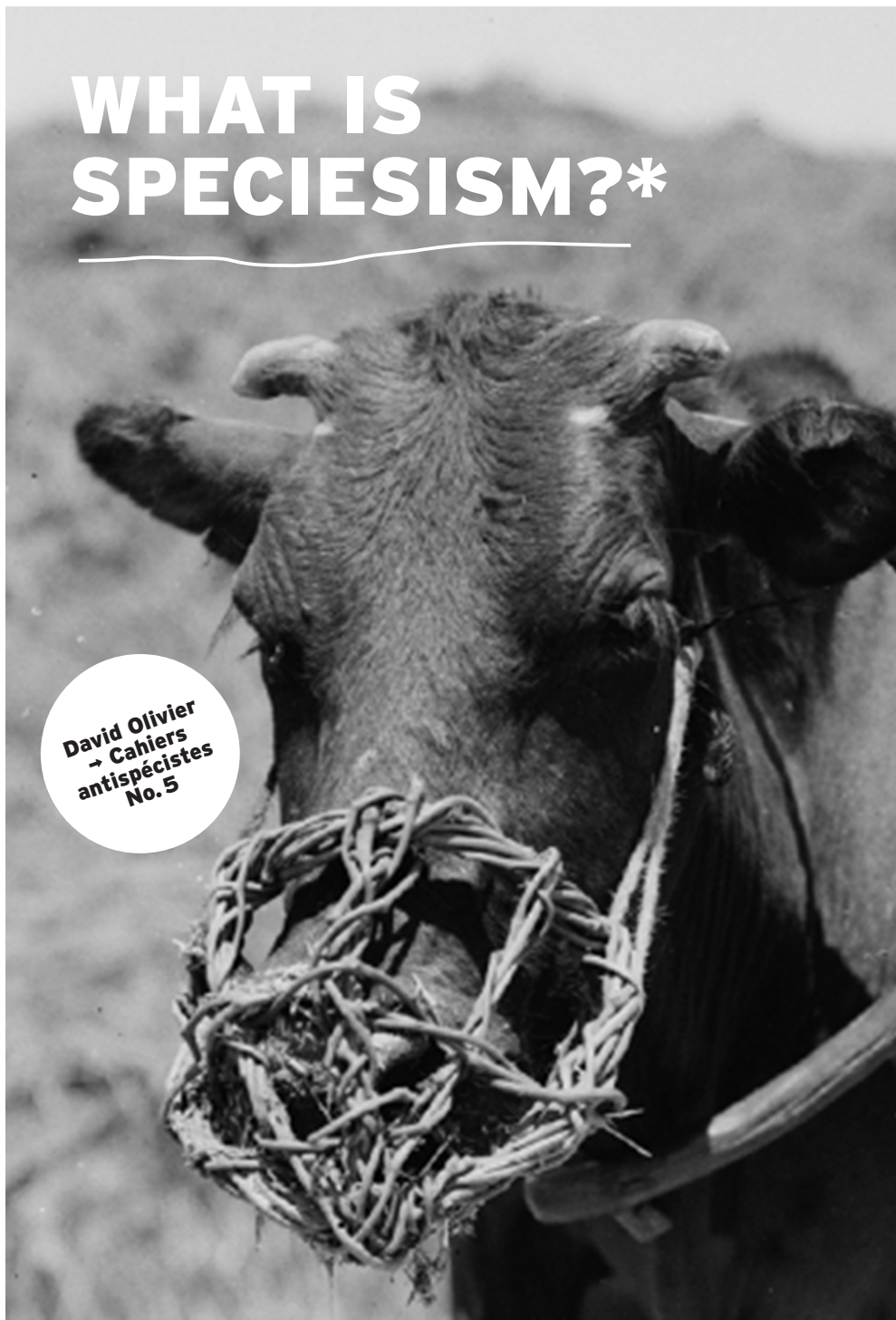


# WHAT IS SPECIESISM?\*

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**David Olivier**  
→ Cahiers  
antispecistes  
No. 5



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# WHAT IS SPECIESISM?

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Although necessary, the use of rational arguments on the subject of speciesism may be slightly frustrating. That is because our opponents very seldom bother to find a counter-argument that holds water; and even rarer still are those who take the time to examine our own. Speciesism, for them, *does not need* to be justified logically or rationally. Just recently, I was pushed to the point of nearly begging someone, who happened to be an anarchist, to tell me why, to give me one single reason why he considered the suffering of chickens in a battery cage as being unimportant. His answer was: “For me, that’s just how it is.” In other words: “Why?”, “Because.” The *explicitness* of speciesism, and the fact that the great majority of humans are the oppressors, are the greatest obstacles facing anti-speciesists.

Once more, it requires us to be on the side of those who are oppressed and treated with contempt — knowing all the while that the contempt may overflow onto those who choose to defend them. There was a time when a white person who defended a “negro” would be treated like a “nigger” themselves. Today, it is relatively easy to be anti-racist or anti-sexist in France, at least when it comes to expressing opinions; this has not always been case. Nowadays, certainly in left wing circles, an anti-racist and anti-sexist position is expected and has indeed become somewhat of a societal norm, commonly accepted, and thus foregoing the need for justification.

When faced by an anti-racism which, when asked “why?” responded with “because.”, the New Right had their work cut out for them trying to appear as the group of *deep-thinkers* they took themselves to be.

