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

ABSTRACT: *The modern animal rights movement has been built upon Peter Singer's argument against 'speciesism,' as presented in his seminal Animal Liberation. Singer contends that the wrongs we do to animals are analogous to those committed against marginalized humans; if we are morally opposed to one, we should also be morally opposed to the other. Despite the argument's popularity, the same historically oppressed groups to whom animals are being compared have been critical of it, perceiving the analogy as dehumanizing. Animal activists have struggled to understand this criticism, arguing that it is only dehumanizing if one believes animals to be inferior in the first place—and that is exactly what they dispute. But I argue that what they fail to realize is that the disagreement here cannot be reduced to differences in what one chooses to value. Instead, they are fundamentally conceptual. To be categorized as 'Animal' means something very different for those who have never been regarded as 'fully human.' It is only after animal activists begin to appreciate the ways that human injustice can be distinct that allegiances can begin to form and collaboration begin.*

It has been said that what distinguishes the ongoing fight for animals is that it is the only social cause instigated by a philosopher. In 1975, Peter Singer published *Animal Liberation*, a text frequently hailed as a "bible," and considered by many the foundation of the modern animal rights movement.[1] The argument he popularized is simply that we humans, in our dealings with other species, are guilty of a prejudice analogous to racism and sexism, what Singer, following

Richard Ryder, calls "speciesism."[2] Racists do wrong because, in Singer's words, they "violate the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of their own race when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Sexists violate the principle of equality by favoring the interests of their own sex. Similarly, speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species."[3] In each of these cases, the wrong is said to consist of nothing more than the infliction of harm on beings that are capable of suffering.

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

It is close to fifty years now since *Animal Liberation* was published and it is undeniable that many accomplishments have followed in its wake. The movement has grown in size and strength, "speciesism" is a household term, increasingly broader audiences are being reached through social media and celebrity influence, and, most importantly, it has become more difficult for companies who exploit animals to operate in secrecy. And yet, despite all this, it is hard to look around and not come away with a sense that in many ways the situation for animals has in fact gotten much worse. Consider that in 1975, the yearly average per-capita US meat consumption was 178 pounds per person; in 2018, that number grew to 217 pounds, an increase of 122%.[5] And because Americans now eat more chickens than ever before, the number of land

animals killed for food has increased as well: from 3.34 billion in 1975, to a whopping 9.6 billion in 2021, a 287% increase.[6] While it is true that plant-based options are now more plentiful, this should not be taken as a sign that abstention from meat is on the rise. Several Gallup polls taken from 1999 to 2023 have in fact reported a steady *decline* in the percentage of the population that adheres to a vegetarian diet, from 6% to 4%. If we look at the state of animal experimentation, the available data is similarly stark. Though it may be that every year fewer animals are being tested on in US laboratories, it is still the case that those who comprise the bulk of this testing are not covered by the already paltry protections of the 1966 Animal Welfare Act. A 2021 study estimated that 99.3% of mammals used in experiments (111.5 million) are rats and mice, neither of which are protected species.[7] The story is the same no matter where we look: the trafficking of wildlife is one the rise, more and more species are becoming endangered, Wildlife Services continues its now decades-long killing spree, the radical fringe of the movement has been entirely snuffed out by the feds, etc. For all its early promise, the modern animal rights movement has fallen short: the goal of animal liberation is still nowhere in sight.

Whenever a movement fails to gain traction, I think it is warranted to look back with a critical eye to the ideology and the rhetoric that has been passed down to it. In the case of animal activists, it is evident that they are still in thrall to the same argument against 'speciesism' put forward by Singer in 1975. While I acknowledge and do not wish to downplay the importance of Singer's contributions to the animal rights movement, my worry is that the framework that he developed, in spite of its many virtues, is now failing to accommodate new and divergent perspectives, respond meaningfully to urgent critiques, or build alliances with other liberation movements. At fault, I argue, are certain assumptions, implicit in Singer's approach, regarding what can properly be the subject of moral disagreement about animals. I defend this claim (and

explore its ramifications) through an examination of the rhetoric and the imagery employed by PETA in a series of controversial exhibits where the suffering of animals used for entertainment, experimentation, or for food is equated to the evils of African slavery and the Holocaust. I focus specifically on these campaigns not only because they are perfect instantiations of Singer's argument against 'speciesism,' but also because they are representative of the tactics still favored by the movement at large. Ultimately, my aim will be to open up new avenues for dialogue between animal rights activists and those with whom they disagree.

