

## Is Speciesism Opposed to Liberationism?

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**Abstract** “Speciesism” accords greater value to human beings and their interests. It is supposed to be opposed to a liberationist stance, since it is precisely the numerous forms of discounting of animal interests which liberationists oppose. This association is mistaken. In this paper I claim that many forms of speciesism are consistent with upholding a robust liberationist agenda. Accordingly, several hotly disputed topics in animal ethics can be set aside. The significance of such clarification is that synthesizing liberationism with speciesism substantially modifies some of the coordinates of the debates over animal ethics. Secondly, defusing some counterintuitive implications of liberationism may make liberationism more popular than it currently is. Liberationism would no longer demand the eradication of ingrained speciesist intuitions. The paper finally presents a form of speciesism that does oppose liberationism, but is too strong and (fortunately) shared by few.

**Keywords** animal ethics · speciesism · liberationism

Ever since Ryder and Singer introduced the term, “speciesism” has been seen as the arch opponent of those who strive to reform our relations with animals. While much is achieved by compelling people to critically evaluate their species-related biases, my contention in this essay is that allowing the speciesist/non-speciesist opposition to govern the call to rethink the moral status of animals is importantly misleading, unnecessary, and detrimental to this important cause. Throughout this paper I will attempt to distill a sense of “speciesism” that actually opposes the pro-animal claim. It will be shown that endorsing the more intuitive meanings of speciesism should not trouble liberationists. Consequently, there is no need to replace speciesist intuitions in order to support reform. Speciesism becomes a target for reformers only under an overly strong and unintuitive sense which the paper will finally present.

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Ethics & the Beast: An Argument for Speciesist Liberationism, *forthcoming*, Princeton University Press.  
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“Speciesist-liberationism” strikes one as a contradiction in terms. Yet in a forthcoming book I offer an elaboration of precisely this position, presenting it as the one that liberationists and non-liberationists should endorse.<sup>1</sup> The book shows how a detailed case for reforming our attitude to non-human animals need not involve abandoning widely shared speciesist intuitions as virtually all pro-animal literature insists. De-radicalization of the theoretical underpinnings of liberationism is important not merely because it is philosophically correct, or because it trims the debate over animal ethics of surplus detailed arguments. The more significant benefit of a theoretical minimization of the case for reform, is tapping a broader consensus. Weighty practical ramifications follow from conservative, widely shared, moral beliefs. The book takes up many of the practical debates over eating, using and experimenting upon animals. In this paper I would like to present the underlying core insight which springboards this approach, suggesting why we should reframe the debate over animals.

### “Speciesism” and “Liberationism”

I need to begin by clarifying what the terms speciesism and liberationism would mean throughout this paper. “Speciesism” has not been used in a uniform sense in the literature. The term goes back to the beginnings of liberationist literature in the Seventies. R. D. Ryder’s gives the following characterization: “speciesism and racism are both forms of prejudice that are based upon appearances – if the other individual looks different then he is rated as being beyond the moral pale. Racism is today condemned by most intelligent and compassionate people and it seems only logical that such people should extend their concern for other races to other species also.”<sup>2</sup> Peter Singer’s introduction of the concept also appeals to prejudice: “Speciesism – the word is not an attractive one, but I can think of no better term – is a prejudice of attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species.”<sup>3</sup> David DeGrazia too perceives the notion as referring to “unjustified discrimination against animals.”<sup>4</sup> Tom Regan uses the term less to describe prejudice, and more as a way of dissociating animals from moral entitlement: “a speciesist position, at least the paradigm of such a position, would take the form of declaring that no animal is a member of the moral community because no animal belongs to the “right” species – namely, *Homo sapiens*.”<sup>5</sup> Mark Bernstein’s characterization of the term, ties species membership with morally relevant properties which, in turn, legitimates discounting interests of non-members: “speciesists believe that membership in a particular species is morally relevant. Morally relevant properties entitle their possessors to have their interests considered preferentially relative to those individuals who lack that property.”<sup>6</sup> These senses overlap, but they are not

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics & the Beast: An Argument for Speciesist Liberationism*, Princeton University Press.

