Oh hyena, don't give me reasons why you're eating me
(Ethiopian)

prevent animals seeing any people ahead of them. So cows and bulls can be out on the pasture, then go into a well-run slaughterhouse, and it is no more stressful than being restrained for veterinary treatment. Being autistic makes these changes really easy to figure out.

What do other scientists make of your ideas about animals and autistic minds?
The trouble is that these are two parallel disciplines, but the people who study autism and the people who study animal behaviour are different individuals.

There is evidence that new abilities emerge when language skills are switched off. The best work comes from Bruce Miller, a neurology professor at the University of California, San Francisco, who showed that when frontal-temporal lobe dementia destroys the language part of the brain, art and music talents come out. But most people don't make the connection between animals and autism.

What about the future?
The more we learn about the brain, the more we find there is no black and white divide between us and animals. It is a continuum. But as you go down the phylogenetic scale, there is a point where pain perception ceases. I'm not sure where that point is. I think also we're going to look back on the way we behaved towards animals and realise we treated them really badly.

What's the goal of your work?
If the aeroplane I'm on goes down, I hope that my knowledge will survive, because I think some of my ideas are valuable to improve life for animals and also for people with autism.

Some scientists say autistic people have privileged access to lower levels of raw information. I think that also helps explain animal genius. They both work at the detailed level.
Temple Grandin

DAVID LUPTON

Our hypocrisy

By granting that animals have minds similar to ours, it looks as if we are evolving in our moral relationship with other species. Don't be fooled, says **Gary L. Francione**

DO GREAT apes, dolphins, parrots, and perhaps even "food" animals have certain cognitive characteristics that entitle them to be accorded greater moral consideration and legal protection?

A considerable literature has so argued in recent times. The central idea behind this enterprise is the notion that we must rethink our relationship with non-humans if we find they are intelligent, self-aware, or have emotions. To the extent that non-humans have minds like ours, runs the argument, they have similar interests, and they are entitled to greater protection because of those interests. This "similar-minds" approach has spawned an industry of cognitive ethologists eager to investigate – ironically often through various sorts of animal experiments – the extent to which *they* are like *us*.

It is astonishing that 150 years after Darwin, we are still so surprised that other animals may have some of the characteristics thought to be uniquely human. The proposition that humans have mental characteristics wholly absent in non-humans is inconsistent with the theory of evolution. Darwin maintained that there are no uniquely human characteristics, and that there were only quantitative and not qualitative differences between human and non-human minds. He argued that non-humans can think and reason, and possess many of the same emotional attributes as humans.

What is more troubling about the similar-minds approach is its implications for moral theory. Although it appears to be progressive, to indicate that we really are evolving in our moral relationship with other species, the similar-minds approach actually reinforces the very paradigm that has resulted in our excluding non-humans from the moral community. We have historically justified our exploitation of non-humans on the ground that there is a qualitative distinction between humans and other animals: the latter may be sentient, but they are not intelligent, rational, emotional or self-conscious.

Although the similar-minds approach claims that, empirically, we may have been wrong in the past and at least some non-humans may have some of these characteristics, it does not question the underlying assumption that a characteristic other than sentience – the ability to feel pain – is necessary for moral significance.

Arbitrary lines

Any attempt to justify our exploitation of non-humans based on their lack of "human" characteristics begs the moral question by assuming that certain characteristics are special and justify differential treatment. Even if, for instance, humans are the only animals who can recognise themselves in mirrors or can communicate through symbolic language, no human is capable of flying, or breathing under water without assistance. What makes the ability to recognise oneself in a mirror or use symbolic language better in a moral sense than the ability to fly or breathe under water? The answer, of course, is that *we* say so and it is in our interest to say so.

Aside from self-interest, there is no reason to conclude that characteristics thought to be uniquely human have any value that allows us to use them as a non-arbitrary justification for exploiting non-humans. Moreover, even if all animals other than humans were to lack a particular characteristic beyond sentience, or to possess that characteristic to a lesser degree than humans, such a difference cannot justify human exploitation of non-humans.

Differences between humans and other animals may be relevant for other purposes. No sensible person argues that non-human animals should drive cars, vote or attend universities, but such differences have no bearing on whether we should eat non-humans or use them in experiments. We recognise this conclusion when it comes to humans. Whatever characteristic we identify as uniquely human will be seen to a lesser degree in some humans and not at all in others. Some humans will have the same deficiency that we attribute to non-humans, and although the deficiency may be relevant for some purposes, it is not relevant to whether we exploit such humans.

Consider, for instance, self-consciousness. Any sentient being must have some level of self-awareness. To be sentient means to be the sort of being who recognises that it is that being, and not some other, who is experiencing pain or distress. Even if we arbitrarily define self-consciousness in an exclusively human way as, say, being able to think about thinking, many humans, including those who are severely mentally disabled, lack that type of consciousness. Again, this "deficiency" may be relevant for some purposes, but it has no bearing on whether we should use such humans in painful biomedical experiments or as forced organ donors. In the end, the only difference between humans and non-humans is species, and species is no more a justification for exploitation than race, sex or sexual orientation.

This is why the similar-minds approach is misguided, and will only create new speciesist hierarchies, in which we move some non-humans, such as the great apes or dolphins, into a preferred group, and continue to treat all others as things lacking morally significant interests.

If, however, we want to think seriously about the human/non-human relationship, we need to focus on one, and only one, characteristic: sentience. What is ironic is that we claim to take the suffering of non-humans seriously. As a matter of social morality, we are virtually unanimous in agreeing that it is morally wrong to inflict "unnecessary" suffering or death on non-humans. For such a prohibition to have any meaning, it must preclude inflicting suffering on non-humans merely for our pleasure, amusement or convenience.

The problem is that although we express disapproval of the unnecessary suffering of non-humans, most of their suffering and death can be justified only by our pleasure, amusement or convenience, and cannot by any stretch be plausibly characterised as "necessary". We kill billions of animals annually for food. It is not "necessary" in any sense to eat meat or animal products. Indeed, an increasing number of healthcare professionals maintain that these foods may be detrimental to human health. Moreover, environmental scientists have pointed out the tremendous inefficiencies and costs to our planet of animal agriculture. In any event, our justification for the pain, suffering and death inflicted on these farmed non-humans is nothing more than our enjoyment of the taste of their flesh.

And it is certainly not necessary to use non-humans for sport, hunting, entertainment or product testing, and there is considerable evidence that reliance on animal models in experiments or drug testing may even be counterproductive.

In sum, when it comes to non-humans, we exhibit what can best be described as moral schizophrenia. We say one thing about how non-humans should be treated, and do quite another. We are, of course, aware that we lack a satisfactory approach to the matter of our relationship to other animals, and we have for some time now been trying to find one.

If we took seriously the principle that it was wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering on non-humans, we would stop altogether bringing domestic animals into existence for human use, and our recognition of the moral status of animals would not depend on whether a parrot can understand mathematics or a dog recognise herself in a mirror. We would take seriously what Jeremy Bentham said over 200 years ago: "The question is not, can they reason, nor can they talk, but can they suffer?"

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Take a small piece of a hippopotamus testicle in water. This, according to Pliny the Elder, is a sure cure for snakebite. He also advises lion's fat and rose oil for a spotless complexion. And the touch of an elephant's trunk will relieve a headache, "more particularly" if the animal happens to sneeze at the same time.
The Natural History by Pliny the Elder, www.perseus.tufts.edu