The Argument from Analogy

Starting in 2003, PETA took to the streets with a traveling exhibit titled "The Holocaust on Your Plate." Six feet high and 10 feet wide panels displayed harrowing scenes from the Nazi concentration camps juxtaposed with images of animals suffering in modern day factory farms. The first panel features an emaciated Jew on the left and a cow whose ribs protrude on the right; the text reads: "During the seven years between 1938 and 1945, 12 million people perished in the Holocaust. The same number of animals is killed EVERY 4 HOURS for food in the U.S. alone."[8] In another panel, rows of hens bunched together in battery cages appear alongside rows of Jews crammed in sleeping bunks; above it reads "to animals, all people are Nazis."[9] Matt Prescott, the PETA campaigner who thought up the exhibit (and himself a Jew who lost family to the Holocaust) justified the analogy thus: "The very same mindset that made the Holocaust possible—that we can do anything we want to those we decide are 'different or inferior'—is what allows us to commit atrocities against animals every single day… The fact is, all animals feel pain, fear and loneliness. We're asking people to recognize that what Jews and others went through in the Holocaust is what animals go through every day in factory farms."[10] But the

public was not buying it. The exhibit was widely condemned as "outrageous, offensive,"[11] as "a desecration of Holocaust memory,"[12] "a moral failure," a "disgrace,"[13] and as "malicious… repulsive." [14]

In light of the overwhelmingly negative response, PETA dropped the Holocaust exhibit from circulation in 2005—only two years after its initial release. Nevertheless, the group held faith in the persuasive force of Singer's argument from analogy. That same year, they launched a variation of the same exhibit, only this time the comparison was not to the Holocaust but to human slavery. Audiences were presented with the question, "Are Animals the New Slaves?"[15] Panels displayed images of captive animals reared for human consumption alongside images of the 19th century African slave trade. Iterations of this exhibit popped up around the country until 2011. Perhaps anticipating the critiques that had been made of the Holocaust exhibit, PETA representatives tended to proceed with a little more trepidation, adding qualifiers such as: "the goal… is not to equate non-human animals with African Americans, [but] to compare the oppression of certain groups of people in the past to the continued oppression of animals today."[16] Nevertheless, many found this 'comparison' to be disingenuous. "Once again, black people are being pimped," remarked Scot X. Esdaile, one-time president the NAACP chapter of New Haven. "You used us. You have used us enough."[17]

Even from the vantage point of an organization like PETA (that thrives on controversy), it is hard not to see these campaigns as detrimental to the movement. Though true that negative publicity does often catapult into the spotlight issues that otherwise never would have been talked about, against this one also must weigh the costs that come with increased criticism. As we just saw, the analogy deployed to legitimize 'speciesism' as a form of discrimination on par with slavery and the Holocaust was met with widespread resentment. This was especially the

case among those groups with whom PETA was (at least ostensibly) aiming to build solidarity: Jews, blacks, and social progressives who care about justice. The breeding of such resentment is worrisome insofar as it can result in deep and lasting rifts between the animal and racial justice movements—what Claire Jean Kim has called a 'posture of mutual disavowal.'[18] When this happens,

> each group elevates its own suffering and justice claims over the suffering and justice claims of the other group, either partly or wholly invalidating the latter as a matter of political and moral concern. Disavowal, an act of dis-association and rejection, can range from failing to recognize that one is causing harm to the other group to refusing to acknowledge that the other group suffers or has valid justice claims to actively and knowingly reproducing patterns of social injury to the other group.[19]

In the case of the Holocaust and slavery exhibits, a posture of disavowal was evident on both sides: on the one hand, in PETA's uncompromising use of hurtful analogies and in their unwillingness to self-reflect in the face of criticism and, on the other, in the total dismissal by those who were offended by the claims made on behalf of animals. This dynamic is not unique to PETA's provocative exhibits. On the contrary, it appears to be a fixture of the animal rights movement.[20] Undoubtedly, the widespread use of the argument from analogy is largely to blame.[21]

If the animal rights movement is to effectively build alliances, it must first be able to recognize that its tactics further implicate them in the disavowal of other marginalized groups. A vocabulary needs to be developed that can not only make a compelling case for animals, but also speak to the differences and to the connections that exist between the exploitation of animals and the oppression of humans. However, if animal liberation continues to be construed exclusively in terms of achieving an 'anti-speciesist' society, the prospect of thinking up new strategies for collaboration and mutual avowal is thereby undermined.