<sup>2</sup> 1983 [1975] *Victims of Science: The Use of Animals in Research*, London, The National Anti-Vivisection Society Limited, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Animal Liberation*, Avon Books: New York, 1975, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status*, 1996, Cambridge UP: NY, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *The Case For Animals Rights*, 1985, University of California Press: Berkeley, p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> “Neo-Speciesism”, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, XXXV (3): 380–391, 2004, cit. p. 380. For a more general discussion including variations of speciesism, see P. Cavalieri, (2001) *The Animal Question: Why Nonhuman Animals Deserve Human Rights*, C. Woollard Trans. New York, Oxford UP, Ch. 4.

equivalent and throughout this paper I will attempt to distill a precise sense of the term that contradicts liberationism.

As for “liberationism” (reaching back to Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, a book that has revived the modern version of animal-ethics), I shall use the terms “liberationists” and “liberationism” as umbrella terms covering many distinct views that have in common:

- A. The belief that non-human animals are systematically expelled from the pale of substantial moral consideration either by objectification or by downplaying the manner by which moral concerns ought to inform our animal-related conduct.
- B. The sense that numerous animal-related practices ought to be substantially reformed or eliminated.
- C. An undertaking of a transformation in one’s own personal conduct in relation to animal-related practices. For example, boycotting some commodities, modifying one’s diet, or clothing, or footwear or choice of cosmetics (all or some of these are sufficient for C).

To be less abstract, the term “liberationists” includes philosophers such as Singer, Regan, Godlovitch, Ryder, DeGrazia, Sapontzis, and Cavalieri as well as other philosophers who write on behalf of animals and are less widely known. I am thinking, too, of numerous non-philosophers who are advocating a general and substantial reform in our conduct to animals.

## Speciesism

Speciesism is sometimes identified with believing that membership in the human species is a morally relevant property. Liberationists have no cause to object to this sense of the term because it is not exclusive: a speciesist of this kind can *also* believe that being a non-human animal is a morally relevant property as well. Such a speciesist can even be an active liberationist. Let us strengthen this definition. Should liberationists oppose a formulation of speciesism according to which humanity is the *only* species in which membership constitutes a morally relevant property? They should not. This formulation too can be digested by a liberationist, who can accept humanity as some special category, distinct from all other species, yet also hold that moral considerability should extend to any being who has a capacity for negative experience. This would mean that, unlike humans, it is not by virtue of species membership that animals should not be treated in certain ways, but perhaps due to their capacity to suffer or be deprived of valuable experiences. The mere identification of species membership as a morally relevant property should not bother liberationists.

Similarly, a mere assertion of human superiority should not, on its own, bother liberationists. Say that someone holds the following (highly popular) position:

Speciesism, I: humans are more important than non-humans because they are human.

Let us ignore possible justifications for this position and focus on what it entails. Liberationists can wholeheartedly agree to I, yet refuse to see why or how this self-commending assertion leads to any discounting of animal interests. In fact, forging a link between this definition and overriding interests is not easy. Asserting that humans are endowed with greater value is sometimes taken to be *identical* with claiming that human interests override the interests of non-human animals, as if they mean one and the same.

But it is easy to see that this identification is mistaken. There exists no simple semantic equivalence between greater value and trumping interests. Some of the things we value have no interests at all (e.g. works of art). Of the things that do have interests, it is possible and plausible to sometimes allow the interests of the inferior entity to take priority over the interests of the more valuable one. One can, for example, agree that the values of the lives of numerous strangers living in some distant country outweigh the value of the life of one's child, yet still allow the interest of the latter to take priority. A factory may value Bill more than other workers yet refuse to discount the interest of other workers when they clash with Bill's.

"Greater value" (leaving the nature of this open) does not simply *mean* discounting interests. But perhaps weaker connections than semantic equivalence are able to tie value to trumping interests. Does the greater value of A over B *entail* the devaluing of B's interests when these conflict with B's? Or, short of logical necessity, does greater importance make such favoritism *plausible*? If the above counter-examples to semantic equivalence make sense, then the answer is negative here too. Susan will save her aging father before she rescues an important scientist even if she admits that the latter's life is more valuable. Greater value (even if it can be conclusively determined), is only one of several considerations that jointly determine whose interest comes first. This becomes obvious when considering the opposite direction: preferential policies hardly ever appeal to importance, and can easily belittle the importance of importance. Countries, for example, are obliged to help their own citizens before they assist others. Yet this preferential policy does not stem from a belief in the greater value of these citizens, and may even be endorsed by a government that, for some bizarre reason, believes that its own citizens are less important. The assumptions that appear relevant here relate to what being a citizen means and the special obligations that this imposes. In sum: greater importance does not hook (logically or probably) onto a discounting of interests.

