

IF AT ALL HUMANLY POSSIBLE

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Among the many ways in which human beings differ from animals, two are especially evident in philosophic debate. I'm not talking about rationality here; the rather hard to understand objections of a few aside, rationality is so evident as not to merit mention. No, I'm referring, first, to the inability of a philosopher to entertain a doubt that anything he/she ever wrote is or could be wrong, and, second, his/her willingness to defend unto the death, in the form of replies and counter-replies, every single word he/she's ever committed to the page. Evelyn Pluhar and I, I am afraid, are very much cases in point. Here we are, going at it again, this being the second journal and the fifth article in the series. Maybe, if we're lucky, we can sell the whole thing as a television serial.

But let me get down to business now, in an effort to keep round five as short as possible.

The story so far has been: I write "In Defense of Speciesism,"[1] arguing that all creatures belonging to a species characterized by personhood have a right to life--basically, all human beings have a right to life; Pluhar responds in "Speciesism Not Justified,"[2] arguing that my argument is defective on many counts; I reply in "My Kind of Person,"[3] arguing that Pluhar's criticisms won't do; Pluhar does not take this lying down but responds yet again in "Speciesism Revisited,"[4] defending her earlier objections against my counter-arguments.

That brings us up to the present. In this paper, I won't be recapitulating any



DISCUSSION

negligence (such as non-persons who were Hollywood stunt people, who didn't wear their seat-belts, or who botched their suicide attempts). This doesn't bother Wreen. In response to my having pointed out that "at most Wreen has made a case for the ascription of basic rights to those human non-persons whose condition is no fault of their own" (p. 126). (The first two words are emphasized because they were inadvertently omitted from Wreen's quotation in his response.) Wreen replies that it would be consistent with his position to hold that such non-persons have forfeited their right to life (WII: p. 26-7). I continue to find this counter-intuitive, but the reader must check his/her own intuitions on this point.

11. In this context, Wreen also claims that such terms "are used metaphorically by all those who reject (SS) [Singer's "speciesism"] and (FS) and, in fact, by everyone who employs the concept of a basic right at all" (WI: p. 57). However, (1) Why must a proponent of basic rights personify change or natural law? Only moral agents are capable of respecting or violating basic rights. (2) Rejectors of speciesism who endorse the notion of basic rights also have no need thus to personify nature. In reiterating his "you, too" charge in "My Kind of Person," Wreen actually makes a very different charge: he claims that anti-speciesists who accord moral considerability to non-humans anthropomorphize these non-humans. Why? By applying terms (moral and psychological) for which the adult human is the model to those who are non-human. In doing this, anti-speciesists use the terms in a "metaphorical" or "derivative" sense (WII: n. 6). In response, I first want to point out that this would be a very different sort of metaphorizing from that which Wreen has been charged with doing. Second, to say that any application of psychological or moral terms to non-humans is anthropomorphism is to say that it is cognitively unjustified. But why should one accept this allegation? Even if "Wittgenstein has taught us" that the adult human is the model for all psychological and moral ascriptions (I happen to be one of those philosophers who have not been "taught" this by anybody, including Wittgenstein), it does not follow that the application of such terms to others is cognitively unjustified or metaphorical. Suppose that I learn the concept of box on the basis of my exposure to cigar boxes. Do I "cigarboximorphize" if, later in life, I classify music boxes as boxes? Is this a cognitively unjustified ascription?

more of the blow-by-blow story of rounds one through four than necessary. (All of the recapitulation needed to orient the reader can be found in "My Kind of Person" and "Speciesism Revisited.") In replying to Pluhar's latest, then, I'll try to be brief and, as I did in "My Kind of Person," skip over lots of minor objections.

I

Pluhar continues to try to rough up my identification principle:

(IP): It is a necessary truth that the statement "X is a human being" is good evidence for the statement "X is a human person."

I said in "In Defense of Speciesism" that (IP) was plausible but, because of space limitations, offered as a defense of it only that it is related to another extremely plausible principle, a reidentification principle:

(RI): It is a necessary truth that bodily identity is good evidence for personal identity.

Pluhar still doesn't think (IP) is so related, or that, even if it were, it's at all plausible. Let me take these charges in turn.

