

Joan Dunayer

Do Exist Words, Speciesist Roots

Through massive and sustained exploitation, humans inflict enormous suffering on other animals. Humans generally justify their exploitation of other species by categorizing "animals" as inferior and therefore rightfully subjugated while categorizing humans as superior and naturally entitled to dominate. So inveterate and universal is the false dichotomy of animal vs. human—and so powerfully evocative—that symbolically associating women with "animal" assists in their oppression. Applying images of denigrated nonhuman species to women labels women inferior and available for abuse; attaching images of the aggrandized human species to men designates them superior and entitled to exploit. Language is a powerful agent in assigning the imagery of animal vs. human. Feminists have long objected to "animal" pejoratives for women and the pseudogenerics *man* and *mankind*. These linguistic habits are rooted in speciesism, the assumption that other animals are inferior to humans and do not warrant equal consideration and respect.¹

Nonhuman-animal pejoratives frequently target women: *catty*, *shrew*, *dumb bunny*, *cow*, *bitch*, *old crow*, *queen bee*, *sow*. In *An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Dirty Words*, Ruth Todasco (1973) identifies "Woman as Animal" as a major category of "patriarchal epithets" (27). What attitudes and practices have prompted these epithets?

Viewed through speciesism, a nonhuman animal acquires a negative image. When metaphor then imposes that image on women, they share its negativity. Terming a woman a "dog" carries the sexist implication that women have a special obligation to be attractive, since the label refers to physical appearance only when applied to females. And so, using *dog* against any woman indirectly insults all women. The affront to all dogs, however, is direct. Denied individual identities, they merge into Ugly. Without this disdainful view of dogs, *dog* would not offend. Similarly *social butterfly*, being female specific, assigns gender to fickleness and frivolity. The phrase would confer very different traits if the butterfly's flight from flower to flower were perceived as life-sustaining rather than trivial. Reserved for women, *dumb bunny* links femaleness to mindlessness. But the expression rests on the speciesist assumption that rabbits are stupid.

In addition to speciesist attitudes, speciesist practices underlie nonhuman-animal metaphors that disparage women. Most such metaphors, philosopher Robert Baker (1975) notes, refer to domesticated animals like the chicken, cow, and dog—those bred for service to humans.²

Comparison to chickens, linguist Alleen Pace Nilsen (1977) observes, spans a woman's life: "a young girl is a *chick*. When she gets old enough she marries and soon begins feeling *cooped up*. To relieve the boredom she goes to *hen parties* and *cackles* with her friends. Eventually she has her *brood*, begins to *henpeck* her husband, and finally turns into an *old biddy*" (29). Nilsen's analysis, however, does not delve beneath the metaphors' sexist use, to their origins in hens' exploitation. Comparing women to hens communicates scorn because hens are exploited as mere bodies—for their egg-laying capacity or flesh. In viewing the actual chick, the egg or "poultry" producer anticipates her exploitation as hen. Analogously the sexist male desires to exploit the human "chick" as a female body, for sexual pleasure. The hen's exploiter values only her physical service, dismissing her experiential world as unimportant or nonexistent. *Hen party* empties women's experiences of all substance or significance; like hens, women have no worth apart from their function within the

exploiter's world. The hen ("biddy") who offers neither desirable flesh nor continued profitable egg production is regarded as "spent"—and discarded. No longer sexually attractive or able to reproduce, the human "old biddy" too has outlived her usefulness. If hens were not held captive and treated as nothing more than bodies, their lives would not supply symbols for the lives of stifled and physically exploited women.³

Hens' current oppression far outstrips the oppression from which the metaphors arose. Over 99 percent of U.S. chickens spend their lives in crowded confinement (see Appleby, Hughes, and Elson 1992, 31–33; Bell 1992; Coats 1989, 81–82; North and Bell 1990, 456). The laying hen is crammed, usually with three to five other birds, into a wire cage so small that she cannot spread her wings (see Appleby, Hughes, and Elson 1992, 30; Coats 1989, 90–92; Johnson 1991, 26–27, 122).⁴ "Broiler" chickens (bred for their flesh) are crowded, by the tens of thousands, onto the floor of a confinement unit. By slaughter time they barely have room to move (see Acker and Cunningham 1991, 635–36; Coats 1989, 87; North and Bell 1990, 456–58).⁵ Laying hens rarely live beyond two years, "broilers" two months (see Appleby, Hughes, and Elson 1992, 30–31; Austic and Nesheim 1990, 287–88; North and Bell 1990, 453, 475).⁶ The imprisoned hen cannot develop social bonds, raise a brood, or become an "old biddy." The hen's defaced image derives from her victimization.