A critic can object to these counter-examples. "Ideally," the critic may argue, "Susan should save the scientist rather than her father, and parents ought to discount the interests of their children if they substantially compromise the wellbeing of numerous strangers." The critic will go on to say that the inability to comply with moral demands in the tough cases above, merely indicates that we are willing to overlook some discrepancies between morally ideal and actual conduct. Excusing such behavior should not be confused with annulling the connection between superiority and trumping interests: the interests of the important scientist or those distant valuable strangers should still morally precede the interests of less valuable entities. "Moral saints" – the Agamemmons of this world who are willing to sacrifice their Iphigenias so as to save their armies – would act accordingly.

This criticism should be rejected. To begin with, the criticism rests on a crude utilitarianism that would be dismissed not only by non-utilitarians, but also by contemporary, nuanced utilitarian positions. Contemporary utilitarians strive to respect a detailed and complex interplay between maximizing value and responding to particular attachments, trying to accommodate this response as part of what "maximizing value" should mean.<sup>7</sup> The assiduous efforts on the part of utilitarians to show that they are not necessarily committed to forsaking their kin or friends on behalf of some important stranger, in themselves register the desire to maintain utilitarian decision-making free from some automatic linkage between import and discounting interests. Non-utilitarians, on the other hand, would find such reasoning to be not merely counter-intuitive, but also oblivious

<sup>7</sup> For one such discussion on the role of special obligations, see R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method and Point*, Oxford UP: Oxford, 1981, Ch. 8.

to our moral commitments to family members. It is morally desirable that people save their relatives rather than act according to import. The ties between obligations to family and one's conduct are stronger (and ought to be so when preventing an impending harm) than the link between relative importance and conduct. Saying that we are "morally excused" when acting in accordance with such commitments, that ideal or supererogatory conduct does call for such sacrifice, is implicated in a theoretical insensitivity to these particular obligations. Moreover, even if the critic is right about ideal morality s/he is (ultimately) wrong in terms of the criticism's objective in our context. Significantly, the very capacity to seriously question whether or not ideal morality prescribes sacrifices in "Iphigenia cases" registers indecisive links between import and discounting interests. Accordingly, the connection between superiority and trumping interests is not immediate either on the level of moral conduct or of ideal moral conduct.

The critic can now reformulate the objection: the examples above merely show that the connection between superior value and trumping interests is defeasible through the workings of special overpowering considerations – not that it is not there at all. Some considerations (familial attachment, national solidarity, religious fidelity or personal loyalty) can annul the linkage between superiority and trumping interests, a connection which is there all the same. Put another way, the examples prove that we are willing to refrain from advancing the interests of entities that we value more when these clash with very strong attachments and commitments we have to particular people. In the case of non-human animals, however, such attachments are beside the point. We not only disvalue them relative to humans, but we have no real reason to abandon our predilection to favor interests of the more valuable entities (namely ourselves). Our conclusion should have been that, all things being (in some undefined sense) equal, if A is superior to B, A's interests should be preferred. In the context of defining speciesism, we thus reach the following:

Speciesism, II: humans are more important than non-humans because they are humans, and therefore, all things being equal, their interests should be preferred.

Let us avoid harping on the vagueness of "importance" and "all things being equal" or pressurizing the "because they are human" clause (this last construction being a favorite target of liberationists). Considerations going back at least to Plato's *Gorgias* will show that this definition, even if the central operators in it can be unpacked in a credible way, is still insufficient in generating anti-liberationism.