Charge one: Pluhar claims that it's possible to hold (RI) without holding (IP) because, she says, it's possible to conceive of determining who or what is a person on purely empirical--that is, non-criteriological--grounds. She notes that, after all, I accept Feinberg's notion of personhood (actually, I don't, but that's another story; I merely gestured in Feinberg's direction in a friendly way in "In Defense of Speciesism" in order to simplify matters), and on that concept of personhood, who is a person is a purely empirical matter. For the sake of argument, then, let's say that we've determined on purely empirical grounds that this particular human being, Walter Weber, is a person. Now that Weber has been determined to be a person, she continues, "we may hold that the relationship between [Walter Weber] and this particular body is not purely empirical," and so accept (RI). That is to accept (RI) without accepting (IP), since, in the story told, the determination of personhood in general--and Walter Weber's in particular

--involves no criteriological principles at all, and certainly not (IP). (IP), then, is, my claim and argument to the contrary notwithstanding, not presupposed by (RI).



This won't do. The mere fact that Feinberg's list of properties characteristic of personhood contains no criteriological principles doesn't show that none links humanity and personhood or that none was involved in attributing personhood to Mr. Weber or that anyone who accepts Feinberg's characterization must think that the determination of personhood is "a purely empirical matter," i.e., involves no criteriological principles. To illustrate the point here with an analogous case, let's take pain--to pull one characteristic off Feinberg's list itself--is definable, and not just characterizable, as that ouch, or ouch-like, sensation. Still, the attribution of pain may be, in fact probably is, criteriologically connected to pain behavior. The same holds, I would say, with personhood and humanity. The point here, in short, is that the mere fact that a definition or characterization of a concept is in terms of properties x, y, and z does not show that the concept is not criteriologically connected to some other concept. Thus, the move from "this is how personhood is correctly characterized (or defined)" to "the determination of personhood is a purely empirical matter" is a move that cannot be automatically made. Certainly, it looks as if it shouldn't be made at all, as one of the characteristics on Feinberg's list, a psychological one, namely pain, is criteriologically related to something else, a characteristic not on his list, namely pain behavior, and all of the characteristics on his list are psychological ones. But even if this particular strong objection is not pressed against Pluhar, she does make just the inferential move in question, and does so without any justification at all, in her story about accepting (RI) but not (IP). To do so is

simply to beg the question at issue, since it is to assume without argument that the concept of a human being is not criteriologically connected to that of a person.

But, that objection also aside, I have trouble with holding that the relation between this particular person (Walter Weber) and this particular body is not purely empirical, after determining that Walter is a person on purely empirical grounds. The temporal "after" can't be taken at face value here; it must be true from the start that there is some sort of necessary connection between the person and his/her (human, we're assuming) body over time--but, to complete the story, none at any one time! That doesn't sound coherent to me. If the diachronic identity of a person is conceptually caught up with the existence of his/her body, his/her synchronic identity must be as well. It would be more than odd otherwise, since the diachronic is simply the synchronic stretched out, so to speak.

II

But even if (IP) is presupposed by (RI), so much the worse for (RI), thinks Pluhar. Why? Because (IP) is itself false, or at least highly implausible. In "Speciesism Not Justified," she says that "it is easy enough to imagine a world in which 'X is a live human being' is not good evidence for 'X is a human person'" (p. 123), and I commented that I supposed

that what she has in mind . . . are worlds in which all, or at least many of the human beings born in it are brain damaged, or retarded, or suffer some mental failing that precludes personhood. . . . Arguing by inductive enumeration in such a world, Pluhar would say (I'm supposing) "X is a live human being" does not inductively warrant "X is a human person" ("My Kind of Person," p. 24-25).

True enough, I said in reply, but not to the point, for all such considerations really show is that the evidential weight that (IP) speaks of is simply overridden in such cases, that the conclusion that X is a human person cannot be drawn straightaway. That doesn't show that the evidential weight isn't there at all or that (IP) is false. What it does show is that the (bizarre) principle that it

is a necessary truth that being a live human being is sufficient empirical evidence for being a human person is false.

