapiens*.



## <sup>1</sup>NOTES

Jewish racism is abetted by a literalist acceptance of eschatological myths of Jews being "the chosen people" of the Lord God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, etc., but that hyper-inflated self-conception is distinguishable from noxious racism. Fundamentalist Christians swear by those stories and fiercely support Zionist goals without regarding Jews as racially superior to gentiles. With or without the Tanackic tales of a ferociously inegalitarian tribal war god, some Zionists favor the further notion, hardly conspicuous if operative at all in the sacred writings (where the Israelites are routinely denounced as depraved, iniquitous evil-doers), that the (European if not also Ethiopian) Jews are intellectually and morally superior to their Arab neighbors (if not all the *goyim*) whom they derogate as dirty, devious, lazy, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Essentially the same complaints can be made against the canard that criticism of Israeli treatment of Palestinians is an expression of anti-Semitism. The major difference is that the latter canard has less justification and more respectability in the USA.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh LaFollette and Niall Shanks, "The Origin of Speciesism", *Philosophy*, 71, 1996, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Whatever their intellectual merit, the responses I've seen of speciesists like Carl Cohen (e.g., "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research", *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 7/24/86) are surprisingly temperate and devoid of expectable resentment.

<sup>5</sup> Hard-core racism is too ugly and deeply embedded in one's character for others to take high-minded Augustinian postures of hating the sin but not sinner. Of course, cases vary in degree and kind (some people are closet racists and keep it unaggressive) and complications alter the options: I couldn't well disown my embarrassingly racist mother.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps my puzzlement betrays an idiosyncratic personal relationship to the subject of Ethics. In a small discussion group many years past, a respected academic ethicist announced that after much reflection about the doctrine of double effect he'd changed his mind and decided that consequentialism was right and the moral intuitions on the trolley cases and their kin he'd long

shared with most people were wrong. Genuinely curious, I asked him what his emotional response had been to this profound transformation of his deepest moral principles. He and our fellow discussants reacted with blank incomprehension, as though I had asked what it had felt like to be persuaded by Grice's argument for a causal theory of perception.

<sup>7</sup> Gauging speciesism's prevalence cross-culturally may require assuming that, despite widely varying conceptions of our distinctive biological kind, the common term in most communities for a member of what they conceive of as their basic biological kind is best translated as 'human being'.

<sup>8</sup> Regrettably, my original essay on the topic ( ..... (1974)) muddied matters by specifying what I called the Standard Belief as including, along with the principle that being human is sufficient but not necessary for moral equality with us, the additional thought that the interests of currently known nonhuman animals have a lesser claim on us. While that combination is common and consistent, bundling these beliefs as a package can only cause confusion. They should be clearly marked as logically and morally independent beliefs.

<sup>9</sup>Rosalind Hursthouse (*Beginning Lives*, Blackwell, 1987) is one of the few who rightly refers to alien species and insists on this non-exclusivist notion. She, however, does not emphasize that this is the popular idea that anti-speciesists have misrepresented. S. F. Sapontzis (*Morals, Reason, and Animals*, Temple, 1987) is among the few anti-speciesists who even refers to some of the data here, but he both grossly distorts the data by alleging that only human-looking beings like the *Star Trek* Dr. Spock get regarded as our moral equals in fictions, and dismisses the mounds of data of myths and imaginative works as somehow not really evidence of people's moral beliefs. Presumably, Sapontzis supposes we're doomed to cluelessness about the morality of Homeric Greeks if all we've got to go on is Homer's epics.

<sup>10</sup>The prevalent ideas and attitudes have more complexity, nuance, and common sense than we have time for here. Generally they are consistent with our triumphantly exterminating the congenitally homicidal (vampires, werewolves, whatever), and shunning any persons, however harmless,

incarnated in revolting globs of hermaphroditic pus, etc. The main point remains.

<sup>11</sup> Hursthouse (1987) and Mary Midgley (*Animals and Why They Matter*, Georgia, 1983) are speciesists who deny the charge of quasi-racism and recognize very considerable claims on humans for solicitude toward animals. While we have significant agreements and some substantive disagreements (e.g., I don't share their confidence regarding the case for concern for animals, or Midgley's rationale for speciesism in terms of natural bonds) my main dissatisfaction here concerns the sharpness of their analysis of speciesism.