However, at a global level, and throughout the course of history, it is racism, and not anti-racism, which, much like sexism over anti-sexism, has been the dominant doctrine of societal thought. Interethnic oppression and massacres have been common currency in human history, both past and present. If today many people can seem to be anti-racist, it is first and foremost because they are opposed to the dominant racism of Western culture, which erases their differences, and ultimately, their culture, for the better, or for the worse. We know full well that the Kanak culture of Canada is sexist, but — shhh, quiet! We mustn’t say as much. We must instead ‘respect their culture as it is.’ Is saying nothing to someone then seen as being ‘respectful’ to them? Given the prevalence of racism, sexism and speciesism, we must not content ourselves to cringe inwardly or to accept unquestioningly that which is evident, but must rather reflect and debate, without fear of being metaphorically relegated to “nigger”, “chick” or dog camp.

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## Some Vocabulary

**Speciesism:** Speciesism is to species what racism is to race, and sexism to gender: a discrimination based upon one’s species, nearly always ruling in the favour of the members of the human species, or *homo sapiens*.

**Animals:** Language is rarely, if ever, neutral, and our current definition of animal encompasses every animal save humans, which thus places a barrier between two beings as close

as a human and a gorilla, while putting that same gorilla into the homogenous category of ‘animal’, where it is on a par with, say, an oyster. Conforming to the scientific usage, amply justified elsewhere, I will call ‘animals’ those that are animal, be they human or otherwise, and use the term ‘non-human animals’ for those who have not had the privilege of being “well-born”.

## My Position

I propose that there can be no reason – except for the selfish desire to preserve the privileges of the exploiting group – to refuse to admit the righteousness of the fundamental principle of equality in the consideration of interests of members of different species.

Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 1975<sup>1</sup>

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Must we be anti-speciesist? Or anti-racist for that matter? The answer must surely be “Yes”? It is not evident for all; and it seems that not all anti-racists are thus for the same reasons. My belief is that anti-racism is justified neither because, nearly, all the humans are equally intelligent, nor because they have an articulated language, nor because they are social, etc.; *anti-racism and anti-speciesism is justified because a sentient being is oppressed and suffers, and that the happiness and suffering of all sentient beings, that is those who are capable of suffering or being happy, have the same importance and must be then taken into account, and given the same weight.*

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1. *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals*, New York Review/Random House, New York, 1975; Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York, 2009.



I am no more a “defender of animals” than those who fought against the slavery of black people were “defenders of negroes”, as they were called by racists at the time; I defend oppressed animals, human or no. I do not do so on a whim, or by vocation, or because “I love animals” as others “love flowers”; I defend all animals, in particular non-human animals, since my intention is to defend every sentient being, regardless of who they are. The sole relevant criterion which justifies taking into account the interests of a being is that they have them. My other reason is that the phenomenon of sentience is most realistically limited to animals, with plants having neither developed sensations nor interests. My opposition to speciesism is one against an ideology which exists to justify the immense suffering and death that the near-totality of humanity inflicts knowingly, deliberately and daily upon billions of beings as sentient as they.

## Racism and Sexism

Racist arguments are often no more than an insidious pretext for an underlying agenda. That does not, however, render their examination an exercise in futility. It is not enough to denounce the “racist baddies;” short of debunking their views, one needs to be able to convince others. Also, in the case of speciesism, the “baddie” is played by nearly every human, who uses the same arguments as a racist would to justify the supremacy which they have reserved for themselves.

Racism and speciesism are ideologies tightly intertwined, and the similarities between the two would be evident, were it not for the fact that anti-racists, for the main part, are speciesist, and it is thus in their interest not to recognise this. The will they have to combat racism without putting the concept of speciesism

in danger leads them to desire the defense at all costs of indefensible positions, which they present as being essential to anti-racism. The idea of animal equality being unthinkable to them, as it is *against the other animals* that they wish to establish human equality.

**White  
people first!**

**Human  
first!**

God has made Whites  
the superior race.

God has made humans  
the superior species.

We feed and protect the negroes.

We feed and protect animals.

Negroes are not as reasonable  
as we are.

Animals don't realize that  
they're suffering.

Negroes attach little value  
to their lives.

Animals don't realize they're  
going to the slaughter.

Negroes are like big children.

Animals act only on instinct.

The natives are fighting  
each other.

Animals eat one another.

All negroes look alike.

Animals don't possess a  
personality.

Me, racist? I have an Arab  
friend.

I love animals, and I don't eat  
horse meat.

It is a private matter whether  
a man beats his wife.

Eating meat is a personal choice.

# What is Racism?

When an anti-racist speaks of human equality, what do they mean? Mathematically, we would say “Paul = John,” as if they were two names for the same person. This however does not apply. Black and white people are generally not seen as being equal because of the difference in their skin color. The equality of which an anti-racist speaks refers to the unequal *treatment* of people whose skin colour differs from that of the dominant group.

Yet the expression “unequal treatment” is a vague one. If, for example, I were a doctor, I would sometimes have cause to treat black and white patients differently: black skin absorbs fewer of the sun’s UV rays, and thus black people in a given country have a lower risk of suffering from skin cancer. Stating that is not racist, any more than it would be to say that, were it the case, a certain colour of skin has advantages over another one. Anti-racism must not be founded upon the dubious and potentially harmful hypothesis that there is an equal distribution of the gifts of “Mother Nature” amongst her “children”, as this type of hypothesis, as we shall see, has absolutely reason to be true, and, in fact, more often than not, is false.