Suppose that I am having A and B to dinner, and that all of us, including B, recognize A's superiority over B and myself (say that A has just received a Nobel prize, and that B and myself wholeheartedly believe that this constitutes a reason to regard him as categorically superior in value to us). Moreover, we all agree that this means that "all things being equal," A's interests ought to take priority over our own. The vagueness in II relates to the inability to stipulate credible links between such beliefs and *particular* decisions regarding specific clashes of interests. For example, should A receive larger portions of food because of his relative importance? Should he have the last slice of pie which all of us have been coveting due to his seniority? Should he be the one that gets to determine the temperature level of the air conditioning system? The sense of ridicule stems not only from our inability to seriously fathom the idea that one human being is superior to another, but from the intrinsic improbability of meticulously tying greater value and consequent belief in trumping interests with *specific* entitlements. Even if all three of us agree both that A is superior and that this should entail *some* kind of promotion of his interests over our own, this admission does not tie up neatly to favoritism of a *particular* kind.

Noting the lacuna between some general favoritism and particular entitlements is important. Liberationists can endorse the second version of speciesism above, accepting both the idea that humans are more important as well as the idea that human interests come first, yet, because this definition does not determine *which* animal interests should be disfavored, add that accepting such beliefs still coheres with abolishment of virtually all animal-related exploitative practices (the definition obviously does not commit one to saying that *any* human interest overrides any non-human one). Accepting the second definition of speciesism does not, for example, entail that particular human culinary interests justify killing animals so as to satisfy those interests. Nor does it support the notion that human research interests exonerate killing and confining millions of rodents (I shall discuss life vs. life conflicts below). Moreover, “trumping” or “coming first” are importantly vague.

### Trumping Interests

Brody<sup>8</sup> has profitably distinguished between two forms of the “trumping human interest” claim. The first is categorical: any human interest, regardless of importance, overrides any animal interest (Brody calls this “lexical priority”). The second is weaker: some human interests carry more weight than some animal interests (Brody calls this “discounting of interests”). Important animal interests (their interest to live or avoid pain) should trump minor human interests. Brody uses this distinction in his mapping of policies for restricting animal-based experiments (associating U.S. policies with lexical priority; European ones with discounting). I add that the categorical (lexical priority) version can be broken down further into qualitative and quantitative aspects: for advocates of the qualitative categorical position, any human interest overrides any non-human interest, regardless of the *relative importance* of the particular interests involved. For defenders of the quantitative categorical variant, any human interest overrides the interest of any non-human entity, regardless of the *number* of beings whose interests are affected.

An additional relevant distinction here, relates to unpacking “trumping,” into a distinction between the obligation to help and the permission to hurt.<sup>9</sup> Say that I believe that A’s interests take priority over B’s in the sense that they are overriding when in conflict. This can mean that I am obligated to help A or to promote any of A’s interests before I assist B (if I see myself as obliged to assist B at all). This is far from supposing that I am entitled to hurt B or curtail any of B’s interests so as to benefit A. This distinction is routinely recognized in human contexts: my commitment to assist my child does not extend to a vindication of me actively harming other children so as to advance my own. While aiding my child can be detrimental to other children, as long as I did nothing actively and directly against them, there is nothing immoral in my actions.

A speciesist of this kind can still be a liberationist: she will see herself as obliged to assist humans and to promote their interests before she helps animals. She can even endorse a categorical version of the trumping claim (both qualitatively and quantitatively), believing that it is her duty to promote marginal human interests before she advances cardinal non-

<sup>8</sup> B. A. Brody (2001) “Defending Animal Research: An International Perspective”, in E. F. Paul & J. Paul, 2001 (eds.) *Why Animal Experimentation Matters: The Use of Animals in Medical Research*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, pp. 131–148.

<sup>9</sup> M. Bernstein calls these type A and type B actions, “Neo-Speciesism”, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, XXXV (3): 380–391, 2004.

human ones, even ones that affect only a small number of human beings (e.g. she can volunteer to give music appreciation classes in a poor neighborhood rather than tend to sick loose animals). But she will *not* believe that this permits her to actively suppress an animal's interest so as to advance a human one. And she will thus be a fully committed liberationist, demanding that all animal-related exploitative practices should immediately cease.