So entrapped have we become in this framework that often we cannot think ourselves out of it even for an instant—to consider a critique or to engage meaningfully with those with whom we disagree. Ingrid Newkirk, for instance, did eventually issue a kind of "apology" for the Holocaust exhibit, writing that she was "deeply sorry." However, this apology was not for the analogy, but for having "caused pain." Moreover, she expressed this only after having lamented the failure of both "Jews and non-Jews alike" to "see through the pain and horror of what was done to human beings to agree [with us that] both systems are hideous and devastating."[22] This comment also is revealing. Newkirk seems to be suggesting that those who object to the analogy simply fail to grasp the broader argument, presupposing the very point under dispute: that human suffering counts for more than the suffering of animals. And she is not alone in making such a rebuttal. For instance, Majorie Spiegel writes that "Comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist."[23] And while it is hard to deny that many of those offended are likely to hold beliefs that are in some way 'speciesist,' this does not mean that any unwillingness to 'agree' with the analogy is therefore just a cry of wounded human pride—the clouding of one's judgement by sentimentality.

It is important to remember that the argument from analogy, though rhetorically compelling, is not considered a 'valid' form of reasoning: that is, the truth of the conclusion is not guaranteed by the truth of the premises. So, while there could exist some resonance between the suffering of animals in factory farms and the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust, this may well be suggestive of but certainly doesn't entail that factory farms are evil just as the Holocaust is evil. To get to that conclusion, one would need first to establish that whatever makes the Holocaust evil is something present also in what we do to animals. And whereas proponents of the analogy will argue that 'suffering' is the relevant feature common to both, here someone

could reasonably object that there's more to the Holocaust than just that. For instance, it could be said that what makes the Holocaust relevantly different is the genocidal intent with which it was carried out. And, of course, more can be said here. For instance, one may retort that the attitude of the German public at large was rather one of indifference—in this way quite similar to our attitudes now towards the billions of animals that we kill for food.[24] And so on. And so on.

But this cannot be all that the disagreement is about. If it really just amounted to the claim that the analogy is too hasty, neglecting historical differences, then one would've expected the audience to have reacted with something more like disinterest or mild annoyance rather than with the hurt anger that we did end up seeing. Samantha Pergadia offers a different perspective, suggesting that the "traumatic potential" of PETA's 'slavery' exhibit arises not from the argument implicit in the analogy, but instead from the mere relating of one image to another. She writes that "analogy does not merely identify sameness and difference" but instead operates "through amplification and reduction."[25] Because the two images are presented together in a vacuum (each one severed from its history, its proper context), the analogy will inevitably act with what she calls a "multidirectional swing."[26] Though the intent may be to amplify the suffering of animals to the level of human tragedy, there is nothing in the analogy itself to prevent one from reading into it the exact inverse: a reduction of humans to the status of 'Animal'—that is to say, worthless and expendable. This is why many who belong to historically oppressed groups experience the comparison as dehumanizing, and even more troubling, see it as employing the very same tactics that Nazis and slaveholders used to justify their violence. And so, we should understand the objection as being, in the first place, not so much about which form of subjugation is worse than the other, or even about surface dissimilarities between the two, but

more fundamentally about the *significance* of holding together these images of suffering humans and suffering animals.

