

## The Ethics of Speciesism

This article explains **speciesism**, an attitude that is common among both humans and non-human animals. Not everyone thinks there is anything wrong with speciesism.

### The ethics of speciesism

What is speciesism?

'Speciesism' is the idea that being human is a good enough reason for human animals to have greater moral rights than non-human animals. [Peter Singer defines it as] "...a **prejudice** or **bias** in favour of the interests of members of one's own **species** and against those of members of other species."

### Speciesism and bigotry

Speciesism is often condemned as the same sort of **bigotry** as racism or sexism. People who oppose speciesism say that giving human beings greater rights than non-human animals is as arbitrary (and as morally wrong) as giving white people greater rights than non-white people.

**NB:** Those working for racial or sexual equality often find this comparison insulting - they say that their struggle for equality has a moral and social importance that animal rights can never have.

### Speciesism is common

Most people, faced with a difficult choice between a human and an animal, would probably react in a speciesist (or 'homocentric') way.

Consider this example:

A child and a dog are trapped in a fire. You can only save one of them. Which will you save?

- Most people don't have to think about this for even one second.
- Most people don't consider the relative moral status of the dog and the child relevant to their choice.
- Society would condemn anyone who delayed in order to consider the correct moral choice.

### Pure speciesism

Pure speciesism carries the idea of human superiority to the extreme of saying that the most trivial human wish is more important than **the vital needs** of other species... for example a pure speciesist would **argue** that it's ok for animals to be cruelly treated and killed to provide **fur** decorations for human beings to wear. Few people take speciesism to this length. More commonly, they say that all other things being more or less equal, it's morally correct to take the human side when considering an ethical issue.

### Species is not a moral factor

People who object to speciesism say that a difference of species is not a morally **relevant** difference - in the same way that a difference of race is not a morally relevant difference between human beings. They say that speciesism amounts to treating morally similar individuals in morally different ways for an irrelevant reason.

### Justifying speciesism

Supporters of speciesism say that there is a clear difference between humans and other species, and that this difference affects their moral status. They argue that human beings are more **self-aware**, and more able to choose their own **course of action** than other animals. This, they say, enables them to think and act morally, and so **entitles** them to a higher moral status. [...]

### Speciesism as 'natural'

One argument in favour of speciesism is that it is biologically natural to treat one's own species favourably. Virtually all non-human animals treat members of their own species better than those of other species.

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/rights/speciesism.shtml>, retrieved 09/29/2019, adapted and abridged)