

# ANTI-SPECIESISM BETWEEN SCIENCE AND LAW

## GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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### ABSTRACT

This special issue devoted to anti-speciesism collects essays which examine different branches of modern and contemporary studies on the status of non-human animals and the role that cognitive progress should play in our ability to abandon the idea that something is *uniquely human*, analyzing at the same time the difficult relationship between the inclusion of other animals and the law.

### KEYWORDS

Anti-speciesism, Cognitive Progress, Human/Non-Human, Science, Law.

In the fifth book of *De rerum natura* Lucretius, after briefly discussing the reasons that led to the extinction of some prodigious original creatures, sketched out, with a few illuminating verses, the condition of those animals that have a lineage. Alongside the physiological ability to reproduce, having some specific virtues is what guarantees the survival of the species: *ingenium*, *dolus*, *virtus*, *mobilitas* or *utilitas* are the characteristics, variously distributed, that will determine the greater or lesser autonomy of one species compared to the others. Thus, where the force allows the wild beasts to master their own destiny, cunning and speed allow others to have valuable weapons to attack or defend themselves, while intelligence and usefulness are those traits able of tying human beings and docile animals in a bond of asymmetrical reciprocity. Useful to human beings and in need of their protection in order to survive, the latter find themselves progressively subjected to human domination, even though this domination is never justified outside the correlation of utility and necessity.

The entitlement that the human species has on some other living beings is therefore rooted not in a pre-existent natural hierarchy, but in a crystallized game of forces in which the *ingenium* allows human beings to be both rulers and guardians of other species at the same time. Every human being is born and spends all their life, like other animals, in vulnerability and in constant need because they belong to a nature from which everything comes and which also takes back everything; however human beings are capable of being stronger, quantitatively speaking, which is something that is destined to turn the relationship between necessity and utility into mere submission. Lucretius' condemnation of the ritual killing of animals and their use, which is not less cruel and ineffective, in war, is a warning for us not only to appreciate his sensitivity, but also of how degenerated that relationship, irretrievably turned into a senseless exploitation, is.

A senseless exploitation we experience on a daily basis: if animal sacrifice can now appear far from our cultural and moral universe, the constant extermination of other living beings for purposes that have nothing to do with the survival of our species at the expense of others, still makes us part of the same explicit and increasingly brutal domination. In a more rational and subtle way, our dominion over other species and nature itself has extended far beyond the sphere of mere need, becoming actually a habit we do not want to get rid of, otherwise we would lose what makes us feel ontologically different and all those privileges that we perceive as inherent in every human individual exactly because we are human. This is a uniqueness which philosophy and science, often far more than common sense, have largely cultivated over the centuries and which the law has taken into account by effectively equating other animals with property or, at most, subjects that have to be protected because they are important to us. Devoid of language - or rather, of *our* language - and unable to play the game of responsibilities and demands, their existence and fate cannot help but being in our (both bloodthirsty and benevolent) hands.

Yet philosophy and science, by appealing to their critical strength and to their best and deepest vocation, can - or could - make an important contribution to put an end to this anthropocentric illusion that never ceases to nourish human domination over other animals. Because, apart from any purely moral reflection on the suffering that we inflict with such terrible superficiality on other living beings, anthropocentrism is an illusion, a prejudice or a misjudgment ascribable to our ignorance and, as aforementioned, to our unwillingness to abandon those privileges that we have been taught to recognize as legitimate and natural. Unraveling this deception and becoming aware of the bad faith at its basis is part of the task that every genuinely philosophical and scientific research should aim to achieve.

It is on this basis that the essays here collected want to examine different branches of modern and contemporary studies on the status of non-human animals and the role that cognitive progress should play in our ability to abandon the idea that something is *uniquely human*, analyzing at the same time the difficult relationship

between the inclusion of other animals and the law. Let us not forget that putting the *ingenium* - a capacity that certainly does not belong to us exclusively - at the service of a clearer definition of that very continuity that binds us to all other living beings and of the reasons that have been supporting the relations of domination we have created, is an extraordinary opportunity to expose the balance of power we exert on our conspecifics as well.