Even speciesism which holds to a categorical (Bernstein's "type A") version of trumping interests in Brody's sense is, then, continuous with a robust liberationist agenda. In non-technical terms: one can believe that human beings are more important than animals, that their interests come first in the sense that any human interest takes precedence over that of a non-human animal (meaning that it is morally obligatory to advance any human interest before advancing any animal interest), yet still not only refuse to actively thwart animal interests, but also be an abolitionist regarding most animal-related practices.

It now appears that the form of speciesism that actually opposes liberationism is this:

Speciesism III: it is justified to *actively* thwart the interests of a non-human animal when they conflict with the interests of a human animal, and it is justified to do so because these are human interests.

But III still fails to constitute anti-liberationism because it lacks restrictions specifying the relative importance of the conflicting interests. Even stout liberationists would not be troubled over minor discounting of animal interests (ships crossing the ocean may alarm fish as they pass, yet I know of no activist who would oppose naval travel on this basis). To generate anti-liberationism, the overridden interest of the animal must be substantial while the human interest is marginal.

Here we enter a more substantive dimension of the debate. If liberationists admit that minor non-human interests may be discounted, they might get pushed to admit that substantial human interests justify actively discounting non-human interests. Liberationists would oppose this contention (rightly in my opinion). But at this point the debate usually degenerates into survival, lifeboat scenarios. These involve challenging liberationists through scenarios involving human/non-human life/death conflicts (saving a man through tossing a dog overboard when only one can be saved implies a speciesist bias and so the liberationist is supposed to be embarrassed into admitting her own tacit speciesism). There are various liberationist counter-arguments to this.<sup>10</sup> Yet I do not think that liberationists need to worry about such contrived cases. They can bite the bullet, admitting that in life/death situations they would promote human survival even if this meant actively killing an animal. Yet they would add that allowing survival to be a trumping interest does not imply that other highly important human interests are also trumping. Liberationists could thus endorse speciesism of the following kind:

Speciesism IV: it is justified to *actively* thwart the survival interest of a non-human being when it conflicts with survival interests of a human animal, and it is justified to do so because these are human interests.

When endorsing IV, liberationists will add that the numerous exploitative animal-related practices that they are criticizing do not resemble lifeboat situations in the least. The varied

<sup>10</sup> These are usually arguments by analogy, claiming that the same reasoning cannot be applied in human–human lifeboat cases. The problem with these analogies is that in an anti-speciesist context, such analogies beg the question in assuming that intuitions generated from inter-human moral transactions carry over smoothly to human–animal ones.



forms of animal abuse (factory-farms, most animal-based research, zoos, blood sports, fishing or hunting) should be abolished, even if one admits that in survival scenarios one would be a fierce speciesist.

The only animal-related practice that does perhaps resemble the lifeboat scenario is experimentation on animals as part of applied research in which life-saving drugs are developed and tested. While liberationists argue against imaging research as a lifeboat situation (both in terms of the disanalogies that this image obfuscates and also in terms of the moral logic itself<sup>11</sup>) there is one way in which digesting the speciesist intuitions that emerge from imaginary lifeboats actually advances the liberationist cause. As I argue in a detailed paper devoted to experimentation,<sup>12</sup> most research consists of product testing, classroom demonstrations and basic research (which is many times unconnected to any known human illness). This means that *if* liberationists and scientists agree that animal-dependent research ought to continue wherever human survival is at stake (while at the same time relocating funds so as to develop alternatives to such research models thereby eliminating the “lifeboat” nature of research, even if it is such<sup>13</sup>), most animal-related research will have to stop. This result is not ideal. Yet it serves the liberationist agenda and will be an extremely important step forward for liberationism. Promoting a tough and radical liberationist agenda is thus continuous with speciesism as defined in this fourth definition when ‘trumping’ is confined to survival conflicts.

Before moving on to a modified version of the fourth definition, which does finally constitute an anti-liberationist position, I need to respond to a liberationist worry about slippery-slopes having to do with the linkage between survival interests and other important interests. The liberationist counterargument to what I have just conceded on behalf of liberationists is that if one allows survival interests to take precedence, one appears to admit that important human interests justify actively annulling interests of animals. But if liberationists concede this, they would be pressed to accept further compromises. After all, why limit importance to survival? What about great human suffering induced by minor aesthetic flaws which can be elevated through animal-based devising of cosmetics? Basic research (the interest to know) or fine cuisine (the interest to enjoy higher pleasure and a richer life), will find defenders maintaining that these are important human interests. Liberationists would worry that accepting the fourth definition above, is not limited merely to swallowing the speciesist intuitions in lifeboat situations, but extends to legitimating all kinds of animal-exploitative practices that promote important human interests, and that *pace* the pacifying tone of my argument, this last implication *is* detrimental to liberationism. There is thus a slippery-slope leading from survival to other human interests. Justifying the first, would vindicate the others too.