As a term for a woman, *cow* is, in anthropologist John Halverson's words, "thoroughly derogatory" (1976, 515), characterizing the woman as fat and dull. Why does metaphorical reference to the cow connote these traits while reference to the bull does not? Exploitation of the cow for her milk has created a gender-specific image. Kept perpetually pregnant and/or lactating, with swollen belly or swollen udder, the "dairy cow" is seen as fat. Confined to a stall, denied the active role of nurturing and protecting a calf—so that milking becomes something done *to* her rather than *by* her—she is seen as passive and dull. The cow then becomes emblematic of these traits, which metaphor can attach to women. Like the laying hen, the dairy cow is exploited as *female body*. Since the cow's exploitation focuses on her uniquely female capacities to produce milk and "replacement" offspring, it readily evokes thoughts of femaleness more generally. Bearing with it a context of exploitation, the cow's image easily transfers to women.

Approximately eight months of each year, today's dairy cow is both pregnant and lactating. During each ten-month lactation pe-

riod, machines drain her of ten times the milk her calf would suckle (see Acker and Cunningham 1991, 111; Coats 1989, 51; Mason and Singer 1990, 11). In the U.S. the largest feedlot dairy operations each hold thousands of cows, year round, in crowded dirt lots. Fed from troughs, these cows never see pasture (see Bath et al. 1985, 303; Coats 1989, 52; Herrick 1990).⁷ Free-stall systems confine cows—frequently, throughout the year—to a crowded barn and adjacent dirt or concrete yard (see Bath et al. 1985, 365–66; Coats 1989, 52–53; Fox 1984, 106, 108).⁸ Tie-stall operations keep each cow chained by the neck in a narrow stall, often for months at a time (see Bath et al. 1985, 361–65; Mason and Singer 1990, 12). When a cow's milk yield permanently declines, she is slaughtered. *Cow* verbally abuses women by identifying them with the abused cow.⁹

In the language of dog breeders, *bitch* denotes a female dog able to produce a litter. As pejorative, the term has remained female specific. But why should calling a woman a "bitch" impute malice and selfishness? Given that most dogs are loving and eager to please, the metaphor's sharp contempt seems puzzling. Breeders, however, have always treated the female dog with contempt—as a means to a useful, profitable, or prestigious litter.

Among recommended methods for breeding bulldogs, the American Kennel Club's official magazine includes "holding the bitch in the proper position"—"by her legs" or "by straps"—and "assist[ing]" the male in "penetration" (Schor 1989, 140). Breeders subject the bulldog bitch to this ordeal because, through inbreeding, they have afflicted her breed with characteristics that preclude natural mating: a low front and high rear (see Schor 1989). Also bred to be brachycephalic (flat-faced) (see American Kennel Club 1992, 486–88),¹⁰ bulldogs suffer chronic breathing difficulty from pathologically short and twisted air passages. Often an overlong soft palate further obstructs breathing (see Fox 1965, 62). Recently a veterinary newsletter reported on a bulldog "placed on her back" for artificial insemination even though her breathing was especially labored. "Her breathing continued to be labored. When the bitch began to struggle," she was restrained (New Claims 1991, 1). Her breathing worsened. Still the forced insemination continued. Struggling to breathe, she died. Familiarity with the numerous ways in which breeders have disabled dogs through inbreeding and treated them like commodities dispels any mystery as to why *bitch* carries contempt (see Dunayer and Dunayer 1990; Wolfensohn 1981).¹¹

Comparisons between women and domesticated animals are of-

fensive, Baker (1975) concludes, because they "reflect a conception of women as mindless servants" (56). But the metaphors' offending components—"mindless" and "servants"—derive from speciesist attitudes and practices. Without speciesism, domesticated animals would not be regarded as mindless; without speciesism, they would not be forced into servitude. Exploiting the hen for her eggs, the cow for her milk, and the bitch for her ability to produce litters invites demeaning female-specific metaphors.

