# They think they're people

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Barbara Kay, National Post · Jun. 8, 2011 | **Last Updated: Jun. 8, 2011 2:03 AM ET**

The most popular attraction at most zoos is the primate section. We're all fascinated by chimps, monkeys and orangutans, in large part because they are so "human" in their looks and behaviours.

Yet despite their intelligence and deductive abilities, they cannot be domesticated. Like children, they can ask for a glass of juice, and they can indicate that they're sad, but unlike children, they won't be toilettrained. And once these physically powerful primates reach adolescence, their trainers will only take them out of their cages for a walk with a cattle prod and a tiger hook in hand.

Very few animals will enter into a social compact with humans to the point that they are house-clean, predictably co-operative and safe. Working dogs above all. The dogs' palpable joy in the execution of owner-or trainer-defined tasks represents a perfect symbiosis in human-animal relations.

But according to an editorial in the maiden issue of the Journal of Animal Ethics (JAE), I am guilty of "speceism" in assuming people have the right not only to "own" animals, but that we have the right to exploit their gifts (or actual flesh) for our own pleasure, nourishment, health or profit. These soi-disant animal ethicists say I am wrong to speak of "vermin" or "pets" or "wild" animals, even suggesting I am demonstrating "anthropocentric bias" in using the word "animal," which they consider a term of abuse. I should instead speak of "non-human animals" or "differentiated beings."

Life must be very dull in academia these days. For multispeceism -the idea that humans are just another species amongst all the other animals, with different traits but no superior niche in the great chain of being -is hogwash only a campus intellectual could cook up. It is also unimaginatively derivative: These guilt-ridden Western theorists are merely transposing their Marxist disgust with social inequality and former European empires to a zoological realm in which analysis through such a lens is utterly irrelevant.

In Genesis, we are told, Adam's first task was to establish his dominion over the other animals. God brought him the beasts of the field and the birds of the air "to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." One doesn't have to believe in God to see that even thousands of years ago, those charged with writing a history of our species understood that optimal life for a human depended on man's good judgment in assessing the properties of all the other animals: deciding which animals should be left to their own devices, and which could be willingly harnessed to speed his species' social evolution.

Adam's task was, allegorically, the first human act of critical thinking, something no other animal is capable of. Unlike his Ivory-towered descendants, Adam wouldn't have hesitated to kill a rat stealing his food, nor would he have wasted his time teaching an animal to ask for juice, if the animal could not be trusted outside a cage.

Dominion is a word in bad odour amongst left-wing academics, but dominion need not be brutal, and today's animal rights activists did not invent compassion for animals. For example,Mosaiclawpresumesthe use of animals for food and economic sustenance. But the laws also supports animals' right to humane treatment: Beasts of burden must rest alongside humans on the Sabbath; animals of unequal strength are not to be yoked together at the plow; and -famously the basis for the separation of milk and meat products in the Jewish dietary laws -"thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk." Various interpretations are attached to this last cryptic command; it seems reasonable to conclude that even an animal has the right not to witness the death of its own offspring.

The most troubling aspect of academic ventures like the JAE is the tendency to throw out historical bathwater without first removing the babies. If humans have treated animals badly in the past, the solution is not to un-name the animals -does a wolf or a lion care whether it is called "wild" or "free living"? -but to remind human beings of their ethical duties towards their wards. Naming the animals was the first act of human wisdom. But unlike the animals, we humans have been cursed with the intellectual freedom to work for or against our own interests. Denying humans their humanity in order to redress former wrongs to animals is an all too human act of folly.

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