Though they may have not been aware of it, by likening racialized groups to animals, PETA's exhibit was in fact perpetuating a trope that has persisted for centuries in Western culture. Decolonial thinkers like Frantz Fanon,[27] Sylvia Wynter,[28] and Walter Mignolo,[29] have shown that the portrayal of nonwhites as less than human began with Europe's colonial expansion starting in the 15th century. Increasingly there arose a need to sanction the subordination and genocide of indigenous peoples; the chosen strategy was to posit the white race as representative of humanity in its most developed form and as therefore entitled to the enlightened use of other races. Whiteness thus became synonymous with 'The Human' and 'The Human' became a standard against which members of our species could be measured. By contrast, those who fell short of the ideal of European whiteness were classified as 'Animal.' In this context, the term merely designates the absence of those value conferring traits associated with whiteness. The Human/Animal dualism thus functions, in the words of Syl Ko, as the "ideological bedrock underlying the framework of white supremacy."[30]. In order to operate, racism thus "requires this notion of animality."[31]

Because the concept of 'The Animal' has been used to subjugate and oppress, it will be difficult for those who have been victimized by it to read into the analogy anything but a reification of white supremacy. This is why it has caused so much distress. Even if one accepts that the underlying intention isn't to demean but to push for equality between humans and animals, the analogy remains problematic. Because it treats these terms as if they designated only biological groupings, it thereby obscures their racial connotations. To accept the analogy on its terms would thus be to cheapen, make common, the pain of those to whom animals are being

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

At this point, anti-speciesists might attempt to collapse the objection, asserting that their framework can in fact adequately account for why it is wrong to rank members of our species along the Human/Animal dualism. They would argue that it is really no different from the wrong committed when we assign lesser weight to the interests of nonhuman animals. In both cases, one discriminates on the basis of differences (whether biological or socially constructed) that lack moral relevance. It does not matter then whether one is using the term ‘animal’ to designate those species other than Homo sapiens or as a racist slur; because neither is a morally relevant property, both are inadequate as a basis on which to ascribe moral worth.

What the analogy between human injustice and animal injustice is thus attempting to achieve is the following: first, it makes clear that the nature of our error is the same in both cases (arbitrary discrimination). Second, it encourages us to look past surface dissimilarities to see that both humans and animals are worthy of our consideration because they are sentient. And so, far from perpetuating the dehumanization of oppressed peoples, the argument against speciesism actually allows us to better understand why such discrimination is wrong.

I believe this line of reasoning is correct, as far as it goes. However, it does not work as a rebuttal to the claim that is made by those who object to the analogy. What was shown is merely that arbitrary discrimination against animals is wrong just as the arbitrary discrimination of humans is wrong. But what this fails to appreciate is that those who object are not insisting on a distinction between the two in order to establish a hierarchy between humans and animals, or to argue that one injustice is worse than the other. Instead, they resist the equivalence because they believe that the evil of dehumanization goes beyond (is not reducible to) the wrongness of

arbitrary discrimination. To insist otherwise is to risk obscuring what makes it the singular evil that it is.

Carol Adams writes about this happening specifically when we use such terms as 'animal slavery' or 'the animal holocaust.' Here, the experiences of blacks and Jews become a metaphor to describe an altogether different occurrence. And though this tactic may succeed at alerting us to the wrongs that are done to animals, those who originally were the subject of that experience are rendered 'absent' in the process. The problem with this, writes Adams, is that "some terms are so powerfully specific to one group's oppression that their appropriation to others is potentially exploitative."[32] The same might be reasonably said about the process by which certain humans have been 'animalized.'

To begin to understand how it is that human injustice may possess a special character, one must first have a sense what it means to do something *to* a human. As Cora Diamond puts it, "We can most naturally speak of a kind of action as morally wrong when we have some firm grasp of what kind of beings are involved,"[33] as well as a sense of the relationship that exists between the two parties.[34] Because the moral relationships we may form with other humans are in significant ways different than our moral relationships to any other class of being, the evils that may be inflicted upon them are of a special kind. For instance, the political theorist Sharon Krause[35] makes the case that humans are such that they require for their proper flourishing the freedom to manifest their distinctive subjectivity; this in turn depends on their being recognized and accepted for who they take themselves to be. It is thus an abiding feature of human relationships that individual agency is always subject to being undermined by systematic power inequalities and pervasive stigma—impersonal forces that we may call 'oppression.' Because oppression usually operates "unintentionally and unconsciously… through social norms and

internalized habits,"[36] it infringes on the individual's freedom differently than that of straightforward discrimination—the "intentional disadvantaging of others" (p. 145). What is likely the most pernicious effect of this unfreedom on the individual is what W. E. B. Du Bois once famously called "double consciousness": to simultaneously see oneself as one authentically is, while also looking "through the eyes of others… measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (1989, p. 3). Thus, under oppression, the constraints placed on a person's agency come not from the outside in the form of physical obstacles or absent opportunities, but rather from within, from the very psyche of the individual. James Baldwin illustrates the implications of such internalized hatred in this harrowing passage:

