

Speciesism - a term that entered our language only 20 years ago, is one of the most deeply entrenched, but least acknowledged, of all human prejudices.

Many people might not believe that they are prejudiced against nonhuman animals, but unknowingly still cause tremendous pain, suffering and death to nonhumans through their everyday choices, such as what they eat and wear, and the products they use.

Others may find no ethical dilemma with their prejudices, believing that species differences are a perfectly moral basis for discrimination, exploitation and killing. Yet, what is the moral justification for harming and killing animals to satisfy our desires and whims? Many animals experience pleasure and pain in much the same way as humans, and they clearly have an interest in their own lives and well-being.

Speciesism is similar to other prejudices such as racism, sexism or classism. Whenever people defend their prejudices they do so by pointing out the differences between themselves and others. Yet, our culture has come to realize that skin color, gender, class, religion and other classifications are irrelevant when it comes to granting equal rights and protection to humans. Should the differences between humans and nonhumans then be used to justify our society's exploitation of animals?

Speciesism is so ingrained in our culture it is convenient to believe that species difference is a relevant criteria for granting protection. In fact, our acceptance of speciesism is so widespread that we allow animals to be mutilated and killed for many reasons - to test cosmetics, please our taste buds, entertain us and satisfy our curiosity in research labs. But it does not have to be so. We *can* choose to live by an ethic which exploits neither people nor animals.

The movement to end speciesism, just like the movements to eliminate sexism and racism, will bring about a more compassionate world, a world in which people do not exploit or abuse animals.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Help us in our work to end animal exploitation. Contact The AAVS today for free information about our innovative programs and activities. Become a member - receive our monthly publication, *The AV Magazine* - stay up to date on the issues and learn how to help the animals.

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