Yet like other philosophically credible responses to slippery-slopes, a liberationist can draw the line very high: human survival trumps animal survival, yet nothing short of survival does. Drawing the line in this way is consistent since making anti-animal concessions in survival conflicts does not carry over logically or probably to other concessions. Inter-human survival

<sup>11</sup> See Bernstein *Supra*, as well as S. Finsen, (1988) “Sinking the Research Lifeboat”, *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 13, pp. 197–212 and Jamieson & Regan: “On the Ethics of the Use of Animals in Science”, *Ethical Issues in Scientific Research*, E. Erwin, S. Gendin, L. Kleiman Eds. Garland: New York, 1994, pp. 267–302.

<sup>12</sup> Zamir, T. “Killing for Knowledge”, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 2006, 23 (1) 17–40.

<sup>13</sup> Is fund-allocation itself in such cases a lifeboat of a kind (since one is, in effect, devoting resources to the well-being of animals when such funding could have been channeled to studies that might prevent diseases that endanger humans)? This may have made sense if all research funds were devoted to human survival.



conflicts for example, also modify our moral intuitions: we justify extreme conduct in such situations which we will not extend to scenarios that do not involve survival. Secondly, slippery-slopes work both ways: if an anti-liberationist places too much importance on slippery-slopes, and if she admits that some marginal human interests should not override highly important animal ones, e.g. admitting that some experiments should not be done, or that maltreating animals is possible, then the slippery-slope would work its way up: if animals are not to be tortured, what legitimates locking them up in zoos? If their interests count for something, what prevents them from counting for more?

We can now formulate the active discounting speciesist definition which does finally oppose liberationism, since it includes quantitative and qualitative determination:

Speciesism V: non survival-related human interests, important as well as marginal ones, legitimately trump major interests of non-humans (in the sense that it is justified to actively disadvantage non-human animals, even when such privileging significantly affects a large number of them). Such privileging is justified because these trumping interests belong to humans.

It is this version of speciesism that legitimizes any of the actual animal-related exploitative practices which liberationists would like to abolish, and it is the only one that they need to argue against. Speciesism in any of the previous senses above should not trouble liberationists.

### Justifying Speciesism

I have so far claimed that many versions of speciesism are consistent with liberationism. But I have not yet said why speciesism is itself justified. This aspect of my argument is less important, because I am less worried about the viability of speciesism as such and more concerned about correcting some distortions in the present debates over animals. “If speciesism is false, liberationism scores points or is even mandatory.” Such, I think, is the underlying motivation of much pro-animal writing when it addresses speciesism. The argument proposed here is different: attempting to deconstruct speciesist intuitions is beside the moral point. Robust liberationism is conceptually and practically continuous with these traditional intuitions (even if they are false).

Still, is there any reason why we should retain our speciesist biases? The problem with rigorously justifying speciesism surfaces when one attempts to unpack the greater importance of humans over non-humans. Judgments over relative importance presuppose a frame of reference which, in the case of animal-ethics, begs the question: properties that human beings value, induce us to fallaciously accept an overall value judgment concerning a species as such. The fallacy stems from our agnosticism regarding animal minds. Whatever animals value cannot be weighed by us for the obvious reason that they do not appear to make value judgments. The most meaningful thing we say is that we care more for humans, and that they are more important to us. This, obviously, does not entail generalized importance, unless one assumes that the general and the human are one and the same which, once again, begs the question against animals.