I find Pluhar's response to this puzzling. She says that "Wreen responds by agreeing that we can imagine the evidential relationship not to hold but denying that this shows (IP) false." That is simply not so. I do deny that anything I said shows (IP) false, but nowhere do I claim that I can imagine cases in which the evidential relationship (IP) speaks of doesn't obtain. Certainly none is provided by me, nor do I anywhere say they are in the offing. All I say is that worlds in which all, or almost all, human beings are not persons are conceivable. That doesn't show that being a live human being is not good evidence for being a human person in those worlds, only that such evidence as it does provide isn't sufficient to carry the day.

Continuing her attack, Pluhar quotes my remark:

All inductive principles, even the best of them, and even criteriologically principles, may have to give way in particular circumstances in the face of evidence to the contrary ("My Kind of Person," p. 25),

and--I think that this is what she is doing, anyway--tries to convict me of inconsistency. She says that the remark won't do because:

it is part of the concept of criterion that if x is criteriologically related to y, there is no evidence that would count as showing that x is not good evidence for y. This is what distinguishes a criteriologically claim from an empirical one.

She's surely right about that. Hence, given the quoted remark from "My Kind of Person," I am inconsistent, or, better still, should just say that human bodies and persons are not related criteriologically.

No doubt I'm at least partly responsible for the misunderstanding here, given the wording of that quoted remark. Still, its sense is clear enough in context, and the position taken anything but inconsistent. For, when I write that all inductive principles, and even criteriologically ones, may have

to give way in particular circumstances in the face of evidence to the contrary, it is evident that what is being said is that the inductive principle enshrined in a criteriological principle--whether mine or one about the relation of pain behavior to pain or whatever--is what gives way, with "gives way" being understood in the sense that the presence of the first property (e.g., pain behavior) is not sufficient for an attribution of the presence of the second property (e.g., pain). This is to say only that the relation is not one of inductive sufficiency, even if it is one of good evidence. Think of what I say in relation to a criteriological principle relating pain behavior and pain, if no other example comes immediately to mind. Worlds in which everyone who is in pain acts stoically and everyone who exhibits pain behavior is faking it don't show that "it is a necessary truth that 'X exhibits pain behavior' is good evidence for 'X is in pain'" is false. Thus, I certainly agree with Shoemaker's remark, quoted by Pluhar against me, that

A test of whether something is one of the criteria for judgments of a certain kind is whether it is conceivable that we might discover empirically that it is not, or has ceased to be, evidence in favor of the truth of such judgments.[5]

III

Still another objection lodged by Pluhar, and one which continues to impress her, is that my argument is inherently dependent on a personification of nature. She notes that I use all sorts of personifying terms in my original article (see "Speciesism Revisited" for a sampling of relevant quotations from "In Defense of Speciesism") and contends that I cannot get along without them. So, to quote myself--for the objection was first raised by me in "In Defense of Speciesism"--isn't my conceptual framework incoherent? No, I replied, for the personification is simply a convenient and vivid way of speaking, and one that helps drive my point home. All personifying terms are extirpable, I said. Pluhar disagrees: they aren't, she thinks, though originally she didn't say why and didn't attempt to read or rewrite the gist of the argument without any personifying terms. Instead, she responds to my remark that all that needs be done to remove the

unwanted terms is to read "In Defense of Speciesism" without them or to read "My Kind of Person" as it stands with the claim that the conclusion of my original argument itself is laden with such terms and that since the conclusion of that argument is repeated in "My Kind of Person," the same holds for it. The personifying I indulge in is, supposedly, thereby shown to be inextirpable.

This can't be right as it stands. The conclusion of my argument is that all members of a species characterized by personhood have a right to life, and no personifying term occurs in that statement. What Pluhar means is that the fourth stage of my argument, especially as encapsulated, without explanation, in the abbreviated summary of that stage, includes at least one personifying term. That it does, namely in the phrase "equality of opportunity:"

(4) Human non-persons, then, should be ascribed basic rights; for although in the primary case it is persons who are ascribed basic rights, equality of opportunity, or better, fairness, requires us to ascribe basic rights to human non-persons as well. ("In Defense of Speciesism," p. 52)

But can I get by without personification? That's what's really at issue. Sure, by reading "In Defense of Speciesism" and "My Kind of Person" in the way previously indicated--and that means no more than reading the relevant portions of each as indicated. I don't really think that's so hard.