The exploitation of domesticated animals, such as chickens, also leads to negative images of *other* animals—predators who threaten that exploitation, like the fox. A woman termed a "vixen" is resented, and somewhat feared, as scolding, malicious, or domineering, especially toward a man. She threatens a man's self-esteem and sense of security, intruding into his perceived domain. In the days when "poultry" were kept in coops or yards, the actual vixen was much resented, and feared, as an intruder. Being a predator, she often crossed human-drawn boundaries to kill chickens or other fowl whom humans consider their property. Quick-witted and fleet, she frequently evaded capture, repeatedly "outfoxing" the human oppressor. Having no male-specific equivalent, the pejorative *vixen* expresses sexist resentment toward the contentious woman, but it derives from speciesist resentment toward the predatory fox.

The vixen as prey conjures a very different image, which forms the basis for *foxy lady*. In this case the expression's origins lie in humans' exploitation and abuse of foxes themselves. Hunters and trappers view the fox as an object of pursuit—a future trophy or pelt. To the extent that the vixen eludes capture, she piques their desire to possess her and arouses their admiration. Even as she frustrates their goal, she prolongs their "sport" and proves "worthy" of pursuit. Hence, the ambivalence of *foxy lady*. A man who labels a woman "foxy" admires her as stylish and attractive yet sees her largely as a sex object worth possessing. Overwhelmingly, hunters and trappers are male (see Novak et al. 1987, 60; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1993, 36). Their skin-deep view of those they pursue easily extends from nonhuman animals to women. "The major connection between *man* and fox is that of predator and prey," Baker (1975) reasons. "If women are conceived of as foxes, then they are conceived of as prey that it is fun to hunt" (53). Although Baker condemns the conception of women as foxes and the resulting conception of women as prey, he fails to condemn the necessary link between the two—the conception of *foxes* as prey. The speciesist practices of hunting and trapping

enable the sexist equation woman = prey: if woman = fox and fox = prey, then woman = prey.

In the U.S., fur "farming" and trapping abuse more foxes than any other practices—killing hundreds of thousands each year (see Clifton 1991; Novak et al. 1987, 1018). "Farmed" foxes live confined to small wire cages and usually die from anal electrocution (see Clifton 1991; de Kok 1989). Most foxes trapped in the wild are caught in the excruciating steel-jaw leghold trap (see *Close-Up Report* 1992; Gerstell 1985, 37–40). Any woman who wears a fox coat wraps herself in the remains of some eleven to eighteen foxes who suffered intensely (see *Fur Is Dead* 1990; *The Shame of Fur* 1988). She also invites continued sexist comparisons between women and nonhuman victims. In *Rape of the Wild* (1989), ecofeminists Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci remark that women who wear fur unwittingly adopt the "identity of prey" and so participate in their own degradation (55, n. 34).

Likening women to nonhuman animals undermines respect for women because nonhuman animals generally receive even less respect—far less. In most (if not all) contemporary human societies, the status of nonhuman animals is much lower than women's. In the U.S., for example, an overall absence of legal protection for nonhuman animals permits their massive institutionalized exploitation and abuse (see Francione 1994; Galvin 1985). They are bred for show, for sale, for servitude. They are imprisoned in aquariums and zoos, forced to perform in nightclubs and circuses, terrorized and injured at rodeos and fairs. Each year, by the millions they are vivisected (see Singer 1990, 36–37; U.S. Congress 1986, 49–66), killed for their fur (see Fox 1990, 116; Novak et al. 1987, 1092), murdered for "sport" (see Satchell 1990; Van Voorhees et al. 1992, 10); by the billions they go from intensive confinement to slaughter (see *Catfish Production* 1995, 8, 10; *Livestock Slaughter* 1995, 1; *Poultry Slaughter* 1995, 15–16).

While only some nonhuman-animal pejoratives denigrate women, all denigrate nonhuman animals. Numerous nonhuman-animal terms act as invective solely or largely against men and boys: *shark*, *skunk*, *lap dog*, *toad*, *weasel*, *snake*, *jackass*, *worm*. The male-specific *wolf* and *cur* parallel the female-specific *vixen* and *bitch*. *Cock of the walk* and *bullheaded* correspond to *mother hen* and *stupid cow*. *Dumb ox* equates to *dumb bunny*. And *old buzzard* and *goat* resemble *old biddy* and *crow*. Nonhuman-animal terms also serve as racist epithets, as when blacks are called "monkeys" or

"gorillas." Often, invoking another animal as insult doesn't target any human group: *sheepish*, *birdbrain*, *crazy as a loon*. In such cases the comparison's fundamental speciesism stands alone. Whether or not a person is avaricious, labeling them a "vulture" exhibits prejudice against no group except vultures.

