**Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832) - Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation**

"Other animals, which, on account of their interests having been neglected by the insensibility of the ancient jurists, stand degraded into the class of things. ... The day has been, I grieve it to say in many places it is not yet past, in which the greater part of the species, under the denomination of slaves, have been treated ... upon the same footing as ... animals are still. The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps, the faculty for discourse?...**the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer? Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?..**. The time will come when humanity will extend its mantle over everything which breathes... "

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1. What do you think about the parallel made by Bentham on racism and speciesism (discrimination on a species critera) ?

2. What do you think of the questions asked by Bentham at the end of the article : why does he say that the question is not “Can they reason” nor “Can they talk” but “Can they suffer” ?

3. What should be a moral critera on the distinction between our moral consideration of humans and animals ?

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1. Discuss human exceptionalism : can it be a critera for moral consideration ?

**Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - The Moral Status of Animals**

The view that only humans are morally considered is sometimes referred to as “speciesism”. In the 1970s, Richard Ryder coined this term while campaigning in Oxford to denote a ubiquitous type of human centered prejudice, which he thought was similar to racism. He objected to favoring one’s own species, while exploiting or harming members of other species. Peter Singer popularized the term and focused on the way speciesism, without moral justification, favors the interests of humans:

*the racist violates the principle of equality by giving greater weight to the interests of members of his own race, when there is a clash between their interests and the interests of those of another race. Similarly the speciesist allows the interests of his own species to override the greater interests of members of other species. The pattern is the same in each case. (Singer 1974: 108)*

Discrimination based on race, like discrimination based on species is thought to be prejudicial, because these are not characteristics that matter when it comes to making moral claims.n

Speciesist actions and attitudes are prejudicial because there is no *prima facie* reason for preferring the interests of beings belonging to the species group to which one also belongs over the interests of those who don’t. That humans are members of the species *Homo sapiens* is certainly a distinguishing feature of humans—humans share a genetic make-up and a distinctive physiology, we all emerge from a human pregnancy, but this is unimportant from the moral point of view. Species membership is a morally irrelevant characteristic, a bit of luck that is no more morally interesting than being born in Malaysia or Canada. As a morally irrelevant characteristic it cannot serve as the basis for a view that holds that our species deserves moral consideration that is not owed to members of other species.

One might respond that it is not membership in a biological category that matters morally, but rather the social meaning of those categories, meanings that structure not only the institutions we operate within, but how we conceptualize ourselves and our world. Humans have developed moral systems as well as a wide range of other valuable practices, and by creating these systems, we separate the human from the rest of the animal kingdom. But the category “human” itself is morally contested. Some argue, for example, that racism is not simply, or even primarily about discrimination and prejudice, but rather a mechanism of dehumanizing blackness so as to provide the conditions that makes humans white (see Fanon 1967; Kim 2015; Ko& Ko 2017). According to this line of thought, speciesism isn’t focused on discrimination or prejudice but is a central tool for creating human (and white) supremacy or exceptionalism.

Like speciesism, human exceptionalism can be understood in different ways. The most common way of understanding it is to suggest that there are distinctly human capacities and it is on the basis of these capacities that humans have moral status and other animals do not. But which capacities mark out all and only humans as the kinds of beings that can be wronged? A number of candidate capacities have been proposed—developing family ties, solving social problems, expressing emotions, starting wars, having sex for pleasure, using language, or thinking abstractly, are just a few. As it turns out, none of these activities is uncontroversially unique to human. Both scholarly and popular work on animal behavior suggests that many of the activities that are thought to be distinct to humans occurs in non-humans. For example, many species of non-humans develop long lasting kinship ties—orangutan mothers stay with their young for eight to ten years and while they eventually part company, they continue to maintain their relationships. Less solitary animals, such as chimpanzees, baboons, wolves, and elephants maintain extended family units built upon complex individual relationships, for long periods of time.