As for why the justice or equality principle,

All creatures in the relevant (person-related) class are to be treated fairly and equally in respect to personhood generated rights ("My Kind of Person," p. 27),

should be accepted in the first place, I don't think that a defense is needed at all--not for that principle, given that everyone holds that all persons have a right to life. Someone like Michael Tooley,[6] for example, or Joel Feinberg[7] could accept it--would have to accept it, on pain of not being fair or just--even though both think that only persons have a right to life, that the relevant person-related class is that of persons.

Indeed, anyone who ascribes a right to life to persons at all has to accept it, despite the fact that there is great controversy over whether personhood is the only ground for ascribing personhood generated rights or basic rights. The more pressing questions I face really are, "Why is the relevant class that of humans?" and "Do I defend the view that it is humans in an inherently metaphorical way?"

To answer the second question first: not at all. My defense of my view--and that comprises essentially the whole of "In Defense of Speciesism"--is primarily non-metaphorical, and even in the section in which metaphorical terms do occur, non-metaphorical ones do as well, interspersed among metaphorical ones, and are used to make precisely the same points (see "In Defense of Speciesism, p. 53).[8] As for question one: suffice it to say that my view is defended basically on the grounds (1) that everyone agrees that personhood is a sufficient condition for the ascription of a right to life, (2) that personhood is metaphysically caught up with humanity in the world we have, (3) that empirical conditions of both a general and particular sort circumscribe personhood in this world, even if not in every possible one, and (4) that when those conditions are not met in the case of any particular human being, it is through no fault of his/her own (in the great majority of cases). If we assume (if only for the sake of argument) that, other things being equal, personhood is the only ground for the ascription of basic rights, the equality/justice principle would, in an ideal world, tell us that the "relevant (person-related) class" is that of persons alone. But, as evidenced by (1)-(4) above, most of "In Defense of Speciesism" is geared to tell us why the class should not be so restricted in the world we've got. There's nothing metaphorical about that.

IV

Circularity is Pluhar's last charge against me, just as it was in her earlier paper. To her earlier objection that the argument of "In Defense of Speciesism" was circular because it assumed that all human beings have a right to be treated equally, in an effort to prove that all humans have that right (along with other basic rights, including the one of interest in the paper, the right to life), I had responded that there was no circle because equality as a right was

not invoked, only equality as a principle. But, contends Pluhar in "Speciesism Revisited, that just changes the location of the circle, for "to suppose, as Wreen does, that the [equality] principle [stated above] applies to human non-persons is to presuppose that membership in a species characterized by personhood has moral weight [I think that she means "has a right to life" here, though]." Thus the circle is "not only . . . not broken, it has tightened into a noose for the argument."

Little need be said in reply to this, given what has been said above. The principle presupposes no such thing; as it stands, it is acceptable to--in fact, needs be embraced by--everyone who ascribes basic rights on the basis of personhood, and it is argued at length that human beings are one such person-related class--that is really what the whole of "In Defense of Speciesism" is an argument for.

V

In academic circles these days, speciesists like myself are more often shouted down, summarily dismissed, sneered at, entirely ignored, or called nasty names than paid attention to and argued with. I thank Evelyn Pluhar, then, for her critical comments on "In Defense of Speciesism" and "My Kind of Person." The attention itself is gratifying, and the opportunity to clarify and explain my position at greater length welcome.[9] I do think, though, that it is time for Pluhar and I to call it quits. Five is about as high as I care to count.

I hope that readers now understand what it is I have been arguing, and why I think that speciesism, in the restricted sense of the terms I've been employing, is justifiable. Nothing I've said commits me to holding that all, or even most, of what human beings do to animals is justifiable. And, indeed, I think that a large portion of it isn't. But I do think that, in the world we inhabit, the claims that species differences are morally irrelevant, that species membership is about as morally important a consideration as distance from Istanbul, that discrimination between two individuals on the basis of species membership is akin to discrimination on the basis of race (that is, racism) or discrimination on the basis of sex (i.e., sexism)--that those and all such claims of a like sort are radically mistaken.