<sup>12</sup> With Singer, but without his consequentialist bias, I'm generally skeptical of the coherence of our (culturally peculiar) notion of moral rights. Some legal rights for some animals *might* be feasible. Speciesism doesn't say. Speciesists may recognize that, legal or moral, talk of animal rights is more a hindrance than a help in making sense of our duties and responsibilities toward animals.

<sup>13</sup> The anti-speciesist, David DeGrazia (*Taking Animals Seriously*, Cambridge, 1996), acknowledges that just as I might give to the UJA while my step-sons give to the NAACP without our being racists, I might devote myself to promoting human welfare while donating not a dime to animal welfare without my being a speciesist in any pejorative sense.

<sup>14</sup> "Speciesism" in Rosalind Hursthouse, *Ethics, Humans and Other Animals*, Routledge, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> At the other extreme, some critics render speciesism more innocuous than they realize. Donald Graft identifies "strong speciesism" with the principle that "[m]embers of a species may do whatever is required to ensure the survival of that species, including exploiting other species" ("Against Strong Speciesism", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, (1997), 14, 2.) Its name notwithstanding, that weak principle doesn't distinguish interspecies relations from intraspecies ones, since most humans (Graft excepted?) would sanction sacrificing some of us if need be to save our entire species. The principle is irrelevant to any of our current controversial practices (meat-eating, factory farming, vivisection, etc.), none of which is now "required to ensure the survival of

[our] species”.

<sup>16</sup>*A Defense of Abortion*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 21. Presumably, Boonin refers only to the right to life and ignores other aspects of our moral relations because his eye is on abortion, an act of ending a life.

<sup>17</sup> Boonin also errs in supposing that what he rightly calls speciesism is incompatible with euthanasia of the permanently vegetative. *Pace* Boonin, when a person does or would consent to someone’s killing her, taking her life is not a violation of her so-called "right to life" on standard conceptions of that right. Euthanasia is condemned, not by the general idea of speciesism, but by varieties of it that hold human life to be sacred, a gift from God, or the like.

<sup>18</sup> *The Case for Animals Rights*, California, 1983, p. 155. Italics in original.

<sup>19</sup> I don’t suggest that Regan really accepts his definition. That’s not because he prefaces it with the conditional “if by that term [*speciesist*] we understand”. Nor is it because he would disavow ascribing its inane entailment to anyone. Rather, it’s because the inanity I note has no real role in his arguments or rhetoric. I assume he’s simply being sloppy. By contrast, Ryder’s mischaracterization seems polemical, purposefully pejorative.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> (1996), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Consider, for example: Is opposition to affirmative action racist (or sexist)? It may be predicated on a lesser valuation of protecting the interests of the disadvantaged. Or it may assert and insist on moral equality and differ on what that equality entails and requires of us.

<sup>23</sup> “Equal consideration of interests” makes a snappy slogan, but not a determinate principle.

Competing interpretations and applications of it applied to inter-human relations are endlessly various, and they’re bound to multiply applied to inter-species relations. There aren’t any hedons to make a mathematical equality. “Equal consideration” has determinate content insofar as we can consider and decide without considering the feature at issue. The basic structure of our societies

cannot be formed (consciously or otherwise) uninfluenced by species' features and differences. Our interests are profoundly formed and ordered by that basic structure, and our daily practical issues are framed by it. As things are, whatever their "moral rights", animals cannot be citizens in our communities as infant idiots are.

<sup>24</sup> "A Declaration on Great Apes", in P. Cavalieri and P. Singer, eds., *The Great Ape Project*, St. Martin's, 1993, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Singer (2003).

<sup>26</sup> In this singular solicitude speciesism has been notably unlike noxious racisms. While racists sometimes impose similar burdens upon themselves – witness the Nazi opposition to abortion – their assertions of superiority tend to work against it, as illustrated by the Nazi eugenic cleansing of the Aryan race.

<sup>27</sup> Consider especially that the humans bent on limiting the scope and rigors of speciesism by liberalizing laws on infanticide, euthanasia, and abortion stand to benefit from their proposals, while their more inclusivist opponents have little to gain and much to lose from their inclusivism.

<sup>28</sup> The prime exception is the Benthamite strain of utilitarianism that has frankly opposed speciesism and common moral sentiments on matters of moral status and on much else as well.