> When I was little I despised myself; I did not know any better. And this meant, albeit unconsciously, or against my will, or in great pain, that I also despised my father. And my mother. And my brothers. And my sisters. Black people were killing each other every night out on Lenox Avenue, when I was growing up: and no one explained to them, or to me, that it was intended that they should; that they were penned where they were, like animals, in order that they should consider themselves no better than animals.[37]

This passage is valuable for our purposes not only because it illustrates how oppression works within the individual—denying and debasing their humanity, eating away at their self-esteem, undercutting their agency—but also because it testifies to Syl Ko's claim that at the core of human injustice is the experience of animalization: "What condemns us [black people] to our inferior status, even before we can speak or act is not merely our racial category but that our racial category is marked... by animality."[38] She goes on to argue that blacks share in this animality "by virtue of our perceived and felt 'less than' status. The feeling of the lack comes from the animal within… The animal is not separate from our 'blackness.' It is part of it."[39]

The injustices that literal animals face, by contrast, cannot be of this sort. Ko writes that "nonhuman animals cannot subjectively experience a lack of humanity… we cannot override their subjective perspectives such that we could program them to suffer what it is like to feel less

than human."[40] Which, of course, is not to imply that the injustices they face are therefore any less worthy of our concern; rather, the implication is only that in addressing animal injustice, we need to first take stock of who these beings are, and what our relationship to them is like.

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

Though the analogy has proven to be inadequate, it cannot be denied that those who have advanced it are driven by genuine concern. We saw that the reason they have sought to strip the concept 'human' of significance—and, by extension, relegate as inconsequential the special bond we share with those of our own kind—is simply because they believe that this is the only way to dismantle the moral hierarchy that sets our species on top. At the same time, those who have taken offense at the analogy do have a point: in equating oppressed peoples to animals, the very same maneuver that has been used in the past to strip them of their humanity is repeated. More importantly, they may not be willing to concede the premise upon which the analogy's underlying argument depends—that, properly conceived, 'human' and 'animal' are just biological categories. First, to accept this would be to obscure the dynamics of oppression—the way that the 'The Animal' may conceal within it a racist logic, work to undermine non-white agency, and thereby uphold a white supremacist social order (under the guise of 'The Human'). And second, it would foreclose a liberatory role for the concept of 'the human' to play outside of a white supremacist framework—the potential that it has to "operate as a reason to treat each other according to a certain standard."[41] Crucially, as we saw, such a concept is needed to explain animalization as the evil that it is: operating (as Cora Diamond might put it) by "withdrawing from the person involved some of what would belong to a recognition of him as a human being."[42]

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

First, we may point to their closely linked history: the fact that the systematic exploitation of animals ('forced domestication' we might call it) served as both the model and the inspiration for the later development of human slavery. Karl Jacoby is a prominent proponent of this theory, arguing that it is "more than coincidental that the region that yields the first evidence of agriculture, the Middle East, is the same one that yields the first evidence of slavery."[43] Although farming could feed more people on less land in comparison to gathering and hunting, it required significantly more labor. Human slavery thus emerged as an attractive solution, especially because it was likely perceived as "little more than the extension of domestication to humans."[44] These societies not only repurposed the master/slave dynamic that had been used in their subjugation of animals, but also the instruments and techniques used to control them: whips, chains, castration, and branding.[45]

The same likely holds for the various coping mechanisms that developed to allow for the exploitation of animals without pity or remorse. For instance, we often create sharp distinctions between our nature and theirs, rationalize our cruelty, detach ourselves emotionally, cover up violence with euphemism—all of these may have likewise facilitated the transition to a slave society. Of course, before this manner of treating humans (like animals) was even available to us as an option, it was necessary for them to be *conceived* as animals in the first place. For instance, Sumer, one of the earliest Mesopotamian city-states, referred to castrated slave boys as 'amar-

kud,' the same word used for young, castrated donkeys, horses, and oxen.[46] The designation of 'Animal,' then, is not only a retroactive means of justifying the domination of humans, but is also what, in the first place, opens that up as a possibility.