It would certainly be racist to afford more or less importance to the interests – like health for example – of black people than to those of the white people. It would be racist to say: someone’s skin colour justifies their subjugation, that is to say, *assigning less importance to their interests*.

If the position of the racists were such, if it were only founded upon skin-colour, it would be exceedingly simple to contradict; but this not the case. I read a story some years ago about a multiracial South-African woman. An illness had changed the colour of her skin from white to black. What must her neighbours have thought! In order to take the buses, etc. designated for white people, she needed to have a special card made up by the authorities stating that, although she was black, she was nonetheless white.

Consequently, from a racist perspective, it is not skin-colour which justifies discrimination. So what does? What does racism have to say for itself? In order to *contradict* an ideology, it must be *spelled out*, rendered explicit. The strength of the racist ideology owes much without doubt to the fact that it was never really explicitly acknowledged, and so was never really objected to.

## What is a Black Person?

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It is very important to a racist that they be on the right side of the wall that they construct. Race is a good medium for this, as, once born white, one stays white without exception. But the presence of this wall, this barrier, is not sufficient in itself; it is then necessary that the meaning of this division justifies, ostensibly, the discrimination. Skin-colour is really too narrow a category, it needs to be given more substance, a complexity to the idea of what race itself is. A black person must be black to the bone. The race of an individual must be perceived as their fundamental truth, their *nature*, of which the skin-colour is but a sign. Black or white, a person who is born black must be a Black. Of black blood. A racist does not justify discrimination based on skin-colour. They mention it, but that which is of real importance is the nature, of which skin-colour is but a *sign*.

If racism were based upon real differences, its intensity would be proportionally based upon the intensity of those differences; but the violence of nazi antisemitism shows the opposite. The near-inexistence of demonstrable differences between the Jewish and the “Aryans” was simply another sign of the duplicity of the Jews. The Nazis, when talking of the “Jewish nose”, were not merely referring to “the shape of the nose that Jewish people possess more often than others”; the “Jewish nose” was not simply that which it was; it was the sign of the Jewish essence, a nature which, in eyes of the Nazis, justified their murder.

We say also that the King is a king because he wears a crown, all the while knowing that he will upon occasion take it off, and that it is not the crown that makes him a king. To a royalist, the king is who he is because he is of royal blood, of a royal nature; the crown is only a sign of this.

Anything can be the sign of a nature, can be interpreted thusly. That is why discussions with racists are as frustrating as they are. They do not take the time to analyse and to fashion an argument that would be of substance; all their argumentation is superficial, concerned chiefly with signs, and cannot access this nature, as nature itself does not belong to the realm of argument. Colour, height (“black people are too small, or too big” depending on from where they come,) accent, the shape of the nose, this is what a racist wants to talk about, they do not care to go any further: in any case, this *nature* is unquestionable for them.

For a racist, it is people’s nature that justifies discrimination: the literal affirmation of their *difference*. They need not postulate an *inferiority* between beings of a different nature, all comparison is impossible. Apartheid is simply a divided development: everyone has a role. The South African racist will deny that Black people are disadvantaged, as they are by nature different, this doesn’t make any sense. Shantytowns are to blacks what luxury houses are to whites. As surprising as that may seem, I would bet a great deal that the slavers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century would themselves deny the inferiority of black people. As shocking as that may again appear, I have also too often heard meat-eaters denying that they believe “animals” are inferior — “Not inferior, just different.”

The sexist discourse is itself also based upon the affirmation of the existence of two differing natures, feminine and masculine, and on praising the Woman, the Mother and the Wife, those for whom happiness and honour is the founding of nations by washing dishes. “I love women!” a sexist would say (or the “chicks” or the “birds”).

From the popular refrain of “I’m not a racist... but:” to the New Right “lauding of difference,” it has always been in the idea of natural differences that racism and sexism have their roots. Furthermore, these ideologies are false, not because white skin is “equal” to black skin, but because this nature simply doesn’t exist.

But they are all the more believable because most people secretly, accept their basic principle, and I think that they accept it because such is the price of the survival of speciesism. In order to maintain speciesism, all must accept the idea of an animal nature, and therefore all, in spite of themselves, accept the idea of a human nature. That is where the mental gymnastics of antiracist speciesists begin.

The same principle, the same discourse : “I’m not speciesist,” “animals aren’t inferior, they’re just different,” and “Their natural role is to be eaten.” The *sign* of this *nature* is that animals eat each other. They are happy: pigs smile on signs in butcher’s windows.

One can be antiracist while being sexist just as one can also be antiracist, antisexist and speciesist. You could very easily find yourself telling me that “it’s all true, but not for animals, one can’t compare the two because humans are equal, while animals are different.”

And there are a lot of differences between humans and “animals”! It’s something that we have not spared any means to document, as a witness to this tranquil vow:

For a long time moralists, philosophers and, later, researchers in the field of humanities have preoccupied themselves with the question of rejection of Man’s belonging to the animal kingdom, or, at the very least, with the question of finding a specific dimension which removes him from his shameful family, and being so embarrassingly close to it.