Although some expressions that compare humans to other animals are complimentary (*busy as a bee*, *eagle-eyed*, *brave as a lion*), the vast majority offend. Anthropologist Edmund Leach (1964) categorizes "animal" metaphors as "obscenity," along with "dirty words" (largely of "sex and excretion") and "blasphemy and profanity" (28). While Halverson (1976) rejects Leach's categorization, he agrees that "animal" metaphors are overwhelmingly negative. What's more, Halverson identifies their most universal component as "the basic distinction human v. animal" (515). This distinction is the essence of speciesism.

Linguistic practice, like other human practices, is even more deeply speciesist than sexist. Humans, after all, have a verbal monopoly. Our language necessarily reflects a human-centered viewpoint more completely than a male-centered one. Considered in relation to the plight of nonhuman animals, Adrienne Rich's words of feminist insight express a terrible absolute: "this is the oppressor's language" (1971, 16, 18).

Speciesist language has far from trivial consequences. Although nonhuman animals cannot discern the contempt in the words that disparage them, this contempt legitimates their oppression. Like sexist language, speciesist language fosters exploitation and abuse. As feminist philosopher Stephanie Ross (1981) has stated with regard to women, "oppression does not require the awareness or co-operation of its victims" (199).

Every negative image of another species helps keep that species oppressed. Most such images are gross distortions. Nonhuman animals rarely possess the character traits that pejoratives assign to them. In reality the imputed traits are negative *human* traits. Wolves do not philander like the human "wolf." Most are steadfastly monogamous (see Fox 1971, 121; Mech 1991, 89, 91). Chickens are not "chicken." Throughout the centuries, observers have reported the hen's fierceness in defending her chicks and the rooster's courage in protecting the flock (see Robbins 1987, 49; Smith and Daniel 1975, 65–66, 137, 159, 162, 212, 324). (In today's factory prisons, of course, chickens can no longer display their bravery.) Pigs do not "make pigs of themselves." Unlike many other animals (including humans),

they show no tendency to overeat (see Hedgepeth 1978, 71; Pond, Maner, and Harris 1991, 11). Pigs are not filthy. Whenever possible, they avoid fouling their living area (see Baxter 1984, 234–37; Hedgepeth 1978, 96). If unable to bathe in water, they will wallow in mud to cool themselves. Lacking functional sweat glands, they cannot instead “sweat like a pig” (see Baxter 1984, 35, 209; Hedgepeth 1978, 66). Rats¹² are not “rats.” While ingeniously resourceful, they do not use their quick intelligence to betray their familiars. Rat societies, in which serious fighting is an anomaly, exemplify peace and cooperation (see Barnett 1975, 262; Hart 1982, 108; Hendrickson 1983, 39, 80, 93–94). Moreover, rats care for the helpless in their communities, such as the orphaned young and those too old to fend for themselves (see Calhoun 1962, 257; Hendrickson 1983, 15, 80, 93–94).¹³

Why the lies, then? Why the contempt? With contemptuous words, humans establish and maintain emotional distance from other animals.¹⁴ This distance permits abuse without commensurate guilt. Humans blame their nonhuman victims. Physically unable to fly away, having no prior experience of predators from which to learn fear, dodos were massacred by humans, who labeled them fools. Humans load mules with heavy packs, force them to carry these loads up the most precipitous slopes in the harshest weather, and excoriate them as “stubborn” because they are not always eager to oblige. Having compelled captive seals to perform demeaning and unnatural acts, humans use the sneering phrase *trained seal* for a person who demonstrates mindless obedience. Pigs, as Leach (1964) remarks, bear an especially heavy “load of abuse” (50): “we rear pigs for the sole purpose of killing and eating them, and this is rather a shameful thing, a shame which quickly attaches to the pig itself” (51). Today most U.S. pigs experience lifelong confinement (see Baker 1993; Mason and Singer 1990, 8).¹⁵ Ordinarily those kept until they reach slaughter weight are restricted to crowded wire cages, then crowded pens. Those kept longer, for breeding, remain confined to individual stalls so narrow that they cannot turn around (see Coats 1989, 36–46; *Factory Farming* 1987, 45–52; Fox 1984, 41–68; Johnson 1991, 34–35). By the time they go to slaughter, many pigs are crippled (see Coats 1989, 46; Hill 1990; Pursel et al. 1989, 1285).¹⁶ Naturally inquisitive and sociable, with a great capacity for affection and joy, pigs suffer intensely from imprisonment. Using *pig* as a pejorative lends acceptability to their massive abuse.