Though the category of the 'Animal' was first applied to humans in order to replicate the exploittative relationship of master and slave, with Europe's colonial expansion the term is deployed for an altogether different project: advancing white supremacy. As we noted earlier, 'The Animal' now gets defined in opposition to 'The Human,' thereby designating the absence of those traits that, it is claimed, are found in the purest form and highest proportion in upper-class European white males, such as rationality, self-determination, and virtue. Defined in this way, the concept of 'The Animal' depends for its coherence not on our relationship to actual animals, but on what is held to be 'ideally human.'

However, this is not to say that the concept of 'The Animal' therefore has no impact on how we treat other species. On the contrary, Syl Ko argues that because the Human/Animal dualism has become so pervasive in our society, by extension "nonhuman animals are raced and we should understand their subordination as a racial phenomenon."[47] If this is true, it implies that the subjugation of animals at least partly serves the purpose of enforcing the separation between 'The Animal' and what is properly 'Human.'

To sum up, human injustice and animal injustice overlap and reinforce each other in at least two significant ways. First, our massively successful and largely unquestioned enterprise of animal exploitation serves as a precursor to the many atrocities committed against our own species. It provides us not only with a model to replicate, but also with a language that, when used metaphorically to talk about humans, is able to sanction violence. Second, the very same

prejudices that underlie the oppression of humans—deemed 'Animal'—also contribute to our disdain (or dismissal) of literal animals. Both serve as foils to 'The Human.'

In turn, these connections have significant tactical implications for both human and animal liberation movements. So long as animals remain the sort of beings that are routinely maimed, tortured, and killed without justification, pity, or remorse, animalizing humans will prove an effective strategy for their dehumanization. So long as white supremacy divides the world into what is 'Human' and what is not, other species will be subordinated along with other races—all in order to set up a contrast between those at the top of the value hierarchy and those at the bottom. More generally, we could say that there always exists the possibility that any "techniques used to oppress one particular group can also be used to oppress another group."[48] What this means is that no injustice can be done away with while others remain strong; to be effective at dismantling any, all must be addressed in tandem. Claire Jean Kim has called this approach an "ethic of mutual avowal"; it consists, in her words, of "recognizing the connectedness of multiple forms of domination and acting against them in concert"[49]

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

> Analogizers claim be connecting and avowing, but in many cases they seem to be instrumentalizing the other cause in question or treating it as a means to an end. The

> analogizer does not connect x and y in the sense of exploring them as independently significant and logics. Rather, concerned to validate x, which is her true focus, the analogizer seizes upon y, which already enjoys some measure of social validation, and posits x = y.[50]

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

> crudely drawn and elementary images or analogies of oppression… many times are the same people who tend to be dismissive of or resistant to views in which animal oppression and human oppression are thought about together and in the same spaces with the aim of taking to task racism, sexism, speciesism, ableism, and so on—or coloniality in general—in tandem.[51]

This leads her to conclude that "most animal activists don't really believe it" when they say that animal and human injustice are inextricably linked.[52] For them, it is just a convenient rhetorical device deployed to advance a political end.

While plausible, I am not convinced by the explanation. I am not convinced that vegan activists have failed to speak meaningfully on the deep connections between human and animal injustice simply because they are disingenuous, that their claim to care about all injustice is just pretense and that secretly they prioritize their own cause at the expense of others. Even with PETA this seems to me unlikely. While it almost certain that their tactics have contributed to the deepening rift between animal and racial justice movements, still I am inclined to take them and other anti-speciesists as fundamentally sincere when they state that their intent is to forge alliances with other liberation movements, practically and theoretically. But then why have they failed to achieve this? Because their vocabulary does not let them. I mean that the concepts at their disposal do not permit them, in first place, to consider these deep connections between racial and animal injustice even as a possibility. And the language they are left with—that of 'speciesism,' and 'discrimination,' and 'the principle of equal consideration of interests' and the

rest—cannot capture what distinctive about human oppression and only implicates them further in disavowals.