In "In Defense of Speciesism" and "My Kind of Person," I concentrate on one important set of differences between humans and other animals, a set of differences which binds humanity together but ties us to no animals, and I argue that the difference is significant enough, in the mortal realm we're stuck with, to argue a right to life for all humans, irrespective of their mental development, and irrespective of the rights, if any, of animals. But there are many, many more differences than I point out there. The human family is marked off from other families by numerous properties, many of them relational in the strict sense of the term, and even more relational in a looser sense, the sense in which the considerations pointed out in "In Defense of Speciesism" are relational.[10] Thus, although I agree with contemporary, academic anti-speciesists about many things and think that humans' treatment of animals is, by and large, deplorable, I can only urge them to attend to more than the small number of facts about humans and animals that they do (these chiefly being facts about the mental life of individual creatures at a particular time), and to remember that there are bigger pictures to consider than creatures in isolation. Some of them are much bigger pictures, involving as they do the nature of the world and humans'--and animals'--possibilities for realizing value in it. An ethic which takes such matters into account is a stronger ethic, because a more realistic one (in the strictest sense of the term), and an ethic which, practically speaking, leads to much the same conclusions as anti-speciesists want to secure anyway.

Notes

1. Michael Wreen, "In Defense of Speciesism," Ethics & Animals 5 (1984), pp. 47-60.
2. Evelyn Pluhar, "Speciesism Not Justified," Ethics & Animals 5 (1984), pp 122-9.
3. Michael Wreen, "MY Kind of Person," Between the Species 2 (1986), pp. 23-8.
4. Evelyn Pluhar, "Speciesism Revisited," Between the Species 2 (1986). My thanks to Prof. Pluhar for sending me a copy of her paper prior to publication.
5. Sidney Shoemaker, Self-Knowledge and

Self-Identity (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 4.

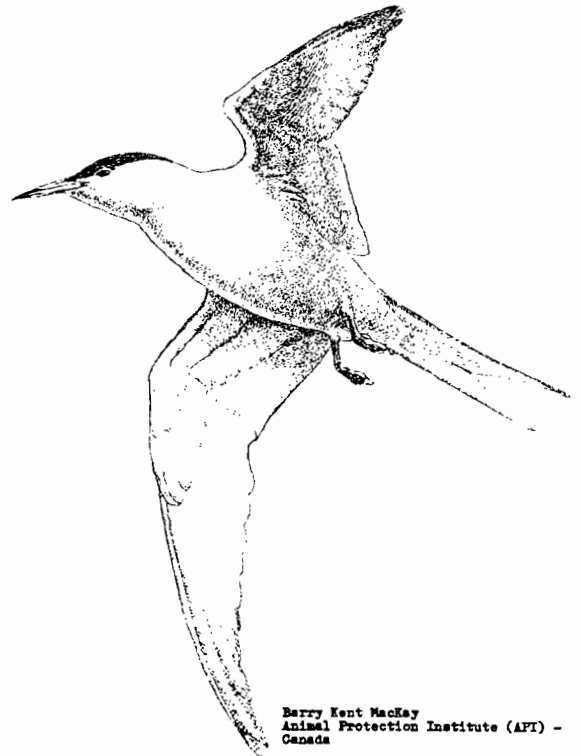
6. See, for example, any of Tooley's articles on abortion or his recent book, Abortion and Infanticide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

7. Joel Feinberg, "Abortion," in Tom Regan, ed., Matters of Life and Death (New York: Random House, 1980), especially pp. 197-201.

8. As I said in "My Kind of Person," the metaphorical terms are used merely to bait the hook, argumentatively speaking. I was surprised to find Pluhar still nibbling away in "Speciesism Revisited," even after having being told that there was nothing on the end of the line.

9. I'd like to thank the editors of Between the Species for making space available and for allowing me the expression of views very much opposed to those generally found in that journal.

10. More on this can be found in my "Speciesism, Sexism, and Racism," in preparation. Also relevant is "Au Natural," a paper, in preparation, by Philip Devine and myself.



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