Expressions such as *male chauvinist pig* display the same species-

ism as *stupid cow*. Particularly amiable and sensitive, pigs possess none of the sexist’s ugly character traits. Affection, cooperation, and protection of others characterize natural pig society, which is matriarchal. Boars rarely show aggression, even toward other adult males, and are especially gentle with the young. A boar mates with a sow only if she is sexually receptive—after much mutual nuzzling, rubbing, and affable grunting (see Hedgepeth 1978, 94–95, 137; Serpell 1986, 5–6). Intended to castigate men for their assumption of superiority to women, *male chauvinist pig* conveys the speaker’s own assumption of superiority, to pigs. Referring to sexism, Ross (1981) notes that “many women adopt the very attitudes which are oppressing them” (199). Those attitudes include speciesism.

When a woman responds to mistreatment by protesting “I’m a human being!” or “I want to be treated with respect, not like some animal,” what is she suggesting about the acceptable ways of treating other animals? Perhaps because comparisons between women and nonhuman animals so often entail sexism, many women are anxious to distance themselves from other animals. Feminists, especially, recognize that negative “animal” imagery has advanced women’s oppression. However, if our treatment and view of other animals became caring, respectful, and just, nonhuman-animal metaphors would quickly lose all power to demean. Few women have confronted how closely they mirror patriarchal oppressors when they too participate in other species’ denigration. Women who avoid acknowledging that they are animals closely resemble men who prefer to ignore that women are human.

When used to denote other species only, *animal* falsely removes humans from animalkind.¹⁷ In parallel, through their male imagery, the pseudogenerics *man* and *mankind* effectively exclude women from humankind. By reserving *animal* for *other* animals, humans deny their kinship with nonhuman animals, abjuring membership in all groups larger than species—such as primatekind, mammalkind, and animalkind (see Clark 1988). This use of *animal* reflects the speciesist belief that humans fundamentally differ from all nonhuman animals and are inherently superior. More subtly, *man* and *mankind* too reflect speciesism. Their power to lower women’s status rests on the premise that those outside our species do not merit equal consideration and respect. Linguistically ousting women from humankind has force because lack of membership in the human species condemns an individual, however thinking and feeling, to inferior status. Parakeets, bats, goldfish, mice, octopi, whales, orang-

utans—these and other nonhuman animals do not lack sensitivity. They do, however, lack legal rights—because they don't happen to be human (see Daws 1983; Francione 1993; Galvin 1985; Midgley 1985). If the cutoff for perceived dignity and worth, and for the right to be free from exploitation and abuse, were not the border between human and nonhuman, the suggestion that women are somehow less human than men would have no political force. "Man's" glorification is the flip side of "animals'" denigration. The sexism of *man* and *mankind* works by way of speciesism.

Throughout our language's history, men—being politically dominant—have exercised far more control than women over public discourse. Men's disproportionate influence has permitted them to largely determine "accepted" English usage (see Bodine 1975; Spender 1985, 147–51). Patriarchal men would not have linguistically appropriated humanness unless it represented superiority and privilege to their speciesist minds. "A picture of humanity as consisting of males," says feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye (1975), is inseparable from a "tendency to romanticize and aggrandize the human species and to derive from one's rosy picture of it a sense of one's individual specialness and superiority" (72). Men's appropriation of humanness, she proposes, "is at bottom a version of a self-elevating identification with Humanity" (71).¹⁸

Linguistic markers embody "man's" apotheosis. Frequent capitalization literally elevates Man above other animals, whose names remain lowercase. As *The Oxford English Dictionary* notes, singular form without a definite article further distinguishes *Man* from "other generic names of animals" (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 9:284), which are either plural or preceded by *the*. We say "giraffes, oysters, and cockatoos" or "the giraffe, the oyster, and the cockatoo"—not "Giraffe, Oyster, and Cockatoo." Functioning as a "quasi-proper name," *Man* personifies our species (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 9:284), endowing humans (male humans, at least) with some shared character, spiritual essence, or history of experience through which they become One. By implication there exists some ineffable, enduring quality Man-ness, but no Cat-ness, Swordfish-ness, or Monarch Butterfly-ness. Unique personification suggests that only humans transcend immediate, individual existence—that nonhuman animals never empathize with others, identify with a group, communicate experience, or remember the past and anticipate the future.