J.-M. Bourre, *Diététique du cerveau* (*Diet of the Brain*)

But humans too are different from one another, everyone knows this. By saying that they are equal, we inevitably say one thing: they are equal in *nature*. And that “animals” are different, not by the number of paws, but by their *nature*.

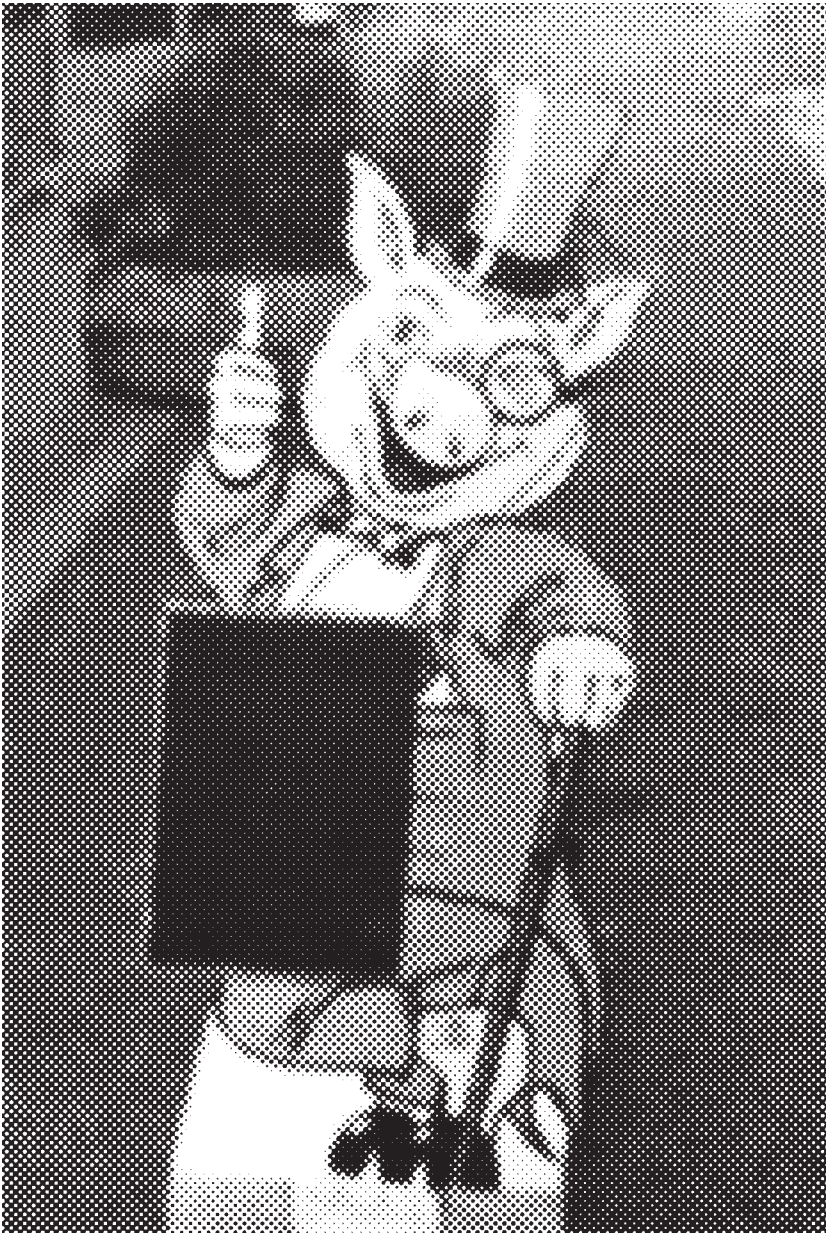
“Reason is the preserve of man.” “Reason” is the main sign for speciesists, and it's because of that, and only that, that I will linger on the question of the equality of intelligence — a matter that in fact, let us admit, concerns me very little. It is however a question that has proven to be quite annoying to speciesists, both racist and anti-racists.

For some, intelligence is the manifestation of the soul, and the soul is human nature. Yet for others, what is human nature?

## What is a human?

The nature of beings has been often used to justify many things: racism, war, the established social order. “To be right-wing is to think that Man has an immutable nature” (Jean Marie Le Pen, quoted from memory.) For Christians, the soul comes from God; for others, the nature of beings comes from Nature, from the Nature God that everyone loves and whose preachers are environmentalists. The nature of a being, its “innate” nature is that which was given to it by Nature before birth.

Leftists cannot accept this discourse on human nature as is; they say: “While the human has his origin in nature, this fact has since erased itself, leaving the field fallow for that which is really human: history, culture, the social, to seed. Man may still be an animal, in so far as he has animal functions, however in his higher capabilities, such as intelligence, he is a world away.”



Pigs smile in butcher's windows, showing that their role, their intimate calling and nature is to become ham.



Thus, the nature of Man is defined exactly by its lack of nature; “animals” too have such a nature — each “animal”, regardless of their species, has an “animal nature” the nature of having a nature. If this thought happens to solidify the concept of human equality upon the crushing of other animals, it is not a coincidence, since the left-wing is anti-racist, but most *certainly not anti-speciesist*. A genuine criticism of the notion of a creature’s nature, profound truth and Nature-given role, this criticism that they use to attack racism, *also undermines speciesism*.