Let us generalize the issue. Can we ever justify a sense in which X is more important than Y? Subjective importance makes sense of such judgments (“X is more valuable *to me* than Y”). But such subjective usage is useless when defending speciesism: if all we are able to say is that humans value other humans over animals, we cannot infer that humans are in

fact more valuable than animals. Crack addicts value a drug more than food. Yet this need not imply that drugs are more important than food. This holds unless the human frame of reference is taken to be all important, an assumption which would beg the question against animals and what might be important to them. Pro-speciesist literature offers three answers to this apparent impasse: first, assertions of human superiority based on some greater potential or by alluding to special properties that humans possess, properties that make humans more important; second, upholding species solidarity (which thus grounds particular obligations to members of one's own species over other beings); third, reclaiming some of the more traditional anchors of speciesism (humans have a soul; animals do not, or human have divine permission to regard themselves as superior to other animals). Liberationists have offered strong arguments against each of these, and I do not intend to rehash this debate here.

Yet does my inclination to throw a dog overboard in order to save a drowning woman actually stem from a sense of solidarity, or from the greater potential of her life in contrast to the dog's? Does tossing the dog emerge from my grasp of a particular obligation I have to the woman? Am I moved to act because of my awareness that she has a soul/can reason/communicate in an elaborate manner? I think not. Something more basic appears to be going on when such decisions take place. One is tempted to use the word "instinct" here, as such decisions appear to resemble instinctive actions, such as fighting to save one's child, at whatever cost to others. One is not acting from a sense of moral duty or obligation. These concepts can be used after the fact so as to justify in hindsight an action which issued out of more immediate and less cerebral routes. It might be true that most human lives are richer than the lives of animals. Some of us may also experience an overwhelming sense of solidarity with other humans. Others might think that humans have rights which animals do not possess, and therefore one should attach more weight to their interests. But such claims, even if admitted, appear to be less of a reason for action, and more of an attempt to justify a strongly held intuition.

Moral philosophers (rightly) regard intuitions gingerly. But since this is not the place to plunge into the debate over intuitions, their value (or lack thereof) and whether or not moral reasoning can be purged of them, I will appeal to a conservative theoretical principle: choose your battles when advocating reform – avoid replacing existing beliefs/intuitions/considered judgments which can be harmlessly maintained. Rescuing the woman by pitching the dog overboard does not appear to me to conflict or contradict my own liberationist sensitivities. It does cohere with my speciesist bias to promote the welfare of humans before that of animals, even if the humans happen to be profoundly retarded and inferior in mental capacities in relation to the animal. And it constitutes precisely the kind of case in which I am prompted to actively discount the interests of an animal. The same holds for eating animals: if personal or collective survival requires eating animal flesh I would give up my moral vegetarianism. The justification I can give to this does not amount to anything more sophisticated than an ingrained favoritism. Similar deep-seated intuitions underlie my liberationism: primarily, the immediate, non-derived conviction that needless tremendous suffering and death take place, and that these can and should be eradicated.

Lifeboat situations thus do elicit a speciesist intuition in me, which I see no reason to shun. Yet a second moral intuition that surfaces in me when considering lifeboat cases and that I should record, is the obligation to look for ways by which survival conflict can be dissolved and through which lifeboat "either or" decisions can be finessed. The only "lifeboat" like situation with regards to inter-species ethics relates (perhaps) to a very small

portion of applied research. Allocating substantial resources to alternative research models might make this conflict go away.

Here then is the version of speciesism which, unlike V, coheres with liberationism and can also digest the most compelling speciesist intuitions:

Speciesism VI: human interests are more important than animal interests, in the sense that promoting even trivial human interests ought to take precedence over advancing animal interests. Only survival interests justify actively thwarting an animal's survival interest.

While VI is intuitive V is not. Strategically, the advantage of endorsing VI from a liberationist stance is that the most counterintuitive implications of liberationism and on which anti-liberationists focus, become conceptually dissociated from liberationism. One can obviously choose to hold on to them too, maintaining that survival conflicts do not justify sacrificing animals. But liberationism as such does not require this extension.

My goal is *not* to urge liberationists to begin defining themselves as speciesists. My aim is to show that the category of "speciesism" is itself not important: accepting or denying that one is or is not a speciesist, at least in most of its senses, does not have much of a bearing on the issues that are actually debated and on the practices that need to be abolished. Moreover, the more popular speciesist intuitions can be readily digested by liberationists without jeopardizing the call for reform.