The word *human* is not differentiated from other animal names by the peculiarities of form that distinguish *Man*. We say "humans" or

"the human" just as we say "lobsters" or "the lobster." Humans and lobsters get parallel linguistic treatment. As "humans" we are simply one of innumerable species. Nonspeciesist in its form, *human* is semantically nonsexist as well. Singled out by its form, *Man* divides all beings into two contrasting categories: members of our species and nonmembers. At the same time, it semantically assigns men to the first category, women to the second.

Standard definitions of *man* and *mankind* clearly convey the sense of species superiority on which the use of these pseudogenerics relies. In the 1992 *American Heritage Dictionary*, the entries for *man* include this self-congratulatory description:

a member of the only extant species, *Homo sapiens*, distinguished by a highly developed brain, the capacity for abstract reasoning, and the ability to communicate by means of organized speech and record information in a variety of symbolic systems. (1090)

The definition exaggerates human uniqueness. Many nonhuman animals have "a highly developed brain." Many have "the capacity for abstract reasoning." And some have "the ability to communicate by means of organized speech." In English, Alex the African gray parrot identifies and describes objects, requests toys and food, and expresses such emotions as frustration, regret, and love (see Griffin 1992, 169–74; Linden 1993; Pearce 1987, 273–75).¹⁹ Parrots do not merely "parrot." No doubt, members of numerous species would show "organized speech" if they possessed the necessary vocal apparatus. Instead Washoe the chimpanzee, Koko the gorilla, and other nonhuman primates have learned to communicate in American Sign Language (see Griffin 1992, 218–32; Kowalski 1991, 10–12).²⁰ Further, Kanzi the pygmy chimpanzee understands much spoken English and communicates by means of abstract visual symbols—demonstrating comprehension of "a variety of symbolic systems" (see Griffin 1992, 221–32; Lewin 1991; Linden 1993). Apes do not merely "ape."

Nonhuman animals like Alex, Washoe, Koko, and Kanzi have learned to use languages devised by humans. How would humans fare if expected to learn another species' method of communication—say, that of the bottle-nosed dolphin? Even if other species did lack the capacity for some typically human type of language and reasoning, why should this capacity be the criterion for superiority? Because it is the one that *we* possess? In the same self-serving and

otherwise arbitrary manner, an individual might pronounce "I have great physical strength, so physical strength signifies superiority."

What if the definition of *man* were more truthful?

A member of the only extant species, *Homo presumptuous*, distinguished by a highly developed narcissism, the capacity for routine institutionalized cruelty, and the ability to communicate endless self-justification by means of organized religion and to record prejudices as if they were fact within a variety of speciesist, sexist, and otherwise oppressive systems.

Men would then shun *man* and *mankind* and eagerly substitute *humankind*—or *womankind*—for the species. Instead of monopolizing species membership, and its attendant glory, they would urge full (or exclusive) membership for women, who could then bear the blame.

Having defined *man* as "the men and women who uphold patriarchal values" (19), Collard and Contrucci (1989) identify what "man" regards as "his greatest glory: his passage from ape to human" (34). Alert to the link between speciesism and sexism, these feminists reverse the standard self-aggrandizing definition of our species, exposing humans' negative traits, connecting our history of devastation and cruelty to those with the mentality of dominance, and saying to "man": "Now, recognize the massive destruction and suffering you have caused!"

Patriarchal men have depicted themselves as "more human" than women because they have viewed *human* as signifying everything superior and deserving, everything that supposedly separates humans from "animals." "Our view of man," philosopher Mary Midgley (1978) argues in *Beast and Man*, "has been built up on a supposed contrast between man and animals" (25).²¹

Through the false opposition human vs. animal, humans maintain a fantasy world in which chimpanzees, snails, barracudas, and tree frogs are somehow more alike than chimpanzees and humans (see Clark 1988).²² The evolutionary bush on which humans occupy one of myriad branches is reduced to a single stalk, with nonhuman animals mired at its roots and humans blossoming at its tip. In reality, species do not evolve toward greater humanness but toward greater adaptiveness in their particular ecological niche. Nor is species something stable and fixed (see Clark 1988; Dawkins 1993). The human species, like all others, continues to undergo variation. In capacities and tendencies humans vary across a vast range (see Midg-

ley 1978, 58), which overlaps with the ranges spanned by other species. For example, many nonhuman animals possess more rationality and altruism than many humans. Who can name a single character trait or ability shared by *all* humans but by no other animals?