Being Limited in One's Vocabulary

The concept of 'speciesism,' we have seen, serves as a moral framework within which an agent's relationship to nonhuman animals may be assessed. Specifically, in Singer's words, it allows us to identify in certain patterns of behavior a "prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species."[53] If we then move from speciesism to consider the wrongs done to marginalized humans, these may well appear to us cast in the same mold: that is, consisting of discrimination against individuals on the basis of differences that don't actually matter.

Against the objection that there is something morally significant about the bare fact of being human, anti-speciesists will declare that whatever difference may exist, we are all nevertheless the same in the only way that matters: we are sentient. Because animals share with us this capacity to suffer, we have just as good reason to take their interests into consideration as we do the interests of other humans. And if humans and animals can be seen in this way as morally equivalent, now we are permitted the satisfaction of turning to other so-called 'progressives' to accuse them of hypocrisy. The argument, writes Diamond, will amount only to "knee-jerk liberals on racism and sexism ought to go knee-jerk about cows and guinea-pigs."[54]

Implicitly, what is being said is that whenever one opposes any injustice, what one is doing is merely endorsing the principle of equal consideration of interests. As a result, it does not matter who the victims of the injustice happen to be. Because all injustice is an instantiation of the same logic, to take a stand against one is to take a stand against all. In this way, anti-

speciesists take themselves to be advancing the causes of marginalized humans when they fight for animals. And this is why, though one may accuse them of instrumentalizing the suffering of oppressed groups for the sake of animal liberation, they will be unable to see it as such.

The problem then is not that anti-speciesists do not care about human injustice, but rather that they unknowingly trivialize it. Yes, it is true that the fact of our sentience works as a reason for why I ought not cause another human being physical injury; however, there are other kinds of wrongs that can be inflicted on our kind that cannot be fully explained in terms of the suffering experienced as a result. For instance, it cannot account for the wrongness of depriving a newborn of a name (instead giving them a number), a child of a birthday party, the deceased of a funeral, or (to use the example from before) withholding from another a recognition of who they truly are. Arguments like Singer's, that establish equivalency by erasing the significance of the human bond, will be unable to account for obligations like these that are only plausibly held between members of our own kind. Inevitably, those to whom the argument is addressed will be left feeling, as Diamond puts it, "that beyond all the natter about 'speciesism' and equality and the rest, there is a difference between human beings and animals which is being ignored."[55]

Ultimately, what the doctrine of anti-speciesism makes it difficult to see is that acknowledging there to be a morally significant difference between humans and animals is not necessarily the same thing as establishing a hierarchy wherein the interests of one group is placed above the interests of another. We have seen that this difference is worth holding onto partly because it allows us to distinguish between the conceptual mechanism that sanctions the subjugation of animals from that which sanction the subjugation of humans. To understand either injustice one must first consider the imaginative process whereby each comes to appear to us as unworthy of the sort of response that would typically be considered appropriate.

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

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

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

What these examples help demonstrate is that when we disagree it is not because we choose to value the same objects differently, but because we make use of an altogether different set of concepts and, as a result, we do not have access to the same objects to begin with. Anti-speciesists are not able to account for this dimension of disagreement insofar as they limit themselves to concepts defined only in accordance with their pre-established public use, serving no function other than that of grouping together the facts given to us by science. What they then become unable to appreciate is the role that concepts may also play in structuring our thought, in configuring the world that we inhabit, and ultimately in deciding what things we find of value in it.