<sup>29</sup> I feel compelled to belabor the obvious when, after handily dispatching a handful of unpromising defenses of speciesism, Singer scrapes the polemical barrel bottom and gives us the inductive argument that now, near twenty years after Robert Nozick noted that no one had much tried to develop a speciesist theory, the "continuing failure of philosophers to produce a plausible theory of the moral importance of species membership indicates, with increasing probability, that there can be no such thing." (Singer (2003)). I'd consider taking this argument seriously if (1) Singer agreed to fairly apply its counterpart to the 200+ years of failure to produce a plausible justification of utilitarianism, and/or (2) Singer were to table his induction until he has confronted the arguments of the "one present-day philosopher who *seems* to have attempted to mount a reasonably sustained



defence of" speciesism (Michael Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide*, Clarendon, 1983.) Since Singer had previously discussed Tooley's book at length, presumably he is aware of the arguments Tooley devotes some dozen pages to discussing.

<sup>30</sup> It bears repeating that Hume did not argue that 'ought' propositions are underivable from 'is' propositions, but rather that we (theorists) need to have such a derivation explained.

<sup>31</sup> See my ..... (1974).

<sup>32</sup> See my ..... (2004), which develops a suggestion first appearing in my .....(1988).

<sup>33</sup> This sophistic dilemma recalls the familiar consequentialist "proofs" of the unjustifiability of retributivism, which demonstrate only that retributivism is incompatible with the assumptions of consequentialism. See my .... (1983).

<sup>34</sup> The neologism is necessitated by the natural analog of "speciesist" -- "biologist" -- having an established, disanalogous sense.

<sup>35</sup> The scare quotes are called for, for I have no firm understanding of the term beyond its being meant to mark some distinctive logical relation.

<sup>36</sup> Throughout I minimize reference to the repeated likening of speciesism to sexism as well as racism, since the similarities of sexism to racism or speciesism are too crude and superficial for the comparison to be instructive. Here the reference is unavoidable since the assumed comparability is essential to the argument I'm addressing. Still, sexism has *lots* more to do with matters well beyond basic civil rights, and the minimal moral demands anyone can make on anyone. Sexism inextricably involves issues of ultimate intimacy. The invidious discriminations and predominate evils of racism occur in our public relations, between our public selves. Effective public sanctions against racist discriminations minimize and rectify the evils of racism in the public world of politics, socialization, education, work, war, etc. Racist evils in our private lives are minimized by minimizing private relations between the races by private choices each may make without violating any universal moral rights. We can all lead livable (albeit less than ideal) public and private lives

with racisms restricted to our private lives. Only sexism's public evils are similar to those of racism. Short of universal celibacy and speciescide, sexual relations are essential to our private lives. Legal equality of sexes and gender can only diminish sexism's evils in our private lives. The more intimate evils from sexist discriminations in our private relations can make our private life unlivable, and our public one along with it. The wrongs done don't or needn't violate any right recognized by the United Nations or other public authority. The invidious discriminations don't predicate a lesser "moral value" of the other sex. The "inherent human dignity" isn't diminished. It's not that the other's life is less worth protecting. What it is is often hard to say. Which discriminations are wrongful can be very unclear or clearly *mysterious*. Which acts and attitudes are sexist in some pejorative sense (wrongful? unjustified? contemptible?)? The question is often open to disagreements as reasonable and honest as we're capable of in the circumstances.

<sup>37</sup>*Morality's Progress* (Oxford, 2002) p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> This language has been less prominent in anti-sexist rhetoric, since sexists have often acknowledged the point and insisted (disingenuously or not) that, precisely because of it, males had paternalistic responsibilities to rule over the "weaker" sex. Against both racism and sexism it has been necessary to rebut the putatively empirical claims that members of the subject race or gender are normally constitutionally defective in morally relevant respects (e.g., lack of sufficient intelligence, conscience, self-control, etc.) Unrebutted, such claims do justify differential regard and treatment. Such claims are backhanded testimony to the prevalence of speciesism, since their implication is that members of the subject race or gender would be the oppressors' moral equal were it not for the alleged defect.

<sup>39</sup> Sure, there's Bentham's oft-echoed pronouncement that pain is pain, and it doesn't morally matter who feels it, but the non-tautological half of that slogan has been hardly more persuasive than its kindred intuition that pleasure is pleasure, pushpin, poetry, it's all the same, all that matters morally is the raw, brute feel of things.

<sup>40</sup>Arguments to this effect are featured in various contributions in P. Cavalieri and P. Singer, eds., *The Great Ape Project*, St. Martin's, 1993. Graft (1997) and Jeff MacMahon's *The Ethics of Killing* (Oxford, 2002) use similar arguments.

<sup>41</sup> See my ..... (1988).