A speciesist anti-racist faces the following problem: they must justify speciesism without at the same time justifying racism. To maintain the idea that Nature has endowed humans with the highest of births, and a nature of freedom, (nothing is innate, at least nothing above the belt.) Animals, on the other hand, are slaves to their nature, and are subjects to their instinct. A racist does not have this pitfall; black and white, cat and mouse, all have a nature, a place, and a role in natural and social harmony. A racist could, much more easily than an anti-racist, adopt a paternalistic attitude and campaign in “defense of animals”, for the betterment of the treatment of animals bred for meat.

At the battle-cry of “Nature is on our side,” speciesists, both racist and anti-racist, debate the ‘innate’ and the ‘acquired’, bickering over signs: do all humans possess the same intelligence? And especially: Are the differences in intelligence *innate*? Is the hierarchy between human races *desired* by Nature? In their search for signs, the ancients read the entrails of heifers while nowadays, we study our brains.

Belief can be blinding, and this argument may yet stand. Yet for those who are not blinded, the answer is plain to see:

1. Humans are no more equal in intelligence than in anything else;
2. Intelligence results, as all the characteristics of living beings, from a combination of genetic and environmental causes, and therefore a difference in genes may produce differences in intelligence.

These facts are common knowledge. If these same facts justify racism, it is thus just, and so too is speciesism. However, if they do not justify racism, then nothing is capable of so doing, the same being true of speciesism.

## **All Humans are not of Equal Intelligence**

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I am not particularly beguiled by the idea of defining intelligence. If, dear reader, you prefer not to speak of it by reason of the inability to explain it clearly, than we shall not, neither to compare one human to another, nor a human to a non-human animal. On the other hand, one could very well bring it up, without recourse to a concrete definition, just as I would be capable of doing were I to compare the length of my neck against that of a giraffe; an operational definition is not necessary. As much as one would like to give meaning to this word, it is obvious that certain humans are more intelligent than others.

There are those who are profoundly mentally handicapped. Some may say, perhaps under the impression that they are shielding them from contempt, that they are intelligent in their own way. However, if one wishes to say this, this form of intelligence could not possibly be the same as that which is employed in debates about the equality of black and white people.

It is difficult to compare the intelligence of a cat to that of a dog; the same would be true of any comparison between a mentally handicapped human and a dog; however it remains that, regardless of the criteria being used, there are humans who are less intelligent than the majority of dogs.

If human intelligence is reason enough not to treat humans like dogs, how do we then treat humans who are less intelligent than dogs?

Badly, assuredly, but less badly than we treat non-human animals. The mentally challenged make us think somewhat too much of animals, just as this white woman was ashamed to appear black. To speciesists, racists or anti-racist, intelligence is but a *sign*, which manifests a *nature*: mentally challenged people “are still humans.” It would be scandalous to even be seen entertaining the idea of cutting them up for research, or to slaughter them for food — to which millions of animals are subjected every day.

The existence of mentally-disabled people is enough to justify the heading of this section. Some may say that this debate is only about the intelligence of black and white people. We tend to easily forget the disabled, “marginal cases,” a bit like how we forget non-humans: we don’t see them in the street. Their case is nevertheless a pertinent one, if speciesist racists and anti-racists argue about the intelligence of blacks and whites, it is their opinion that intelligence is linked with the right to respect. It follows that, to them, the mentally-challenged are entitled only to contempt.

Things are less clear for blacks and whites, or for the French and Belgians. One can only deal in averages: at an individual level, the question is already answered, since in each group there are those who are mentally-challenged and those who are not. Yet, these are averages of what? There are IQ tests, the results of which are nonetheless contestable. We are capable of constructing differing criteria, but none which would, save for highly improbable coincidence, produce the same averages in any given group. One can perhaps find certain criteria which would result in blacks’ earning a higher average than whites, and vice-versa. However, no matter how precise the criteria used to produce the same averages in a so-called “right test,” one will still be confronted by this: whatever the meaning of the word, the intelligence of any two different groups is not equal.

*Comment on sait que l'âme existe.* — On ne la voit ni ne la touche. Mais elle existe certainement. Voici pourquoi :

Comparons un homme et un singe. Nous trouverons entre eux trois grandes différences :

89. 1° **L'homme est intelligent, le singe ne l'est pas.** — Ainsi, un homme apprend à parler, à écrire, à compter ; quand il le sait, il **invente** de belles choses : la construction des maisons, les chemins de fer, le tissage, le télégraphe... Il est **artiste** : peintre, musicien, poète... Surtout il connaît Dieu et il a **une Religion**. — Le singe ne fait rien de tout cela. Il n'y a pas d'écoles de singes ; les singes n'ont jamais rien inventé : ils font tous la même chose depuis qu'ils existent. Ils ne chantent ni ne dessinent. Ils n'ont pas de religion. En un mot, ils ne font rien d'intelligent ; ils n'ont pas d'intelligence ;

2° **L'homme est libre ; le singe ne l'est pas.** — Par sa volonté, l'homme peut choisir librement ce qu'il veut : il peut se priver de tous les plaisirs pour être un saint et plaire à Dieu. — Un singe n'a pas de volonté libre. Si quelque chose lui plaît, il saute dessus ; si quelque chose lui déplaît, il fuit. Pour l'empêcher de faire ce qu'il désire, n'y a qu'un moyen : c'est de lui donner des coups. Ainsi, le singe ne fait rien de libre : il n'a pas de liberté. — En passant, remarquez combien il y a d'enfants qui se conduisent comme de petits singes : pour les empêcher de faire le mal, il faut les punir ou les menacer de les punir ! Un enfant chrétien doit se dire : c'est mal, donc je ne le ferai pas, même si je ne dois pas être puni !