Because of the restriction on the concepts that are to be admitted into the study of morality, the argument against speciesism also renders one incapable of forging deep imaginative connections between human and animal liberation. If terms like 'human' and

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

Conclusion

The inarticulacy of animal activists has hampered meaningful dialogue with those who disagreed with the use of the argument from analogy. They do not have the right concepts with which to build and maintain strategic alliances with other liberation movements. The poverty of their language is evident also in the failure to gain traction with those who do not share their vision of human life with animals. In these interactions too animal activists have not been able to appreciate the depth of disagreement. As a result, neither have they been able to develop the techniques that would allow them to appeal to those that are different. We disagree not because we ascribe value to the same world in contradicting ways, but because we *see* different worlds to begin with. The movement's tactics must change in light of this fact. It is, after all, quite difficult to argue with someone about what principles best apply to the situation at hand if they do not picture it in the same way. Persuasion must begin by sharing with them—making intelligible—a particular morally inflected way of *looking* at animals. This requires learning how to attend to

them lovingly and without prejudice. Only then, when both parties are at least *striving* to get the same object in focus, will the appeals of animal activists begin to have purchase.

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[1] Villanueva, ‘The Bible’ of the Animal Movement.”
[2] Ryder, “Specisimsism Again.”
[3] Singer, *Animal Liberation,* 9.
[4] PETA, “About PETA.”
[5] Our World in Data, “Meat Consumption in the US.”
[6] Ibid.
[7] Carbone, “Estimating Mouse and Rat Use in American Laboratories.”
[8] Kim, “Moral Extensionism of Racist Exploitation,” 311.
[9] This is a quote from Isaac Bashevis Singer’s “The Letter Writer” (1964).
[10] Teather, “’Holocaust on a Plate’ Angers US Jews.”
[11] Wall, “ADL Labels Animal-rights Exhibit Offensive, Abhorrent.
[12] Guidos, “PETA Display Draws Stares.”
[13] Boston Globe, “PETA’s Human Victims.”
[14] Worcester Telegram & Gazette, “Latest PETA Uproar.”
[15] Wright, “Another PETA Exhibit Compares Animal Cruelty to Slavery.”
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Kim, *Dangerous Crossings.*
[19] Ibid., 118.
[20] Ibid., for more examples.
[21] Zoledziowski, Vegan Influencers Keep Comparing Meat-Eating to the Holocaust and Slavery.”
[22] Newkirk, “PETA Apologizes for Holocaust Comparisons.”
[23] Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*.” David Sztybel (“Can the Treatment of Animals Be Compared to the Holocaust?,” 123) similarly writes that “It simply begs the question to allege that any insult is being made, or that there is any ‘obscenity’ in making the comparison. People feel insulted by the comparison partly because they use

‘animal’ as a term of contempt, to refer to beings who may be virtually harmed at will, otherwise they might not be so offended.”

[24] Here I am paraphrasing Alex Herschaft, co-founder and president of Farmed Animal Rights Movement (FARM), who writes, “I don't think hatred is the relevant thing here. I think indifference is the key factor. Because the people who were gassing the Jews were not doing it out of hatred. It was their job. They didn't hate the Jews any more than the slaughterhouse workers hate the pigs." (Isaacs, 2015).

[25] Pergadia “Like an Animal,” 289.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks.*

[28] Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom.”

[29] Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter: What does it mean to be human?”

[30] Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 45.

[31] Ibid., 46. All of this is not to deny that literal animals have been similarly subjugated. Indeed, for much of Western history they have been dismissed from moral concern, considered mere ‘things’ to be used and disposed of as we see fit. But, as I will argue, there is a crucial difference between relegating a member of our own species to the status of ‘Animal’ and denying literal animals basic moral consideration.

[32] Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 22.

[33] Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” 323.

[34] Ibid., 325.

[35] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty.*

[36] Ibid., 149.

[37] Baldwin, “An Open Letter to My Sister, Angela Y. Davis,” 20-21.

[38] Ko, *Apro-ism*, 67.

[39] Ibid., 68.

[40] Ko, “An Interview with Syl Ko,” 11.

[41] Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 114.

[42] Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” 331.

[43] Jacoby, “Slaves by Nature?,” 94.

[44] Ibid., 92.

[45] Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*.

[46] Mason, *An Unnatural Order*, 46.

[47] Ko, “An Interview with Syl Ko,” 10.

[48] Rodriguez, “White Normativity, Animal Advocacy and PETA’s Campaigns,” 92.

[49] Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, 201.

[50] Ibid., 285.

[51] Ko, *Aphro-ism*, 84.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 6.

[54] Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” 325.

[55] Ibid., 322.