Human superiority is as much a lie as male superiority. Gorillas are stronger yet gentler than humans, cheetahs swifter and more graceful, dolphins more playful and exuberant. Bees who perceive ultraviolet light and dance a message of angle and distance; fish who simultaneously see forward, above, below, and behind while swimming through endlessly varied tropical color; birds who navigate over hemispheres, sensing the earth's magnetic field and soaring in rhythm with the rest of their flock; sea turtles who, over decades, experience vast stretches of ocean—what wisdom and vision are theirs? Other animals have other ways of knowing.

Our individual worlds are only as wide as our empathy. Why identify with only one species when we can be so much larger? Animal encompasses human. When human society moves beyond speciesism—to membership in animalkind—"animal" imagery will no longer demean women or assist in their oppression, but will represent their liberation. When we finally cross the species boundary that keeps other animals oppressed, we will have crossed the boundary that circumscribes our lives.

Notes

1. The relationship between speciesism and sexism is not unidirectional. Just as speciesism contributes to women's oppression, sexism contributes to the oppression of nonhuman animals. For example, sexism permits concern for nonhuman animals to be dismissed as "effeminate" or as "female sentimentality." A number of feminists have detailed ways in which sexism and speciesism are mutually reinforcing (see, for example, Adams 1990, 1994; Collard with Contrucci 1989).

2. "I believe the sexual subjugation of women, as it is practiced in all the known civilizations of the world, was modeled after the domestication of animals," writes feminist Elizabeth Fisher in *Woman's Creation* (1979, 190). The exploitation of women for breeding and labor, she observes, followed long after enslavement of nonhuman animals (190, 197). Fisher sees an enduring "connection between dependence on animals and an inferior position for women" (194). Addressing oppression in general, social historian Keith Thomas (1983) presents strong evidence that the domestication of nonhuman animals "became the archetypal pattern for other kinds of social subordination" (46).

3. Negative images created by speciesist practices and wielded against

- women are not restricted to images of living and nonhuman animals. As Carol Adams discusses in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990, 39–62), “meat” images born of butchering are also commonly applied to women (also see Corea 1984). For example, the pornographic film industry calls women new to the business “fresh meat” (see Corea 1984, 37).
4. In 1993 I visited a “state-of-the-art” Maryland egg-production facility. Four windowless warehouses imprisoned a total of half a million hens, squeezed nine to a cage. Row after row, four tiers of cages extended into the distance, disappearing into the dimly lit haze. From manure pits directly below, huge mounds of excrement saturated the air with eye-stinging ammonia. Cagemates shared a single water nipple and were forced to climb over one another to reach the food trough in front of their cage. In bursts the birds gave frantic cries, worlds away from the soft clucking of contented hens. With a dazed look, they stared outward—as if into empty darkness. As of 1 March 1995, the U.S. egg industry’s captive laying hens numbered approximately 244 million (see *Chickens and Eggs* 1995, 5).
 5. Most “broiler” operations allot each chicken floor space of only 0.7 to 0.8 square feet (see Acker and Cunningham 1991, 636; North and Bell 1990, 458). As expressed by the *Commercial Chicken Production Manual* (North and Bell 1990), “the question has always been and continues to be: What is the least amount of floor space necessary per bird to produce the greatest return on investment?” (456).
 6. In the U.S. in 1994, the number of chickens slaughtered for their flesh exceeded 7.2 billion (see *Poultry Slaughter* 1995, 15).
 7. The textbook *Dairy Cattle* states that cows on California’s large feedlot dairy operations are denied access to pasture and “are fed stored feeds year round” (Bath et al. 1985, 303). What’s more, an industry researcher recently remarked that “most” U.S. dairy operations have now “evolved from pasture grazing” to “feeding out of storage” (Howard Larsen, quoted in Don’t Send 1990).
 8. Dairy-industry publications acknowledge the existence of “numerous total confinement, free-stall operations” (Bath et al. 1985, 365–66), many of which keep cows on concrete “throughout their productive lifetimes” (*Guide* 1988, 28).
 9. As of 1 January 1995, the U.S. dairy industry was exploiting over 9.5 million milking cows (see *Cattle* 1995, 1).
 10. *The Complete Dog Book* (American Kennel Club 1992) contains the American Kennel Club’s official standards for AKC-recognized dog breeds. Each standard specifies a particular “conformation” (structural arrangement of body parts). The bulldog standard decrees, among other features, an “extremely short” face and a nose “set back deeply between the eyes” (487).
 11. On average, each breed of “purebred” dog harbors over a dozen genetic defects (see Padgett 1988); most purebred dogs suffer from at least one such defect (see McKeown et al. 1988).
 12. In keeping with popular usage, *rat* here refers to the single rat species predominant in Europe and the U.S.—the Norway rat, also called the brown rat,

common rat, and (pejoratively) sewer rat. Nearly all domesticated rats belong to this species, including the docile albinos routinely burned, poisoned, maimed, electrically shocked, and otherwise caused to suffer in vivisection.