3° **L'homme est capable d'aimer ; le singe ne l'est pas.** — Quand un homme en aime un autre, il est content de souffrir pour lui et même de mourir à sa place. Il ne pense plus du tout à lui-même ; il ne pense qu'à son ami. — Un singe, au contraire, ne cherche qu'à s'amuser avec les autres singes : il ne voudrait pas être battu à leur place. Il a des camarades, mais pas d'amis.

Eh bien, ces trois grandes choses : l'intelligence, la liberté, l'amour montrent que l'homme a en lui quelque chose que les animaux n'ont pas. C'est l'âme raisonnable.

90. Par ces trois grandes choses, l'homme ressemble à Dieu qui est parfaitement intelligent, libre et aimant. C'est donc en pensant à l'âme et non au corps de l'homme que Dieu a dit en le créant : « Faisons l'homme à notre image et à notre ressemblance. »

91. *Quel est donc l'homme le plus parfait ?* Ce n'est ni le plus fort,

Signs that show the presence of the soul, according to Abbé Bouvet, in *Premières Notions d'instruction religieuse* and *Leçons de choses religieuses*, 1938.

## RUDIMENTS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

*How do we know that the soul exists.* — We do not see it nor we touch it. But it certainly exists. Here's why:

Compare a human and a monkey. We will find in them three major differences:

1° The human is intelligent, the monkey is not — So, a human learns to speak, write and count; when he knows he invents nice things: building of houses, railways, weaving, telegraph ... He is an artist: painter, musician, poet... Above all, he knows God and has a Religion. — A monkey does none of this. There are no monkeys' schools; monkeys have never invented anything; they all do the same thing since they exist. They do not sing nor draw; they have no religion. In short, they do nothing intelligent; they have no intelligence;

2° The human is free; the monkey is not — by his will, the human can freely choose what he wants; he can deprive himself of all the pleasures to be a holy and please God. — A monkey has no free will. If something pleases him, he jumps; if something displeases him, he fled. To prevent him from doing what he wants, is only one way: it's kicking him. Thus, the monkey does nothing free: it has no freedom. — Incidentally, note how many children behave like little monkeys : to prevent them from doing harm, we must punish them or threaten to punish them! A Christian child must say to himself : it's wrong, so I will not do it, even if I have not to be punished!

3° The human is able to love; the monkey is not. — When a human loves another, he is happy to suffer for him and even die in his place. He does not think at all to himself; he thinks only of his friend. — The monkey, however, only wants to play with the other monkeys; he would not be beaten in their place. He has mates, but no friends.

Well, these three things: intelligence, freedom, love show that the human has within him something that animals do not have. This is the rational soul.

For these three things human looks like God who is perfectly intelligent, and free love. So thinking of the soul, not the body of the Human that God said by creating the "Let us make Human in our image, after our likeness."

*So what is the most perfect human?* This is neither the strongest,

# Genes are responsible for differences of intelligence between humans

No one would disagree that the differences in intelligence between a dog and a human are a result of genetics, and therefore that there is a relation between intelligence and genes, but it is *between humans* that we would like these genes to disappear. However, we still realize that is not the whole truth: there are these “marginal cases”.

22 Numerous mental handicaps have genetic causes. For example, a certain gene gives rise to phenylketonuria in humans, which in turn provokes profound mental-disabilities and an early death — except that, today, we are aware of a diet which allows people in whom this is found to develop like everyone else. Hence my affirmation that intelligence results, as all traits do, from a conjunction of causes that we can classify, if we so wish, into genes and the environment. For those inflicted with phenylketonuria, we know which environmental aspect (diet) develops their intelligence; for others, as for dogs, we are in the dark. But what does all of that have to do with their *nature*? Is a phenylketonuria sufferer closer in nature to a normal human or to a dog? Does their nature depend on genes or on their diet? Or is the nature of beings really a chimera?

And what of blacks and whites? Their genome undeniably influences a black person's pigmentation. A large number of black people live in regions with dull weather conditions, where this pigmentation can engender an insufficient rate of production of vitamin D, and thus a risk of contracting rickets. Rickets may possibly inhibit the development of intelligence. In this particular case, some black people are less intelligent because of their genetics, and the average intelligence of black people is lower because of this genetic trait.

This is a hypothesis, and the factor in question, if it exists, is probably a weak one. A vitamin D supplement would eliminate the problem. Nevertheless, this example is still pertinent: if one wants to demonstrate that genetic differences between black and white people have no effect on their average intellect, then *each causal path leading from genetic contrasts to intelligence* must be dealt with — and it is that which is completely unrealistic. In ten minutes, I could think of 10, either for the blacks and the whites, or for the French and the Belgians. One would need to have a certain level of trust in the goodness, in the unfettered anti-racism of Mother Nature to believe that not one of these reasons could be proven, or that they, magically, find an equilibrium amongst themselves.

The idea of “genetic equality” among groups of humans is false. And what purpose does it serve to defend such a notion? What does this have to do with racism? Would racism then be a justified ideology if, by chance, genes begot pigmentation which in turn begot vitamin D deficiency, and consequently rickets which lowers intellect? Does the level of intelligence become a nature once it is caused by genes?

Someone may say that this is not what is we are talking about when we debate the genetic equality of intelligence. As a matter of fact, *real* genetics, of which I am speaking, is a cause and a series of consequences; that with which the others generally concern themselves is *mythical* genetics, where our genes are our *nature*, our being, our truth, our essence; our fate, unalterable, irredeemable, prescribed by Nature. Through genetics we see the “scientific” concretisation of our mystical ancestry, our *bloodlines* and *birthrights*. This type of genetics does not exist, save for in the minds of racists, sexists, speciesists, etc., who argue amongst themselves so as to know if the nature of black people is more animalistic than that of a white person or not. They can argue about it for centuries. Black people are animals, just as white people are. There is no such thing as innate intelligence.

There is but one genuine intelligence. Genes themselves are not intelligent, having neither will nor intention, despite the thinly-veiled attempts, a specialty of the socio-biologist, to assign them a soul.

## So what?

“They talk about this thing in the head; what do they call it? [“Intellect,” whispered someone nearby.] That’s it. What’s that got to do with women’s rights or Negroes’ rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint and yours holds a quart, wouldn’t you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?”

Sojourner Truth, a black feminist, speaking at a feminist convention in the United States of America in 1850, quoted by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation*.

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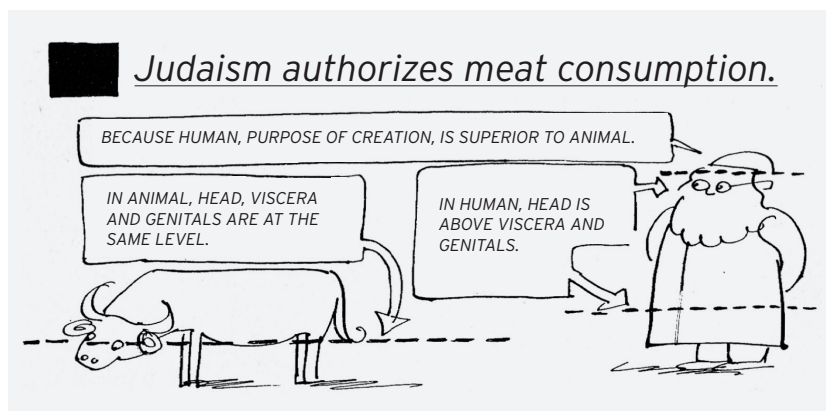
Why do we then afford intelligence such an importance? Is it due to its *real* and *practical* importance? We justify this emphasis, saying that physical force is no longer of any particular use. Intelligence is supposed to render the individual useful to a community, while the individual is then rewarded by an improved social standing.

Are those in the higher echelons of society more useful to their community? I would prefer to invert the explanation: In a conflicted society, intelligence is a *weapon*. It was said that “the liberation of the oppressed would be the work of the oppressed themselves,” and unfortunately, that’s true. The liberation of African-Americans owes much to their own initiative and action, which would not have come about had they had the intelligence of chickens. Nevertheless, the idea that black people are less intelligent than whites, may serve only to demoralise them in their fight for social equality.

Such an inequality of intelligence, whether it be “innate” or “acquired,” would be an unwelcome discovery for antiracism,



rendering the struggle that much more difficult. However, it would not make the struggle *unjust*. Our culture conflates strength and rights with respect a little too much. African-Americans are no longer slaves, chickens still are. While the intelligence of black people *explains* in some part their liberation, it is not what *justifies* it.



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A pictorial explanation of why we have a right to eat animals, according to Ch. Szlakmann, in *Judaism for Beginners*, La Découverte édition, 1985

Intelligence entitles one to respect, but it also plays a magical role: it is the principal *sign of humanity*. Black people are black, animals are stupid. Humans place their status of being human above all else. The enormity of the suffering and misery imposed by humans upon other animals is widely known. It is thanks only to speciesism that humans succeed in affording this very little importance. These animals must be completely other to us, we must be intelligent. The fact that intelligence is a means of attaining social promotion ascribes it the role of a sign; society itself is defined negatively with regard to non-human animals, with social promotion as proof of humanity.

# Signs by the bucketful

We produce many, way too many reasons to justify what humans do to other animals. For the creators of these reasons, the truth which they have tasked themselves to expose is already known. Speciesists roll them out, one after the other. None of them hold water. No matter; in our deeply speciesist culture, everyone has their other, and draws strength and support from that, while no one suspects that the whole thing is of no substance.

These are not reasons, but merely signs that justify human dominion over all others and which, of course, no one has yet seriously tried to expose. It is of little consequence that everyone has the same shortcoming; they do not include all humans, for fear of also including some non-humans.

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There are countless examples of such signs. Any trait would do, as long as it seems “noble” and is readily identifiable in humans. The tool used to be the preserve of humanity, until the discovery of a bird that also uses utensils. Seeing as it did possess a ‘uniquely’ human trait, we then declared that the life of this bird was as sacred as that of a human. No, of course not, I was only joking! While eating this bird, we said: yes, but only humans make tools. However, some chimpanzees do this too, and so the line of demarcation became more and more blurred.