13. Over the years, seventeen rats have been my adopted friends. All were highly sensitive to their surroundings, loved to explore, and revealed a wide range of emotions. Rufus, I’ll always remember, reacted to his first piece of cantaloupe with a somersault of joy. The ten rats I knew since they were pups enjoyed being petted. Some of them liked perching on my shoulder or sitting in my lap and would, if I sat on the floor, scurry to me from across the room. Five brothers who were full-grown when I adopted them regularly cuddled, and sometimes play-wrestled, with each other. When I talked to them, they responded with a look of friendly curiosity—an attentive expression different from the determined one with which they investigated their room or the tentatively accepting one they showed when petted. Vegan and Nori (both male) were already adults when brought, as a pair, to a humane society. For some time after I adopted them, they remained wary of humans; yet, even when handled, they never showed aggression. Eventually they welcomed being petted. Although their cage extended eight feet, they usually stayed side by side, snuggling. Vegan—the older and larger—was very protective of Nori, who was blind. Once, my cat China peered inquisitively into their cage while only Nori was near the front. I saw Vegan, startled, rush forward. Pushing Nori behind him, Vegan positioned himself as a shield. His eyes glittering, he confronted China directly. Rebuffed, China left the room. When Vegan died two years later, Nori drastically changed, becoming lethargic and withdrawn. For the rest of his life, he visibly mourned Vegan. Humans’ gross misunderstanding and relentless persecution of rats causes me particularly sharp anger and grief.

14. Through metaphors that convey false images of other species, Adams (1990) notes, humans distance themselves from those species (see 64–65).

15. In the May 1993 issue of *Feed Situation and Outlook Report*, a U.S. Department of Agriculture economist concedes, “Most hogs are now raised in confinement” (Baker 1993, 12).

16. Approximately 96 million pigs were slaughtered in the U.S. in 1994 (see *Livestock Slaughter* 1995, 3).

17. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1992) provides these conflicting definitions of *animal*: “a multicellular organism of the kingdom Animalia” and “an animal organism other than a human being” (72).

18. Writing before the word *speciesism* gained currency, Frye (1975) termed humans’ assumption of superiority “humanism” (72).

19. Since the 1970s, Irene Pepperberg of the University of Arizona has studied Alex’s ability to learn English. In a 1993 *Time* magazine article, Eugene Linden relates: “When the parrot, who lives with Pepperberg, became sick a few years ago, she had to take him to a vet and leave him overnight in a strange place for the first time in his life. As she headed for the door she heard Alex calling in his plaintive child’s voice, ‘Come here. I love you. I’m sorry. Wanna go back’” (59).

20. Asked when gorillas die, Koko reportedly responded with the gestures for "trouble" and "old." Asked how gorillas feel when they die—Happy? Sad? Afraid?—she answered, "Sleep" (see Kowalski 1991, 11–12).

21. For example, Aristotle—a founding father of Western patriarchy—defined humanity as animality's opposite and claimed humanity for men, leaving women in between as a psychological buffer zone (see Brown 1988, 55–56).

22. In our ancestry and genetic composition, we are not merely *like* apes; we *are* apes. Conventionally the classification "apes" includes two chimpanzee species (common chimpanzees and pygmy chimpanzees), gorillas, orangutans, and gibbons—but excludes humans. According to evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1993), this classification misleads. The African apes (chimpanzees and gorillas) share a more recent common ancestor with humans than with Asian apes (orangutans and gibbons). Therefore, Dawkins explains, no natural ape category includes African and Asian apes yet excludes humans. Physiologist Jared Diamond (1993) agrees: "The traditional distinction between 'apes' (defined as chimps, gorillas, etc.) and humans misrepresents the facts" (95). DNA studies, he points out, have revealed that both chimpanzee species share a higher percentage of their genes with humans (about 98.4 percent) than with gorillas (about 97.7 percent). How, then, can "African ape" include chimpanzees and gorillas but not humans? The DNA evidence, Diamond says, indicates that humans are most accurately classified as a third species of chimpanzee.

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