Another such distinction is language. We used to say that animals have no language, but, as dogs know how to howl, we made it more specific: *articulate* language. Since then, we have taught a number of monkeys the gesticulative language of deaf and mute people, with syntax and everything. They are less adroit than us at it, but the point stands. Thus we must abandon this division, too. Also of interest is that we avoid the subject of *sonorous* language, in view of deaf and mute people who, contrary to those who suffer from autism, know how to take care of themselves.

Also, why would the absence of language justify their being massacred? People have told me that if a creature cannot say that it is suffering, we don't know if it is. Yet, all mammals show the same signs of suffering as humans do, it would be surprising if two such similar phenomena were not caused by the same thing. Little science would be possible if we demanded that its objects be endowed with speech. Furthermore, "if someone can't conceptualise their suffering, it doesn't exist, except on a purely physical level." Feminists have documented that, for centuries, women have suffered in silence because the concepts to express the suffering they felt did not exist. A decisive step in their liberation was the success in creating the concepts to convey their lived experience. Before this, was their suffering "purely physical"?

There is this criterion: "An animal knows, a man knows that he knows" (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin); "animals are not self-aware"; "only humans have a unique personality;" these are all either false, vague or a mixture of the two, none of which would withstand even the simplest of scientific analyses. But what would that change? Knowing that we know, or our knowledge of being "self-aware" or having a "personality" that gives life its value? It is this I don't know what – these *natures* – that justify our many massacres, be they of chickens, or of the Jewish.

And then, there is also "animal instinct" as opposed to "human reason." This manner of posing the problem highlights humans' lack of basic knowledge about other animals. Whatever knowledge people possess on the subject is based on jumbled up, recycled stereotypes. Racists also generally know nothing of those they detest; but these racist and speciesist fables are just that: fables, a way of expressing the inexpressible, one's *nature*.

## An Idea Like Any Other

It would be very possible to raise, from birth, human children in both rational and sensorial isolation such that they would never develop *any* of these noble qualities that are “unique to man.” Brought up in certain conditions, the equivalents of those in which calves live and suffer, they could then be subject to the same fate, “because they were made for that” (“they’ve never known anything else”.) How can we care about the fate reserved for such asocial beings, incapable of speaking, of using tools, without any emotional bonds and who don’t even know that they know? You may find that scandalous, I do too; but if you don’t find what we do to calves for veal *as too being scandalous*, then you are speciesist. You do not want someone to do that to a *human*, because they are one of your *species*. What objections can you then seriously pose to a racist, who refuses such an action only against one of his own *race*?

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## Natures Hide the Reality

How much should we care about the fate of any creature? Who or what is to say if we should abstain from harming this creature?

No one and nothing, if we so desire. We can, if we wish, kill and torture whomever we may. We could also decide to torture only black people or the right-handed. We can even choose to torture ourselves; that, however, we do only with irregularity. Why? Because it is painful, it is not in our own best interests.

To avoid harming others is to extend the consideration we have for our own interests to those of another. It is this very notion which underlies ethics. And what determines whose interests we are to take into account? Those of white people only?

Why them? Of intelligent beings only? Or only those that are social? When we take into account our own interests, we do not ask ourselves whether we are intelligent or social. This has nothing to do with the problem. Being in pain causes pain, whether we are social or not.

Each real thing has its real consequences. The intelligence of a being has many implications for many things, but there is no connection between that and whether or not it is wrong to harm it. What would then be of importance in such a consideration?

Each real thing has real consequences. The possibility that a creature may suffer is such a consequence, so avoid harming them. This is independent of any other characteristics that the creature may have. That is a non-racist, non-sexist and non-speciesist ethic.

If a living being is sentient, can suffer or enjoy, their suffering and their joy are of the same importance as that of any other. Each difference in importance attributed to the interests of two living beings is necessarily arbitrary, since its foundation is something which has absolutely no relation with the reason why we take these interests into account: their mere existence.

Suffering is suffering, pleasure is pleasure: it is the sole equality that matters to me. If pebbles could suffer or rejoice, we should then take into account their interest not to suffer and to be happy — regardless of whether each pebble had a “unique personality” or not. If pebbles aren’t privy to these faculties, as they most probably are not, there is nothing to be taken into account.

What should we do *in practice*? Often, with a derisive grin, we accuse those among us who do not eat meat of contempt for plants. Those same people who so brusquely show their sympathy for plants end up eating ten times more of them than we do, through the animals that are made to lead a life of misery, and then killed. No matter; we actually do not hold in contempt either plants or pebbles.

Contempt is a racist attitude in and of itself. Contempt is the judging of a living being's nature as being inferior to one's own. To me, that which is important is the real. Human or not, an animal's sentience is a real characteristic. It is thus important for me to know: who possesses this, who can suffer?

How can we know if plants or pebbles can suffer? It's a question difficult to resolve in any absolute fashion, but in *practice*, a few simple conclusions can be easily reached. I will speak of these in my next article, but those of you with a non-speciesist view will agree with me on this: a bird's, a fish's and a non-human mammal's capacity to suffer is as real and assured as that of a human's. This then decides the first and most simple consequence: cease to eat them.





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